

**STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE
FOR PAYMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FEE BY
REGIONAL LEISURE TOURISTS 2020**



**TOURISM COUNCIL OF BHUTAN
KINGDOM OF BHUTAN**

July 2020

Title

1. This procedure shall be called the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for payment of Sustainable Development Fee (SDF) by Regional Leisure Tourists 2020.

Definition

2. Leisure tourists refer to all visitors who travel to a country or a place beyond his/her usual residence for holiday or leisure. The duration of stay for leisure tourists shall be as prescribed by the Immigration Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan.
3. Regional leisure tourists are the nationals of Bangladesh, India and Maldives who visit Bhutan for holiday or leisure.

Rationale

4. This SOP has been developed to:
 - a. Facilitate and guide the payment of SDF by regional tourists;
 - b. Define the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders; and
 - c. Enhance service delivery and experience of regional tourists.

Scope

5. This SOP shall be applicable to:
 - a. Tourism Council of Bhutan;
 - b. Department of Immigration (DOI), Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs;
 - c. Department of Revenue and Customs, Ministry of Finance;
 - d. Registered Bhutanese Tour Operators;
 - e. Accommodation providers; and
 - f. Regional leisure tourists.

Validity

6. This SOP shall be valid until June 30, 2021 after which the provisions of the Guidelines for the Management of Regional Tourism 2020 shall be applied.

Sustainable Development Fee (SDF)

7. SDF of Nu 1200 shall be levied per person per night for regional leisure tourists in line with the Tourism Levy Act of Bhutan 2020. However, it will not cover the cost of accommodation, tour guides and transport services and any other additional services.

Application

8. SDF shall be levied only for regional leisure tourists travelling beyond the first interior checkpoint of the border town of Phuentsholing at Rinchending, Samdrup Jongkhar at Pintsina and Gelephu at Pelrithang.

Commencement

9. SDF shall come into effect from July 1, 2020 in line with the Tourism Levy Act of Bhutan 2020. Accordingly any application for permit to enter Bhutan received on or after the above mentioned date shall be liable for SDF.

Types of permit

10. As an interim arrangement until June 30, 2021, there shall be two categories of permit for regional leisure tourists as follows:
 - a. E-permit, which shall be applied in advance of the trip through a ground handler, who shall be the tour operator; and
 - b. Entry-permit for walk-in regional tourists, which shall be applied directly to the Regional Immigration Office at Phuentsholing, Gelephu and Samdrup Jongkhar upon arrival by road and at Paro International Airport upon arrival by air. This is an interim arrangement to facilitate regional leisure tourists who may arrive without e-permit during the transition phase. However, this option shall be withdrawn with the full implementation of the Guidelines for Management of Regional Tourism.

E-permit application and payment process

11. On behalf of the regional leisure tourists, a ground handler shall:
 - a) Apply for e-permit through Tashel visa online system (<http://tashel.gov.bt>)
 - b) Submit a passport copy of the tourists having a minimum of 6 months validity; and
 - c) Deposit the applicable SDF and tour cost into TCB's account.
12. TCB shall review the application and endorse or reject within two working days from the receipt of the application.
13. DOI may approve or reject the application as per the Immigration Rules and Regulations within three working days from the date of endorsement of the application by TCB.
14. If approved, DOI shall issue e-permit clearance to the applicant via online system.
15. TCB shall remit SDF payment to Royal Government Revenue (RGR) account on a monthly basis.

Refund of SDF

16. The following procedures shall be followed for refund of SDF due to:

a. Delayed Arrival

- i. The ground handler shall immediately notify TCB in writing about delayed arrival with supporting documents such as ticket copy and entry seal of DOI to process refund.
- ii. TCB shall facilitate the refund of SDF to the client or any other authorized person within 5 working days.

b. Early Departure

- i. The ground handler shall immediately notify TCB in writing about early departure with supporting documents such as ticket copy and exit seal of DOI.
- ii. TCB shall facilitate the refund of SDF to the client or any other authorized person within 5 working days.

Permit Extension

17. The ground handler shall apply in writing to TCB for permit extension as follows:

- a) Submit the detailed itinerary of extended nights;
- b) Deposit the applicable SDF into TCB's account; and
- c) Submit a deposit copy for verification.

18. TCB shall verify the application and forward to DOI for approval.

Postponement or cancellation of a tour

19. The ground handler shall submit an application for postponement or cancellation of a tour to TCB in writing.

20. TCB shall verify the application and forward to DOI for approval.

21. TCB shall facilitate the refund of SDF to the client or any other authorized person within five working days.

Application process for walk-in tourists

22. Regional leisure tourists who arrive by road shall apply for the entry permit to the concerned Regional Immigration Office at Phuentsholing, Gelephu and Samdrup Jongkhar. Documents required shall be:

- a. Passport with a minimum validity of six months along with a photocopy of it

- b. Duly completed entry permit application form
 - c. Evidence of the confirmation of TCB certified accommodation
 - d. 2 copies of passport photographs
23. Regional leisure tourists who arrive by air shall apply for the entry permit to the Immigration Office at Paro International Airport. Documents required shall be:
- a. Passport with a minimum validity of six months; and
 - b. Evidence of the confirmation of TCB certified accommodation
24. DOI may approve or reject the application for the entry permit as per the Immigration Rules and Regulations.
25. TCB officials at the entry ports shall connect the walk-in tourists with a ground handler to arrange accommodation, tour guide, transport and any other services as may be availed.
26. The ground handler shall obtain the route permit for the walk-in tourists from DOI to facilitate travel to places beyond Thimphu and Paro.

Payment process for walk-in tourists

27. Regional tourists from India shall pay the applicable SDF in Indian Rupee or Ngultrum exchanged at exchange counter at the entry points.
28. Regional tourists from Bangladesh and Maldives shall pay the applicable SDF in US Dollar (equivalent at prevailing exchange rate) or Ngultrum exchanged at exchange counter at the entry points.
29. DRC shall designate officials at the entry ports in Phuentsholing, Samdrup Jongkhar, Gelephu and Paro International Airport to collect SDF payment, which shall be remitted to the Royal Government Revenue Account on the next working day. SDF amount collected in US Dollar and Indian Rupee shall be exchanged into Ngultrum at the exchange counter before depositing into the Royal Government Account.
30. TCB in collaboration with RMA may provide Point of Sale (PoS) facilities at the entry points to facilitate online payment of applicable SDF, which shall be directly credited into Royal Government Revenue Account. The payment may be made using international cards such as Maestro, Master, VISA and Rupay Card.

Permit extension for walk-in tourist

31. The ground handler shall submit an application for permit extension for walk-in tourists to DOI along with the detailed itinerary of extended nights.
32. DOI may approve or reject the application and share the information with TCB.
33. Upon approval of the application, the ground handler shall pay applicable SDF to DOI, which shall be remitted to the Royal Government Revenue Account on the next working day.

Amendment

34. TCB may propose for the amendment of this SOP in consultation with relevant stakeholders as and when deemed necessary.