



BHUTAN

FIELD GUIDE

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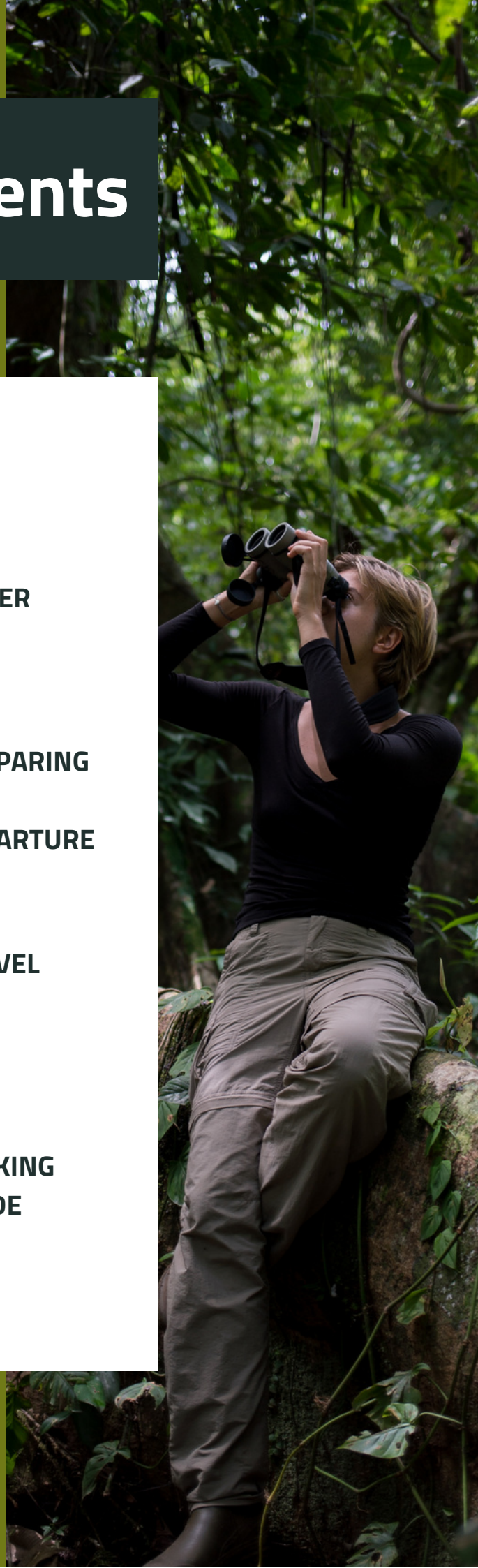
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LIFE IN THE FIELD



The Center



Academic Foci

- The center is set in the Paro valley of the Himalayan mountains (elevation 7,218 ft) surrounded by Rhododendron forests.
- Bhutan is known as Druk Yul or Land of the Thunder Dragon and is one of the world's top ten biodiverse hotspots.
- Gross National Happiness outranks Gross National Product and Buddhist philosophy resounds throughout Bhutan's culture competing with community livelihoods to inform their ever-evolving environmental policies.
- Endemic species such as black-necked cranes, takins, golden langurs, snow leopards, and tigers all call Bhutan home.

SEMESTER:

HIMALAYAN ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

Mountain, forest, and river ecology, resource management and conservation. Geology and hydrology of mountain regions. Environmental governance. Gross National Happiness and the influence of Buddhist philosophy. Urban migration. Agriculture and food security.

SUMMER 1:

FORESTS IN THE LAND OF THE THUNDER DRAGON

Mountain, forest, and river ecology, resource management and conservation. Geology and hydrology of mountain regions. Environmental governance. Gross National Happiness and the influence of Buddhist philosophy. Urban migration. Agriculture and food security.



Community Engagement

You will live at a field station as a cohort, rather than in a homestay, local apartment, or university dorm. This means that you will not necessarily be eating local cuisine, speaking a local language, or navigating the local culture every day. However, we fundamentally believe that meaningful research is only possible with the input of local people and in consideration of cultural history, so community engagement may vary each term to reflect the requests of our partners.



Chores

There is no cleaning service at the center, so students are expected to take responsibility for their space during their stay. Students will help set up/clean up for meals and engage in a center-wide clean-up about once a week. Specific chore responsibilities and schedules will be shared during orientation.



Climate

Fall runs from September through November. Temperatures in Paro range from 47–75°F.

Winter runs from December through March and brings light snow. Temperatures in Paro range from 20–54°F.

Spring runs from April to June with increasing rainfall. Temperatures in Paro range from 39–75°F.

Climate varies widely depending on elevation, so be prepared for both hotter and colder weather



Identity

Every country is shaped by its history, and therefore attitudes towards gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religion can differ greatly. Keep in mind that what seems like discrimination may simply be curiosity. Additionally, most students expect to encounter differences between themselves and their host country but don't realize the most significant differences may be between themselves and their student group. Students should research how different aspects of their identity might be perceived in a new context, in specific political and societal issues, racial, ethnic, and religious composition, LGBTQIA+ climate (Resources [1](#) and [2](#)), and cultural norms and local laws. Reflecting on one's own culture and identity before studying abroad can help students better navigate their experience abroad.

It is a privilege to study in another country and be welcomed into these communities. It is not our students' place to try and change its culture or values. While students will be learning about the country and its people, they will be ambassadors of their own country and culture. SFS campuses are permanent fixtures, and these communities are home to our staff members year-round. Behavior that is disrespectful, illegal, or contrary to cultural norms can degrade the relationship with the community and can impede meaningful interactions for peers, SFS staff members, and future students.



Setting and Facilities

A former hotel nearby the quiet town of Paro.

RURAL ← ● → URBAN

PARO

10-minute walk

Population ~12,000

Nearest town. Restaurants, shops, cafes, and bars.

THIMPHU

60-minute drive

Population ~115,000

Capital city. Restaurants, shops, cafes, bars, and hospital.

HOUSING

Ten rooms, 2-3 people per room in twin beds. Personal desks and storage spaces.

En-suite bathroom with shower (hot water) and western-style toilet.

OTHER FACILITIES

Common room with TV, books, and games.

Classroom, kitchen, dining area, and terrace.

Five washing machines (detergent provided). No dryers, clotheslines only.



Food

SFS can accommodate most dietary needs, but the variety of food may be limited due to local availability and cost. SFS cannot accommodate life-threatening allergies to dairy or strict Halal or Kosher diets. Due to limited dietary variety, SFS always recommends bringing vitamins, protein bars, nuts, favorite snacks, etc.

Meals consist of rice, starchy vegetables, legumes, and spicy chilies. Cheese, butter, and milk are common ingredients. Raw vegetables are not common. Snacks include tea, juice, fruit, and crackers.



Exercise

The center has a ping pong table, volleyball net, and badminton rackets. There are a few running routes around the center. A gym is available in town for approximately \$30 USD per month.



Time-off

Due to Bhutan visa restrictions, students will not be given a mid-semester break or the opportunity to travel independently.



Money

The local currency is the Bhutanese Ngultrum (Nu) and Indian Rupee (INR). Thai Bhat (THB) will be used during the short layovers while flying to and from Bhutan.

Bhutan and Thailand are cash-based economies. You cannot use credit/debit cards for most purchases. However, all students are required to bring a credit/debit card with at least \$3,000 in funds in case of emergencies. Mastercard and Visa are the most commonly accepted cards internationally. Be sure to notify your bank that you will be traveling internationally.

Please bring the entire amount of USD you plan to spend with you to start. Staff will assist students in exchanging USD to Nu upon arrival. Students should withdraw THB or exchange USD for THB while at the airport. When bringing USD to exchange, travel with bills in excellent condition (clean, unwrinkled, unmarked, with no tears). You will have access to ATMs to replenish your cash supply in Paro and Thimphu, however there are unreliable.





Electricity

The electrical voltage in Bhutan is 230 and in Thailand is 220 (the U.S. uses 120). Check all electrical devices to see if you need a voltage converter. Bhutan uses plug type D, F, and G and Thailand uses types C and O (the U.S. uses A and B). All students will need plug adaptors.



Internet

Wireless internet is available at the center and Thai hotel, but it is slow and intermittent. SFS reserves the right to limit internet activities occurring on our servers including, but not limited to, streaming or downloading audio/video content (Facetime, Netflix, etc.).



Computers

Students need to bring laptops with Microsoft Office (or the ability to open Microsoft files offline) and a USB port. Electronic devices are subjected to a much harsher environment than normal. In particular, Apple products do not fare well in high humidity and are more difficult to repair or replace locally. Please take precautions to protect your device.



Phones

Students are provided local phones and/or local sim cards in Bhutan. Students are responsible for maintaining credit on their phones to communicate with staff and peers. This will cost around ~\$1 USD per month. Additional credit will be needed for international calls. During the short stay in Thailand, students will rely on WIFI only.



Mail

No packages can be sent to the center. Letters may not arrive due to the unpredictability of local mail service. Send all letters through USPS (not UPS, FedEx, or DHL). The average one-way travel time for airmail from the U.S. to Bhutan is 3-4 weeks. Therefore, no mail can be sent during the last month of programs, as students will not receive it! Mail will not be forwarded.

Address: ATTN: Staff, Student Name, The School for Field Studies, Gangtey Palace, P.O. Box 1308, Taju, Wangchang Gewog, Paro, 12001, Bhutan





Health & Safety in the Field



24-Hour Emergency Hotline

SFS maintains a 24-hour emergency hotline. If you need to urgently contact a student in the field, call 978.219.5113.



Student Health & Wellness Manager

The Student Health & Wellness Manager is a full-time primary medical responder and student support personnel on campus. They are certified in Wilderness First Response, or equivalent certification, and trained in sexual assault first response. They also counsel students on adjusting to life abroad, conduct risk assessments, and help coordinate program logistics and community outreach.



Orientation

Upon arrival to campus, students receive an orientation about the local community and culture, center operations, and relevant risks and hazards. Prior to arriving on program, students should research the inherent risks associated with traveling abroad.



Medical Care

SFS maintains a detailed risk assessment and management plan outlining risks and response protocols, including nearby medical facilities and their treatment capabilities. These plans ensure that staff are always aware of the best route for appropriate medical care.

If a visit to a medical care facility is needed, an SFS staff member will accompany the student to the appointment. Be aware that there may be times when access to medical care is delayed, such as on expedition. Students are responsible for all medical costs and all incidental expenses including transportation, accommodations, etc., incurred by all parties involved. This may include costs related to COVID-19 quarantining. Some medical emergencies or conditions may necessitate medical withdrawal from the program. Final decisions on medical withdrawal are made by SFS.



Mental Health Support

Adjusting to new routines, relationships, and cultural environments while away from your usual support systems can be challenging. The ways you manage stress, take care of yourself, or find joy may not be available to you while you are abroad. Many students also struggle with the rigorous schedule that is inherent to the nature of SFS programs. Understand that you may have decreased communication with home, limited privacy and alone time, and infrequent or modified opportunities for exercise.

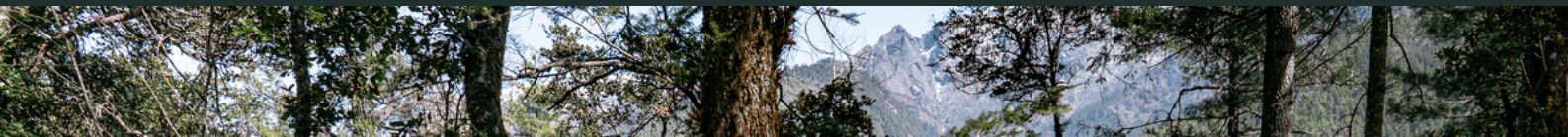
SFS is partnered with Morneau Shepell to provide students with access to free, mental health and wellness support by chat, phone, and video that can be accessed whenever connected to wifi. Students should download My Student Support Program (My SSP) in the app store or on the [My SSP website](#). My SSP is a supplemental resource, and students should work with their mental health provider to create a primary support plan. Students who undergo regular counseling should verify that their mental health provider is available while they are abroad.



Sexual Health & Wellness

When it comes to sexual health and wellness during your program, please consider:

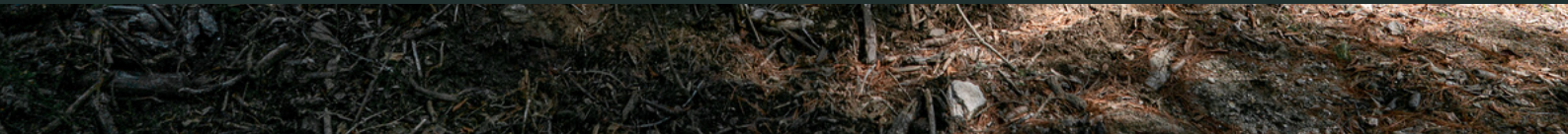
- The ramifications that a short-term relationship may have on a small residential campus or within the local community.
- Access to protection, medication for sexually transmitted infections, and emergency contraception may not be available.
- The current dialogue and understanding of consent in the U.S. does not always apply in other cultures.
- If you feel subjected to sexual harassment, you should walk away from any situation that makes you uncomfortable without concern for being culturally inappropriate. You can report harassment or assault to any SFS staff member.
- In the case of a sexual assault, SFS will make every effort to support you. This includes access to medical care, the option to report to local law enforcement, and identifying additional support resources. Local laws, definitions, and legal implications often differ from those in the U.S. Different laws and limited availability of resources such as rape kits can be complicating factors in responding to a report of sexual harassment or sexual assault in foreign countries.



LGBTQIA+

SFS is welcoming of all students at our centers. However, when traveling throughout the country, please be aware of the following:

- Laws and social customs may differ from your home country, and countries that criminalize same-sex partnerships may also use the law to criminalize gender identities and gender expressions.
- Cultural practices may not support freedom of expression and travelers may experience discrimination and harassment.
- Some cultural practices are based on traditional gender roles and gender expressions. As a result, those who do not identify as they physically present may sometimes be misgendered or misidentified.
- Some languages are gendered, resulting in a lack of terms that encompass non-binary and gender-neutral identities.
- Health services specific to transgender people may be limited or unavailable. You may also be denied services in your affirmed gender while you are traveling abroad.
- It is not always possible to use preferred names or gender identities (visa paperwork, plane tickets, hotel reservations, and government sites). Gender X is not recognized worldwide, and you may need to provide binary sex information.



Social Drinking & Drugs

There is no consumption or possession of alcohol allowed on campus. If you choose to consume alcohol on your days off in which you are off campus, please do so in moderation and maintain respectful behavior toward others.

Possession of marijuana and cannabis-infused products, including some cannabidiol (CBD) oils, is currently illegal under U.S. federal law. SFS does not allow possession or use of any drugs or medications that are illegal for the full duration of SFS programs including free time and weekends away. Check local laws before possessing, purchasing, or using electronic cigarettes or vaping devices on program.



PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE



Program Costs

The relationship SFS has with your school will determine your billing process. Within a week of acceptance, you or your school will be required to pay a non-refundable deposit to reserve your spot. Afterward, our finance department will reach out to you or your school to collect tuition payments. Up-to-date costs and refund policies can be found [here](#).

Included in SFS program costs are program advising and orientations, tuition and research fees, airport transfers, housing, meals during program time, field excursions and cultural activities, emergency evacuation and 24/7 support, and official transcript processing.

PROGRAM	BILLING DEADLINE
Spring	November 1st
Summer 1 or 1+2	April 1st
Summer 2	May 1st
Fall	June 1st

BASIC COSTS (BILLED BY SFS)	SEMESTER	SUMMER 1
Tuition	\$20,550	\$7,250
Room & Board	\$7,950	\$4,000
Estimated Airfare (to and from Bhutan)	\$1000	\$1000
BASIC PROGRAM COST	\$29,500	\$12,250
ADDITIONAL COSTS (ESTIMATED, ACTUAL COSTS MAY VARY)		
Airfare (to and from Thailand)	\$2,000	\$2,000
Passport	\$200	\$200
Visa fees (if applicable)	N/A	N/A
Immunizations/Medications	\$2,000	\$2,000
Personal Expenses	\$800	\$500
Program Breaks	N/A	N/A
ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL PROGRAM COSTS	\$5,000	\$4,700
TOTAL PROGRAM COSTS (BASIC + ADDITIONAL COSTS)		
ESTIMATED TOTAL PROGRAM COST	\$34,500	\$16,950



Financial Aid

All students are welcome to apply for SFS financial aid. Financial aid applications are reviewed on a rolling basis starting in February for summer programs, April for fall programs, and September for spring programs. Early submissions are encouraged. Students who submit an SFS financial aid application by the payment deadline will be considered for our full range of aid options. Learn more [here](#).



TRAVEL



PASSPORT

You must have a passport in hand four months prior to departure that is valid for at least 6 months after your departure from Bhutan.



VISA

Bhutan

Students' Bhutan student visas will be applied for by staff and will last for the duration of the program only. Visa costs are covered in your tuition payment. Travel before or after the program within Bhutan is not possible.

Thailand

U.S. citizens do not need a visa for travel to Thailand under 30 days. You may be asked for proof of onward travel or sufficient funds in order to receive your visa waiver upon arrival. Nothing needs to be done pre-arrival. If traveling before or after the program within Thailand, make sure that your stay does not exceed the waiver allotment. Non-U.S. citizens may require a different visa process and are responsible for applying for, obtaining, and paying for their own Thai visa valid for the duration of their stay.



FLIGHTS

Students are responsible for the cost of flights to and from their program. SFS will book flights for all students from Thailand into Bhutan and vice versa and invoice students thereafter. Students will receive travel instructions at least 2 months prior to the start of their program. Do not book flights to Thailand before receiving these instructions.

SFS staff will meet students at the airport on the date and time specified in the airport instructions and transport them to the center. Students will receive airport instructions 1-2 weeks prior to the start of their program. If traveling before the program, you are responsible for meeting the group at the airport at the designated date and time. Additionally, SFS is not responsible for transporting or storing luggage before or after the program.

SFS is not responsible for reimbursing travel expenses for programs canceled or rescheduled due to acts of war or civil unrest, strikes, weather, quarantine/epidemics/sickness, government regulations, or failure of equipment, power, or communications.





Medical Requirements



Medical Approval Process

Students are required to complete the SFS medical approval process using our HIPPA-compliant portal to inform SFS staff of their medical and mental health needs and accommodations. The review is not meant to exclude, but to inform and allow support systems to be put in place. No student may enter the field until medical approval is granted by SFS. [More information.](#)



Vaccinations & Medications

Required

- At least 1 COVID-19 vaccine within 1 year of the program start date, but no less than 2 weeks before departure.
- Rabies pre-exposure vaccination series (must be completed at least 2 weeks before arrival).

Recommended

- [Centers for Disease Control](#), travel clinics, or medical providers can provide further recommendations.



Accommodating Disabilities

SFS will work with students, schools, and physicians to determine the required accommodations and whether it can be safely and reasonably maintained on program. While SFS strives to meet students needs, due to the remote nature of the programs, there are varying levels of accessibility, services, and accommodations. Students with questions regarding physical or mental health accommodations should contact the Office of Student Affairs and learning accommodations should contact the Office of Academic Affairs.



Insurance

Students are required to buy health insurance. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that their coverage is valid in their program country(s) for the full duration of their program and covers basic medical care, including non-urgent illness or injury, laboratory tests, and pharmaceutical needs. SFS does not provide company recommendations. Keep in mind:

- Most domestic health insurance plans do not provide comprehensive coverage for out-of-country medical expenses.
- Schools may provide international health insurance or have their own insurance requirements for studying abroad.
- Most insurance companies provide coverage on a reimbursable basis. Therefore, students need to bring a credit card to pay for medical expenses and then request reimbursement later on.

Emergency Evacuation and Repatriation Insurance

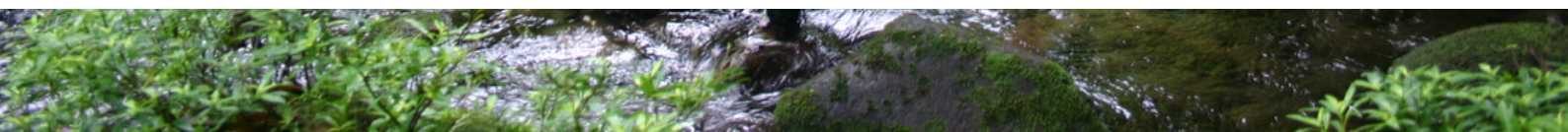
All students are automatically enrolled in an emergency evacuation and repatriation insurance plan through American International Group, Inc. (AIG) for the duration of their program only. This plan covers the cost of transportation, accommodations, and medical care associated with medically or politically necessary evacuations (e.g. life-saving support during air evacuation). It includes up to \$350,000 for emergency medical evacuation, \$100,000 for emergency security evacuation, and \$20,000 for repatriation of remains. The coverage provided does not cover basic medical care, laboratory tests, or pharmacy needs. Students on SFS programs are required to supply their own comprehensive health insurance as outlined above.



PACKING GUIDE



Packing Considerations



Luggage

SFS does not have a specific policy regarding how much or what type of luggage students bring, so pack according to your needs. Make sure you bring only what you can maneuver yourself, and check with all airlines for luggage restrictions and fees. Druk Airlines limits each person to 66 lbs of luggage which includes carry-ons; most students choose to pay the coordinated fees instead.



Culture & Climate

Many students bring old clothes to wear in the field and leave behind at the end of the program. Do not bring anything that you would not want damaged!

Bhutan regulates that all citizens wear traditional dress in workplaces, businesses, and schools. While SFS students do not need to buy traditional clothing, please be aware you will be required to dress culturally appropriate. Pack enough jeans, t-shirts, and sweaters for casual wear in town as well as formal pants/skirts/dresses for special occasions.

As you pack, please consider the impact of the products that you bring with you to your program, both the ingredients and packaging. Plastic can be difficult for waste management in remote environments. Think about bringing a reusable tote, metal straw, cloth napkins, etc. We also highly encourage biodegradable soaps, shampoos, and conditioners.





Required Packing

- **Shorts**
- **Pants** Lightweight blends that dry quickly. Some for field work, jeans for day-to-day, and comfy pants for inside your room. Consider waterproof pants as well.
- **T-shirts** Synthetic or merino wool for chilly nights, wet weather, and field days. Cotton shirts for non-fieldwork days but must be loose-fitting with no midriff exposed.
- **Long-sleeved shirts** Light-weight fabric for working in the field and heavier ones for warmth.
- **Formal top** Can buy local, traditional clothing instead.
- **Warm wool sweaters, jackets, or fleeces** worn nearly daily.
- **Waterproof jacket with a hood** Water resistant is not sufficient.
- **Winter Coat, Warm scarf, Hat, Gloves, etc.** 1 set.
- **Underwear** Past students recommend a pair of synthetic/quick-dry underwear for the trek.
- **Socks** 4-5 pairs of wool or synthetic hiking socks (not cotton).
- **Pajamas** appropriate for shared spaces.
- **Sun hat and sunglasses**
- **Hiking boots** Preferably waterproof.
- **Sneakers** Durable, close-toed, and good in the rain
- **Rubber sandals** Crocs, flip-flops, etc.
- **Sleeping bag (SEMESTER ONLY)** At least 20°F rating for the camping trip and to supplement bedding provided. Sheets, a pillow, and a blanket will be provided for all sessions.
- **Towels** 1 large shower towel and 1 face/hand towel for the camping trip. Quick dry towels are best! Additional towels will be provided at the center.
- **Toiletries** Basic items can be purchased in town, but you should plan to bring enough with you for at least a week. Preferably biodegradable.



- **Masks and COVID tests** Bring enough masks to last the duration of the program and 5+ home rapid tests
- **Record of immunizations and Health history**
- **Personal first-aid kit** including Anti-itch creams, Neosporin, Bacitracin, Tylenol, Ibuprofen, Pepto Bismol, Band-Aids, Tape, Tweezers, Nail clippers, Antihistamines, Pro-biotics, Antidiarrheals, Vitamin C, Cold medicines, Hydration salts, etc.
- **Prescriptions** Note that overseas prescriptions are not always accepted. You should bring adequate supplies of prescription medications with you to last the duration of your program alongside your doctor's prescription to avoid customs delays. Think about inhalers, allergy medication, contacts/glasses, etc.
- **Motion sickness medication/ Dramamine/ Ginger chews** Even if you don't usually experience motion sickness.
- **Period care** You can purchase pads in town, but tampons are not common. We encourage you to use a menstrual cup or environmentally friendly, biodegradable options.
- **Flash drives and/or External hard drive** At least 1 GB recommended.
- **Computer** that can open Microsoft Office documents offline and has a USB port.
- **Surge protector and Plug adaptors**
- **Wristwatch** Preferably water-resistant or waterproof.
- **Headlamp or flashlight**
- **Dry bags or sturdy plastic bags** Gallon-sized Ziploc bags work well.
- **Day pack with waterproof cover** Small backpack suitable for taking gear into the field. 15-30L recommended.
- **Weekend bag** to bring on overnight field excursions or weekends off. 35-55L recommended.
- **Water bottles** 2 bottles with 1L capacity each.
- **Tupperware and Travel mugs** for packing lunches. Can buy locally.
- **Small gift for day-stay family** There may be an opportunity for a day stay with a local family. If this occurs, it's good to bring a gift. We recommend that the gift be modest and represent your hometown. Great gifts are locally made items (maple syrup, special candy), calendars or postcards, magnets, and photos of you or your family, etc.



Optional Packing

- **Purse/tote bag** for town.
- **Small clothing repair kit**
- **Laundry bag** One shared basket is provided per room.
- **Swimsuit**
- **Additional formal outfits**
- **Rubber boots** The center has several pairs of rain boots that you can use, but if you have an especially large or small foot it is recommended you bring your own. If you want your own pair, lightweight, shin-high boots with good tread are best. Can purchase in town.
- **Pocketknife** Checked luggage only.
- **Sleeping pad (SEMESTER ONLY)** Thermo-rest or cell foam pad for camping. Only used 1 or 2 nights..
- **Trekking poles**
- **Binoculars** preferably 8 x 40 but anything in the 6 x 30 to 10 x 40 range is fine.

- **Umbrella**
- **Earplugs and Eye mask**
- **Baby wipes and Hand sanitizer** Can purchase in town.
- **Lactaid** or similar medication for students with lactose intolerance. Not available locally.
- **Journal**
- **Games, Movies, and Books**
- **Snacks, Drink powders, and Dietary supplements** Any favorites.
- **Camera**
- **Voltage converter** if needed for electronics.
- **Headphones and/or Bluetooth speaker**
- **Waterproof cases for electronics and silicone packets** (or some water-absorbing equivalent).
- **Extra batteries and External battery packs**



Contact Us

Keep up with SFS follow us on Instagram [@theSFS](#)/[@theSFS_bhutan_la](#), read [news from the field](#), and find the [full list of the SFS team bios here](#)!

Questions about billing? Billing@fieldstudies.org

Deposit payments, invoices, charges to your account, financial aid packages, billing deadlines, and loan paperwork.

Questions about health and safety? StudentLife@fieldstudies.org

Medical paperwork, Immunizations, managing medical conditions during your program, and dietary needs and preferences.

Questions about academics? Academics@fieldstudies.org

Learning accommodations, syllabi, and directed research.

Questions about admissions or enrollment? Admissions@fieldstudies.org

Which program is the best fit for you, application materials, travel and visa logistics, and other program-specific questions.