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## DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM



# **GUIDELINES FOR THE CERTIFICATION, REGISTRATION, AND OPERATION OF VILLAGE HOMESTAYS (VHS)**

January 2026

**DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM (DoT)  
MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, COMMERCE AND EMPLOYMENT (MoICE)**

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## 1. Introduction

The Village Homestay (VHS) program was introduced in March 2017 with the goal of offering a unique form of alternative tourism, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the authentic lifestyle of a typical Bhutanese village alongside its local community. VHS was thus initiated as a tourism product for international travelers seeking genuine village experience.

The VHS program emphasizes small-scale, low-density and family-based operations that are flexible and spontaneous in nature. The initiatives are owned and operated by local communities, ensuring that the benefits directly provide a supplementary income to host households whilst enriching the community livelihoods. The program also supports preservation of local culture and traditions including cuisine, foster artisanal and collage-based activities or Cottage and Small Industry (CSI), promotes the preservation of historical sites, and encourages environmental stewardship through community participation.

The VHS initiative draws its inspiration from the traditional Bhutanese practice of “Nyep Culture” (hosting travelers) where visitors are welcomed and treated with warmth and hospitality. This practice provides an opportunity for visitors to experience a holistic and authentic Bhutanese way of life, allowing them to participate in village activities “*as life happens*”.

VHS is an experience-based form of accommodation intended to complement and not replace the core livelihood activities of rural households, such as farming and traditional occupations. VHS operations shall remain non-commercial in nature and shall not be operated as substitute for formal accommodation establishments.

The *Guidelines for Certification, Registration, and Operation of Village Homestays 2026* has been revised in pursuant to Tourism Rules and Regulations (TRR) 2024 and provides a comprehensive framework for Certification, Registration, Operation and Monitoring whilst facilitating effective oversight and compliance.

## **2. Title**

The **Guidelines** shall be called the “**Guidelines for the Certification, Registration, and Operation of Village Homestay 2026**”, hereinafter referred to as the ‘Guidelines’.

## **3. Commencement**

The Guidelines shall come into effect from January 2026.

## **4. Applicability**

The Guidelines is applicable to the existing certified and registered Village Homestays (VHS) and it applies to tourists governed by tourism policy and tourism rules and regulations of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

The Guidelines covers:

1. Requirements for setting up of a VHS
2. Procedural requirements for certification and registration of VHS
3. Operation and management of VHS

## **5. Supersession**

The Guidelines supersedes the past and/or existing Guidelines for the Village Homestays.

## **6. Definition**

**6.1 Village homestay** is a form of tourism product that allows visitors to stay with the host family and experience traditional village life ‘as life happens’.

**6.2 Host family** is the entity who provides and operates the VHS.

**6.3 Visitors** are entities who avail the services of the VHS.

## **7. Objectives**

The objectives of the Guidelines are to:

- Establish clear and consistent requirements for Certification and Registration of VHS.
- Ensure that VHS operate as household-based and supplementary income-generating activities in rural areas.
- Set minimum operational and management standards to ensure safety, hygiene, authenticity and quality guest experiences.
- Enable effective monitoring and compliance by the Department of Tourism in accordance with the Tourism Rules and Regulations 2024.

## **8. Eligibility Requirements**

A VHS must get certified and registered with the Department of Tourism prior to operation.

To be eligible for certification and registration, a VHS shall meet the following **mandatory criteria**:

### **8.1 Citizenship**

The host of the VHS must be a Bhutanese citizen.

### **8.2 Location**

VHS shall be located in the rural areas or outside the municipal boundaries. VHS located in villages within the municipal boundary will not be eligible for certification. The Department of Tourism in consultation with the relevant Gewog and Dzongkhag Administrations, where necessary, shall assess existing facilities to determine potential impacts of the tourist accommodation supply.

### **8.3 Structure**

The structure of a VHS should meet the following requirements:

- Shall operate from a traditional family house, constructed in or before March 2017.
- The house shall reflect vernacular architectural features of the locality.
- The structure shall be safe, habitable, and culturally consistent.
- There shall be no shops, rentals, or commercial operations within the same structure proposed for VHS.

### **8.4 Accessibility**

The access to the house from the nearest road point should be safe and convenient.

### **8.5 The Host:**

The host family shall:

- Be a registered household of the village or the community.
- Reside in the same house designated as the VHS, with a minimum of two physically active family members.
- Operate the VHS strictly as a family managed activity by:
  - Not leasing or subletting the VHS to any third party.
  - Not employing external staff for operation or management.
  - Not operating catering, restaurant, or other commercial services beyond hosting guests as a part of the homestays experience.
- Be responsible for ensuring the safety and security of all visitors and accountable for any incidents that occur due to negligence or failure to maintain safety standards.

### **8.6 Guest rooms**

- The rooms must be within the same house.
- A VHS should have a maximum of **three** rooms, with each room accommodating up to two guests only.
- The rooms should have proper ventilation and safety measures.
  - Rooms must be clean and well-maintained.
  - Each room should be equipped with clean supplies.
  - Not use the altar, living and common rooms as the guest rooms.

## **8.7 Sanitation & Bathroom Facilities:**

The VHS should:

- Have at least one clean toilet equipped with basic amenities and continuous water supply.
- Have a separate space for a shower/bath is recommended.
- Ensure bathroom facilities are comfortable, clean, and well maintained.

## **9. Application for Assessment and Certification**

### **9.1 Application**

Upon meeting the eligibility requirements, the proponent shall submit an application for assessment and certification to the Department of Tourism, with the following documents:

- Annexure 1: Forwarding letter to be submitted by the applicant
- Annexure 2: Application form for the registration of village homestay
- Annexure 3: Self-assessment checklist (Pictorial evidence, where relevant)
- Annexure 4: No objection letter from the Head of the Household
- Annexure 5: Recommendation from Gewog Administration

Only applications that meet the eligibility criteria and are submitted with complete documentation shall be considered for assessment. Incomplete applications shall be returned for resubmission and applications not meeting criteria shall be formally notified about its ineligibility.

### **9.2 Field Assessment**

The Department of Tourism shall schedule and conduct field assessment through certified assessors. The assessment findings shall be shared with the applicant, who shall undertake necessary corrective measures within the timeframe specified by the Department prior to re-assessment.

The initial assessment shall be free of charge. Fees for subsequent assessment shall be levied in accordance with the TRR 2024.

### **9.3 Certification**

The approved VHS will be issued a certificate with the following details:

- Valid for a period of three years.
- VHS shall display the certificate of registration in a prominent area inside the house.
- A field monitoring will be conducted prior to renewal of the certificate.

### **9.4 Registration**

The certified VHS will be registered with the Department of Tourism and listed under the list of certified Village Homestays.

## **10. Monitoring**

The Department of Tourism or any entity authorized by the Department of Tourism shall undertake periodic monitoring to ensure compliance with the Guidelines and TRR 2024. Any non-compliance and violations shall be addressed in accordance with the TRR 2024 and other

applicable laws and regulations.

## **11. Operation and Management**

The host family shall be fully responsible for the operation and management of the VHS. The following requirements shall be observed:

1. Maintain VHS in compliance with certified standards at all times.
2. Obtain prior approval from the Department of Tourism for any major refurbishment, upgradation or structural changes.
3. Provide accommodation and meals as part of the Homestay experience for overnight guests using home-cooked cuisines, where possible.
4. Ensure hygiene, sanitation, safety and waste management.
5. Maintain guest records and cooperate with monitoring, training and data reporting requirements.

## **12. Non-commercialization**

The VHS are intended to supplement household income and shall not replace core rural livelihood activities.

Accordingly, operation of VHS shall not:

- Substitute farming or traditional household occupations.
- Function as a commercial entity such as restaurant, catering service or any other commercial accommodation establishment.

## **13. Guest Experience Activities**

The host family may offer culturally appropriate and locally relevant activities as part of the homestay experience.

- Any applicable fees and charges shall be displayed transparently and applied uniformly.
- Guests may participate in regular household activities as a part of experience such as cooking, farming or weaving.
- Limited sale of household produce or handicrafts shall be permitted only when incidental to the guest experience and shall not constitute a commercial enterprise.

## **14. Amendment**

The Department of Tourism reserves the right to revise and amend the Guidelines from time to time, as may be deemed necessary.

**Annexure 1:  
FORWARDING LETTER TO BE SUBMITTED BY THE APPLICANT**

Date:

The Director  
Department of Tourism  
Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment  
Thimphu, Bhutan

**Subject: Application for Village Homestay**

Dear Sir,

Having read and understood the **Guidelines for the Certification, Registration and Operation of Village Homestay** and hereby oblige to fulfill the requirements required for operation of a Village Homestay, I would like to submit an application for setting up a Village Homestay in .....  
(Village).....(Gewog)..... (Dzongkhag).

Please find attached the following documents:

1. Application form	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. Self-assessment checklist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. No objection letter from Head of Household	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Household Information (Family tree)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5. Recommendation Letter from Gewog Administration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

I understand that the Department of Tourism reserves the rights to approve or disapprove the application based on the assessment.

Yours Sincerely,

(Name & Signature)

Mobile No:

## Annexure 2

### APPLICATION FORM FOR THE REGISTRATION OF VILLAGE HOME STAY

- **Applicant's Details:**

Name	
Citizenship Identity Card No.	
Contact No	
Email Address (if available)	
Village: ..... Gewog: ..... Dzongkhag: .....	
House No.: ..... Thram No.: .....	

- **Details of the proposed Village Homestay:**

Proposed name of the Village Homestay <i>(The proposed name of VHS should be the name of the proponent)</i>	
Owner of the Village Homestay	
Year of construction of the house	
No. of levels/storeys	
No. of rooms proposed for guests rooms	
Location <i>(Distance in kms from the Gewog Center)</i>	
Distance from the nearest road point	

- No. of household members living in the house, including the applicant: .....

Details of the family members residing in the same house, excluding the applicant:

#	Name	CID No.	Gender	Relationship to the applicant

**Annexure 3****Self-Assessment Checklist***To be completed by the applicant***Proposed name of Homestay:.....**

#	Criteria	Parameter	Description/Requirement	Self-assessment		Remarks
				Yes	No	
<b>MANDATORY</b>						
1	<b>STRUCTURE</b>	Design and building materials	The structural design of the house and building materials used reflect local, traditional architectural features and identity. The house has traditional aesthetics and vernacular architecture.			
		Guest bedrooms	The altar, living, and other common rooms shall not be used as guest rooms. The rooms must be clean and well-maintained with proper ventilation (without moulds or odours) and provided with necessary provisions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clean supplies (mattresses, blankets, pillows, covers and sheets)</li> <li>Electrical points and switches are within reach</li> <li>Doors and windows fitted with latches and bolts</li> <li>Cloth hanging hooks</li> </ol>			
		Sublets	There shall be no shops, rentals (tenants) or other commercial operations in the same house.			

		Surrounding environment	<p>The surroundings around the house are neat, clean and well maintained. There is no stagnant or grey water in the premises.</p> <p>Livestock sheds are not adjacent to the house and will not disturb the guests. Livestock wastes are properly maintained.</p>			
	2 <b>TOILETS/ WASHROOMS</b>	Accessibility	The house is safely and conveniently accessible from the nearest road point.			
		Cleanliness	The toilet is maintained neat, clean and hygienic with ventilation and continuous water supply.			
		Bath area	The bath area can be within the toilet or maintained separately, with adequate water supply (hot/cold). The floor must be non-slippery and maintained clean, with proper floor drains.			
2	3 <b>KITCHEN &amp;</b>	Provisions	<p>The toilets and washrooms should have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Soap</li> <li>ii. Toilet paper</li> <li>iii. Running water or stored water</li> <li>iv. Towel (on request)</li> <li>v. Waste bin</li> <li>vi. Hooks/hangers</li> <li>vii. Hot water if required</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
		Area	The kitchen area should be well maintained with proper hygiene and cleanliness.			
		Utensils	All utensils, cutleries and crockeries should be well			

	<b>MEAL</b>		maintained and stored in proper storage. Cracked, stained or broken cooking or serving items should not be used.			
		Food Options	A proper meal plan is recommended. All meals must be home-cooked and include local traditional dishes.			
4	<b>COMMON LIVING ROOM</b>	Area and set-up	The common living room used for reception, sitting and dining purposes should be: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clean and well-maintained (dust-free, odourless).</li> <li>2. Provided with heating/cooling facilities fit for the weather.</li> <li>3. Equipped with adequate and appropriate sitting and dining spaces; furniture should bear local traditional aesthetics.</li> </ol>			
5	<b>HOST/OPERATOR</b>	Host family	The host must be a permanent resident living in the same house and should solely operate the facility. There must be at least two physically active members present at the time of guests management.			
6	<b>SAFETY &amp; SECURITY MEASURES</b>	Safety measures	The safety and security of the guests should be treated with utmost priority. The homestay should have features such as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Windows and doors fitted with proper latches and bolts.</li> <li>b. Proper electrical wirings.</li> <li>c. Fire safety measures.</li> <li>d. Dry and non-slippery walkways and staircases.</li> <li>e. Dry and non-slippery floors in the kitchen, toilets and washrooms.</li> <li>f. Emergency contact details</li> </ol>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

DESIRABLE					
7	<b>OTHERS*</b>	Additional services and facilities	<p>Please list:</p> <p>Additional services and facilities available/planned, to enhance the guest experiences:</p> <p>a) .....</p> <p>....</p> <p>b) .....</p> <p>....</p> <p>c) .....</p> <p>....</p> <p>d) .....</p> <p>....</p> <p>e) .....</p> <p>....</p> <p>Sustainable practices to reduce wastes, conserve energy, and promote sustainable livelihoods.</p> <p>1. ....</p> <p>2. ....</p>		

			3. ....				
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**Notes:**

- i. **ALL mandatory** parameters must be fulfilled.
- ii. SN 1-4 should be supported with pictorial evidence.

**Declaration**

I declare that the information provided is true to the best of my knowledge. I understand that I will be fully and solely responsible for any discrepancy arising from the information submitted above and any deviation can lead to the disqualification of the application.

Name and signature

Date:

(Legal Stamp)

## Annexure 4

Date:.....

### No Objection Letter from Head of the Household

I, Mr/Mrs/Ms.....(Head of the Household), bearing Citizenship Identity Card (CID) Number..... from ..... (village) ..... (gewog) ..... (Dzongkhag) hereby affirm that **I do not have any objection** to Mr./Mrs./Ms....., who is my..... (Daughter/Son/Spouse/Relative), bearing CID number ..... operating the house under Thram number....., House number ..... in .....(village) ..... (gewog) ..... (Dzongkhag) as a **Village Homestay**.

I have provided the approval after fully understanding the requirements for operations of a Village Homestay and shall take full responsibility should any disputes or issues arise from this matter.

I understand my responsibility to inform the Department of Tourism of any changes in the future.

Affix legal stamp

Name and Signature

#### Witness

Name:

CID No:

Contact No:

\* Please attach a copy of Household Information (family tree).

\* If the applicant is the Head of the Household, submit only the Household Information (family tree).

## **Annexure 5**

Date:

### **Recommendation from Gewog Administration**

This is to confirm that Mr./Mrs./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ bearing CID No. \_\_\_\_\_ is a residence of \_\_\_\_\_ village, \_\_\_\_\_ gewog, \_\_\_\_\_ Dzongkhag, under House no. \_\_\_\_\_, Thram no. \_\_\_\_\_ and the house proposed for Village Homestay is constructed in the year \_\_\_\_\_.

The undersigned hereby affirms that:

- b) The house proposed for VHS was constructed on or before March 2017.
- c) The applicant is a permanent resident of the Gewog.
- d) The applicant resides in the house proposed for the Village Homestay.
- e) The house conforms to the vernacular architecture and local traditional structures.
- f) The house is outside the municipal boundary.
- g) The house has suitable parameters for a Village Homestay

The above information is provided based on the official records available with the Gewog Administration and any changes that may arise will be duly communicated with the Department of Tourism.

And I understand that the objective of VHS is to provide a village experience to visitors and allow villagers to earn from providing such services without major investment. And there should not be economic press regardless of tourism business. I also understand that it is important to ensure sustainable tourism accommodation capacity for Gewog, Dzongkhag and Bhutan.

Issued by:

### **Signature and Seal**

Name:

Designation:

Contact no.

Email ID: