

## **Bhutan plans major tourism expansion with new int'l airport**

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Dhaka: Bhutan is set to open a new chapter in its tourism industry with the construction of a major international airport in Gelephu, a southern town near the Indian border. The airport, expected to open in 2029, is part of Bhutan's ambitious Gelephu Mindfulness City project, which aims to combine economic growth with sustainability and spiritual living.

For decades, Bhutan has been known as one of the world's most exclusive travel destinations, limiting tourist numbers through its "High Value, Low Volume" policy to protect its culture and environment. Most international visitors currently arrive through Paro International Airport, which is famous for its difficult mountain landing conditions and limited flight operations.

The upcoming Gelephu International Airport is expected to significantly

improve access to the Himalayan kingdom and attract more global travelers. The airport has already received international recognition after winning the “Future Project of the Year” award at the 2025 World Architecture Festival.

Bhutanese officials said, the project will not only strengthen tourism but also create jobs and attract foreign investment. The development is expected to introduce visitors to southern Bhutan’s subtropical landscapes, wildlife, and eco-tourism experiences.

Close to the project site is Royal Manas National Park, one of Bhutan’s richest wildlife regions and home to elephants, rhinos, tigers and hundreds of bird species. Authorities also plan to promote activities such as jungle trekking, rafting, birdwatching and cultural tourism in the region.

The project is strongly supported by King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, who says Bhutan wants to modernize while preserving its cultural traditions, environmental protection and focus on national happiness.

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