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DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment
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STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) FOR FAMILIARIZATION (FAM) TRIPS TO BHUTAN

Department of Tourism (DoT)
Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment
Thimphu

April 2026

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1. Background

As per the Cabinet Secretariat Letter No: C-3/7SLZ/2023/1657 dated June 1, 2023 concerning the Guideline for Foreigners visiting Bhutan as Non-Tourist under various Categories, the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment (MoICE) is responsible for approving application for Familiarization (FAM) Trips.

Subsequently, the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the FAM Trips was developed to provide uninterrupted services to the tourism partners.

This SOP was revised in March 2026 taking into consideration the emerging issues and challenges. The SOP defines the application and documentation procedures necessary for facilitating FAM Trips.

2. Commencement

The SOP shall come into force on 7th April 2026.

3. Objective

The objective of this SOP is to guide and facilitate the approval of FAM Trips for Non-Tourist Categories guests.

4. Scope

This SOP shall extend to all visits undertaken by international travel agents on Familiarization (FAM) Trips to Bhutan to carry out promotional activities in their respective markets in partnership with Bhutanese Hotels and Tour Operators.

5. Applicability

This SOP shall apply to all international travel agents and their Bhutanese counterparts (Hotels and Tour Operators) who wish to promote Bhutan as a destination with the objective of bringing more visitors to Bhutan.

6. Definitions

- a. **FAM Trip:** A visit organized for international travel agents (from sales, product and management) by the certified and validated Bhutanese Tour Operators and Hoteliers to experience a destination, its tourism products, and services first-hand, enhancing their knowledge and promoting the destination in their respective markets.
- b. **Local/Bhutanese partner:** Any DoT certified Hotels or Tour Operators.



- c. **International Agent:** Any agency licensed/certified as a competent authority in the country where the agency is based to undertake tourism business.
- d. **Department:** Refers to the Department of Tourism (DoT) unless specified.

7. Application Procedure

a. Application

- i. The applicant must complete and submit the online FAM Trip Request Form via the [LINK](#).
- ii. The applicant must ensure that all the required information is provided.
- iii. The applications must be submitted at least one (1) month before the travel date.

b. Review and Approval

- i. The concerned division in the Department shall review the duly completed form submitted by the applicant.
- ii. The concerned Division in the department shall process the FAM Trip Verification Note to be approved by the Head of the Department.
- iii. The Department shall notify the applicant and the local partner on the status of the application within 7 working days from the date of receipt of complete application.
- iv. For approved applications, the Department shall issue a Sustainable Development Fee (SDF) waiver Recommendation Letter for the FAM Trip.
- v. The local partner shall then process visa/permit with the Department of Immigration, Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA).
- vi. For the Rejected/Declined applications, the Department shall notify the applicant and the local partner on the rejection of the application with appropriate reason.



8. Eligibility

- a. DoT certified Tour Operators and Hotels can apply for FAM Trip to promote the destination.
- b. International travel agents licensed/certified by a competent authority in their respective country can apply for FAM Trip through a Bhutanese counterpart.
- c. FAM trips shall be eligible for SDF waiver of up to a maximum of seven (7) nights as follows:
 - i. Entering from western Bhutan and travelling within Thimphu, Paro, Punakha, and Chhukha.
 - ii. Entering from eastern Bhutan and travelling within the eastern Dzongkhags of Samdrup Jongkhar, Pema Gatshel, Trashigang and Trashi Yangtse.
- d. FAM trips beyond the Dzongkhags mentioned in 8 (c) above shall be eligible for SDF Waiver up to a maximum of fifteen (15) nights.
- e. The same individual from the company/market shall be eligible to avail FAM Trip only twice in a year.
- f. FAM Trips can be undertaken any time of the year.

9. Requirements

- a. The FAM Trip shall be hosted by a DoT certified Hotel or Tour Operator and listed in the tourism service portal services.bhutan.travel.
- b. The applicant shall ensure that:
 - i. The information required in the Form 7 (a) (i) above is correctly completed;
 - ii. The FAM Trip is undertaken by management position holders in the company (sales or product departments) with clearly defined position titles and credentials;
 - iii. The company has a fully functioning website. Any company without a website shall produce social media links;



- iv. The company provides social media links with a minimum of 10K followers including but not limited to Facebook, Instagram and TikTok with adequate promotion and packages being undertaken on the platform.
- c. The Local Partner shall submit a duly signed Undertaking to the Department (*ANNEXURE I*).

10. Compliance and Deliverables

- a. The international agents shall be required to commit to marketing activities for Bhutan in return for the FAM Trip.
- b. The international agents shall agree to deliver at least three (3) of the following activities:
 - i. Promoting Bhutan in a prominent way on their website;
 - ii. An Electronic Direct Mail (EDM) or newsletter to their database;
 - iii. Social media posts tagging Department of Tourism;
 - iv. A hosted dinner or event about Bhutan;
 - v. A webinar to their clients or agents;
 - vi. Digital marketing spends;
 - vii. Inclusion in their brochures and other marketing collateral; and
 - viii. And any others (Please specify).
- c. The Local Partner (Hotel/Tour operator) shall submit a report upon the completion of the FAM Trip along with evidence (photos), links, and places visited/activities undertaken.

11. Miscellaneous

A. Penalties

- a. Any international travel agents caught abusing the system will be blacklisted from applying for any FAM Trips in the future, and other penalties under the prevailing law of the country may apply.



- b. A local Hotel or Tour Operator caught abusing this system shall result in cancellation of their business licenses, and other penalties in line with Tourism Rules and Regulation (TRR) 2024 shall apply.

B. Accountability

The applicant shall be held accountable for any misuse/mislead of the conditions in the FAM Trip application.

C. Reporting and Monitoring

- a. Monitor when the FAM Trips are underway in the country.
- b. Conduct study every quarter to assess the impact/outcome of the FAM Trips undertaken and submit to the Ministry.
- c. Publish a monthly FAM Trip report and submit it to the Ministry in the first week of the following month. The Department must ensure that the following information are included in the report:
 - i. Number of FAM Trips approved and rejected;
 - ii. Details of the Local Partner and the number of FAM Trips hosted;
 - iii. Details of the destination of the FAM Trip (Dzongkhag wise);
 - iv. Deliverables of the Agent mentioned in 10 (b) above;
- d. Maintain records of application for future reference.

12. Amendment and Interpretation

MoICE reserves the right to amend the SOP and the interpretation of the Ministry shall be final and binding in the case of a difference in the interpretation of this SOP.



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ANNEXURE I

**DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM
MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, COMMERCE AND EMPLOYMENT
Royal Government of Bhutan
Thimphu**

UNDERTAKING

Declaration:

- I hereby declare that all the information furnished by me in this application is true and correct. Should any false or misleading information be provided or this privilege be abused then the applicant is liable to be penalized.
- I agree to abide by the following conditions for the issue of FAM Trip clearance for the FAM individuals:
 1. The visiting FAM guest is not a tourist and, in the event, it is established that the guest is a tourist, I undertake to refund the entire costs and bear applicable fines and penalties as may be imposed by the relevant agencies;
 2. Be responsible for the FAM guest during the stay in the Kingdom;
 3. Comply with provisions of the Tourism regulations, Immigration regulations and any other regulations made thereunder or any notification thereof for the time being in force in the Kingdom of Bhutan;
 4. Not engage in any form of activities other than the intended purpose of this privilege and any activities detrimental to the security, reputation and wellbeing of the organization and the Kingdom.



Name and Signature of the Applicant/Local Partner
Company Name
Contact Number (Mobile & email)