

## **Bhutan halves tourist fee to attract international visitors**

-A Monitor Report

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Thimphu : In an effort to attract international tourists, the Kingdom of Bhutan has decided to reduce its daily tourist fee of USD 200 to USD 100. The kingdom has taken the decision to boost the tourism sector which is still waiting and struggling to recover even after a year since the pandemic.

In September 2022, soon after the end of Covid-19 restrictions, Bhutan decided to increase its "Sustainable Development Fee" to USD 200 per night from USD 65. The country justified this increase by saying that it would go to off-set the carbon generated by visitors.

However, the newly introduced tourist fee only limited the number of tourists to the country. And now, once again, Bhutan is hoping that the slash in price would increase the number of arrivals.

The new tax would come into effect from September and last for four years, the government said in a statement.

The statement said, "This is in view of the important role of the tourism sector in generating employment, earning foreign exchange and in boosting overall economic growth."

It may be mentioned here that Bhutan remained isolated for many years and generations. It was only in 1974 that the country opened to tourists and received 300 visitors. However, by 2019, this number touched 315,600, as per official data.

Bhutan, the stunning Himalayan nation, home to several monasteries, has always attracted travellers from all over the world. However, the Covid-19 ban had a huge impact on the tourism sector in the country and then the tourist fee also limited the number of tourists and bigger spenders.

As per reports, Dorji Dhradhul, Director General of Department of Tourism, Bhutan, informed that reducing the fee could boost arrivals in the September-December peak tourist period.

He also said that over 56,000 tourists had visited Bhutan since January.

Among these, about 42,000 were Indians, who only had to pay a fee of USD 14.5 per day.