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## DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment

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5<sup>th</sup> June 2024

### STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP)

#### SUBJECT: MEETINGS, INCENTIVES, CONFERENCES AND EVENTS GROUPS TO BHUTAN

Date updated: 5<sup>th</sup> June 2024

#### This policy applies to:

- All guests who wish to visit Bhutan for a Meeting, Incentive, Conference and/or Exhibitions (hereafter referred to as a MICE group).
- All Department of Tourism (DoTr) certified travel agents and/or hotels who wish to organize a MICE group to Bhutan.

#### DEFINITION:

A MICE group refers to a meeting, incentive group, conference or exhibition being organised in Bhutan, typically organised for professional, educational or business purposes.

#### EXCLUSIONS:

The following types of activities and categories will not be applicable for a tourism MICE SDF waiver (even if they include any kind of meeting in the itinerary):

- a. Personal gatherings such as weddings, anniversaries, family reunions, and other celebrations
- b. Any kind of music or cultural festival
- c. Any kind of leisure tourist itinerary or programme
- d. Any kind of adventure or sports tourism
- e. Visits to explore historical sites, cultural landmarks, museums, and festivals that are not linked to a specific business or professional event
- f. Trips focused on health, wellness, and medical treatments, including spa visits, yoga retreats, and medical tourism
- g. Visits to religious sites for spiritual purposes or participating in religious ceremonies
- h. Traveling with the primary purpose of volunteering for a charitable cause or community service project
- i. Gatherings centred around hobbies or special interests such as bird watching, photography, cooking classes, or other clubs
- j. Individual travel experiences focused on personal enrichment, exploration, or relaxation without a business or professional agenda
- k. Educational trips and student exchange programmes
- l. Incentive groups without any business or meeting component as part of the itinerary



## OVERVIEW OF HOSTING A MICE EVENT IN BHUTAN:

1. Organizers of MICE events can apply for an SDF waiver meeting the other requirements outlined in this document.
2. The minimum group size to qualify as a MICE event is fifteen participants. This includes speakers, panelists and other resources.
3. A maximum of 5 nights SDF waiver can be granted to all participants per event, including travel days. The idea is that the attendees will pay the SDF to extend their stay in Bhutan and enjoy the destination as a tourist.
4. The SDF waiver can be granted to only the participant; meaning that the partners, children and friends are not entitled to an SDF waiver. Proof of ID of the participants will be required at the time of application.
5. MICE events can be organized any time of the year.
6. All MICE events must be organized and/or hosted by a DoTr-certified Bhutanese Tour Operator or Bhutanese Hotel.
7. The event must be approved by the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment and Department of Tourism will conduct spot checks to ensure the SDF waiver for MICE is used / applied as per the stated purpose.
8. A summary of the event including the outcomes and photographs must be submitted by the organizing partner to DoTr ASAP and (and within a maximum timeframe of one month) following the departure date of the guests, otherwise the full SDF of the participants will be levied on the organizing partner.
9. DoTr must be given access by the organizer anytime to monitor MICE events.
10. If an organizer is discovered to have strayed from the planned itinerary or misused the MICE waiver for other purposes, they will face penalties, which may include the revocation of their license, a suspension from opening another business for a period of 24 months, requirement to pay the full SDF for all participants, among other possible penalties.
11. Extensions on SDF waivers for MICE events are not possible.
12. To be eligible for the MICE SDF waiver, the meeting, conference, or exhibition aspect of the event should span at least two full days. These can be distributed over various days; for instance, events structured as half-day meetings coupled with half-day tourist activities are permissible, provided the total encompasses at least two full days of meetings or workshops.
13. Organizers are responsible for ensuring adequate health and safety protocols for all attendees and venues, including emergency preparedness. Organizers are responsible for ensuring that MICE events in Bhutan are conducted responsibly, safely and sustainably.
14. All existing tourism-related rules and regulations will still apply. For instance, a guide will be required to accompany the group.
15. The participants will be required to process for route permit wherever applicable.

## PROCESS:

1. Any DoTr-certified Bhutanese TO or Hotel who wishes to organize a MICE event in Bhutan must submit their request [via this online form](#), at least one month before the event.
2. The objectives and itinerary of the event must be submitted at the time of application.
3. If the application meets the criteria, DoTr will grant a “conditional approval”. At this point the TO or Hotel must submit to DoTr by email or in person all the passport copies and information about the attendees of the event, including their LinkedIn profile, or copies of business cards, or proof that they work for (or have been invited by) the company who is organizing the MICE event. The passports must be valid for at least six months from the



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intended date of departure from Bhutan.

4. Once this information has been reviewed, DoTr will seek the approval of the Ministry for the SDF waiver for the participants.
5. Organizers can then approach the Department of Immigration for the SDF waivers and apply for the visas or permits.
6. A post-event report including the outcomes and photographs must be submitted by the TO or Hotel to the DoTr within one month of the departure date of the guests. This report should include information on attendance, the projected economic impact in Bhutan, key outcomes, and feedback from the participants.

### MONITORING AND EVALUATION:

1. DoTr and any government body authorized by DoTr may conduct unannounced visits during the event to ensure compliance with regulations, and conduct virtual monitoring if in person monitoring is not possible.
2. DoTr may send surveys to participants after the event to gather feedback, ensure compliance and to assess the event's impact.

For any questions please email: [hosts@tourism.gov.bt](mailto:hosts@tourism.gov.bt)

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