

Helpful Dzongkha Phrases

Pair Practice Script — Bhutan Trip

Partner A: Blue rows **Partner B:** Orange rows *Green text = how to pronounce it!*

Use the My Notes column to write your own pronunciation reminders.

Pronunciation Guide — Read This First!

Dzongkha uses sounds that don't exist in English. Here are the key ones to know before you practice:

Sound / Letter	In the Phrase	How to Say It
zh	<i>Zhey, Zhimbay</i>	Like the 's' in 'measure' or 'treasure' — a soft buzzing sound, not a hard Z.
kh	<i>Kadrin chhe la</i>	A breathy, airy 'k' — like saying 'k' while exhaling. Similar to the 'ch' in Scottish 'loch.'
ch / chh	<i>Kadrin chhe, Atsi</i>	Like the 'ch' in 'cheese' but said with a puff of air.
ng (start)	<i>Nga, Ngachu</i>	This 'ng' comes at the START of a word — like the end of 'sing' but at the beginning. Take it slow!
la (end)	<i>Kuzuzangpo la, Kadrin chhe la</i>	Added to the end of phrases for politeness. Said lightly, like 'lah.'
ay	<i>Gay, Tashi Delek</i>	Like the 'ay' in 'say' — a long A sound.
oe / ö	<i>Chhoe</i>	Similar to the 'u' in 'burn' or 'her' — round your lips slightly.

 *Don't worry about perfect pronunciation — Bhutanese people are warm and patient with visitors who make an effort. A smile and a genuine try go a long way!*

Section 1: Greetings & Introductions

 *Bhutanese people greet with a slight bow and open hands. Hugging is uncommon with strangers, and adding 'la' to the end of any phrase shows respect.*

Scenario: Meeting someone for the first time

Role	Dzongkha	Say It Like This...	English Meaning	My Notes
A	Kuzuzangpo la!	<i>koo-ZOO-zang-poh lah</i>	Hello! / Welcome! (formal, respectful)	
B	Kuzuzangpo la!	<i>koo-ZOO-zang-poh lah</i>	Hello! / Welcome!	
A	Nge gi ming ___ ein.	<i>ngay gee ming ___ ain</i>	My name is ___. (fill in your name)	
B	Nge gi ming ___ ein.	<i>ngay gee ming ___ ain</i>	My name is ___.	
A	Nga ___ ley ein.	<i>nga ___ lay ain</i>	I am from ___. (fill in your country/city)	
B	Tashi Delek!	<i>tah-SHEE deh-LEK</i>	Blessings and good luck! (warm cultural greeting)	

Role	Dzongkha	Say It Like This...	English Meaning	My Notes
A	Tashi Delek!	<i>tah-SHEE deh-LEK</i>	Blessings and good luck!	

 *Nga (I/me) starts with that tricky 'ng' sound — practice it by humming 'singing' and stopping at the 'ng,' then adding 'ah.'*

Scenario: Asking how someone is

Role	Dzongkha	Say It Like This...	English Meaning	My Notes
A	Gaday bay zhui?	<i>gah-DAY bay zhoo-ee</i>	How are you?	
B	Legshom!	<i>LEG-shom</i>	I'm fine / I'm well!	
A	Kadrin chhe la.	<i>kah-DRIN chay lah</i>	Thank you very much.	
B	Jembalaekso!	<i>jem-bah-LAY-kso</i>	You're welcome!	

 *Zhui sounds like 'zhoo-ee' — the 'zh' is like the middle of the word 'measure.' Legshom rhymes roughly with 'legshome.'*

Scenario: Saying goodbye

Role	Dzongkha	Say It Like This...	English Meaning	My Notes
A	Log jay gay!	<i>log jay gay</i>	Goodbye! / See you later!	
B	Log jay gay!	<i>log jay gay</i>	Goodbye! / See you later!	

Section 2: Polite & Everyday Phrases

 *These phrases will serve you in almost any situation. 'La' added to the end of any phrase instantly makes it more respectful — use it freely!*

Scenario: Expressing thanks and responding

Role	Dzongkha	Say It Like This...	English Meaning	My Notes
A	Kadrin chhe la!	<i>kah-DRIN chay lah</i>	Thank you very much!	
B	Jembalaekso.	<i>jem-bah-LAY-kso</i>	You're welcome.	
A	Atsi zur nang.	<i>AHT-see zur nang</i>	Excuse me. (to pass by someone)	
B	Atsi re she la.	<i>AHT-see ray shay lah</i>	Just a little. (e.g., 'I speak just a little Dzongkha')	

 *Atsi sounds like 'aht-see' — the 'ts' is a sharp sound like the end of 'cats.' Kadrin chhe — the 'chhe' is breathy, like 'chay' with a little air.*

Scenario: Yes, no, and no thank you

Role	Dzongkha	Say It Like This...	English Meaning	My Notes
A	Inn.	<i>in</i>	Yes.	

Role	Dzongkha	Say It Like This...	English Meaning	My Notes
B	Men.	<i>men</i>	No.	
A	Me Zhu.	<i>may zhoo</i>	No thank you.	
B	Kadrin chhe la!	<i>kah-DRIN chay lah</i>	Thank you!	

 *Me Zhu* — 'Me' rhymes with 'say,' and 'Zhu' sounds like 'zhoo' (the zh from 'measure'). A very polite and useful phrase for declining offers!

Section 3: Getting Around

 English is widely spoken in cities like Thimphu and Paro, but these phrases are especially useful in smaller towns and rural areas.

Scenario: Asking where something is

Role	Dzongkha	Say It Like This...	English Meaning	My Notes
A	Kuzuzangpo la...	<i>koo-ZOO-zang-poh lah</i>	Excuse me... (use as a polite opener)	
B	Inn?	<i>in</i>	Yes? / How can I help?	
A	___ ga tey in na?	<i>___ gah TAY in nah</i>	Where is ___? (fill in the place)	
B	Thrangdi song.	<i>THRANG-dee song</i>	Go straight ahead.	
A	Kadrin chhe la!	<i>kah-DRIN chay lah</i>	Thank you very much!	

 *Ga tey* — 'ga' sounds like 'gah' and 'tey' like 'tay.' So 'Hotel ga tey in na?' means 'Where is the hotel?'

Scenario: When you don't understand

Role	Dzongkha	Say It Like This...	English Meaning	My Notes
B	Atsi re she la?	<i>AHT-see ray shay lah</i>	Do you speak just a little (Dzongkha/English)?	
A	Atsi re she la.	<i>AHT-see ray shay lah</i>	Just a little.	
B	Drogay bay tang.	<i>droh-GAY bay tang</i>	There's no hurry — take your time!	
A	Kadrin chhe la.	<i>kah-DRIN chay lah</i>	Thank you.	

Section 4: Restaurant & Food

 Bhutanese cuisine features a lot of chili — the dish *Ema Datshi* (chili and cheese) is the national dish! Saying 'Zhimbay' after a meal will absolutely delight your hosts.

Scenario: At the table

Role	Dzongkha	Say It Like This...	English Meaning	My Notes
A	Zhey!	<i>zhay</i>	Please eat! / Please drink! (host inviting you)	
B	Kadrin chhe la!	<i>kah-DRIN chay lah</i>	Thank you!	
A	Zhimbay!	<i>ZHIM-bay</i>	Delicious!	
B	Zhimbay!	<i>ZHIM-bay</i>	Delicious! (agree!)	

 *Zhey rhymes with 'say' but starts with that soft zh sound (like 'measure'). Zhimbay — stress the first syllable: ZHIM-bay.*

Scenario: Asking about the food

Role	Dzongkha	Say It Like This...	English Meaning	My Notes
A	Kha shire?	<i>kha SHEE-ray</i>	Is it spicy?	
B	Inn, kha shire!	<i>in, kha SHEE-ray</i>	Yes, it's spicy!	
A	Zhimbay!	<i>ZHIM-bay</i>	Delicious anyway!	
B	Tashi Delek!	<i>tah-SHEE deh-LEK</i>	Wonderful! / Blessings!	

 *Kha shire — 'kha' is breathy (like the Scottish 'loch'), and 'shire' rhymes with 'here.' Together: kha-SHEE-ray.*

Practice Tips for Partners

1. Read the Pronunciation Guide before starting — spend 2 minutes on the sounds 'zh,' 'kh,' and 'ng.'
2. Say each phrase out loud twice before moving to the next line — repetition builds muscle memory.
3. Use the My Notes column to write how a phrase sounds to YOU personally (everyone hears sounds differently!).
4. Run through each scenario twice, then switch roles — Partner A becomes B and vice versa.
5. Practice a slight bow with your greetings — the gesture is just as important as the words in Bhutan!
6. Most importantly — don't be afraid to try! Bhutanese people are known for their warmth and will appreciate every effort.