
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

The country that measures happiness



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Pippa

And I'm Pippa. In this programme we're talking about happiness.

So, what makes you happy, Neil?

Neil

It makes me happy when I'm with a group of old friends and we're having a good laugh. How about you, Pippa?

Pippa

Cats make me very happy. Especially if I see a cat on the street that I don't know, and it lets me give it a little stroke. That always makes me happy.

Neil

I'm not surprised. That sounds great.

Pippa

So, happiness means different things to different people, but what's for sure is that most people would like to be happy. And the small Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan has taken this to a new level with the idea of Gross National Happiness, or GNH.

Neil

We'll be hearing more about Gross National Happiness and learning some useful new vocabulary soon, but first Pippa, I have a question for you. Of course, it's not

just the people of Bhutan who want to be happy. In fact, the United Nations has even announced an International Day of Happiness. But when is that? Is International Happiness Day:

- a) the 20th of March?
- b) the 20th of June?
- c) the 20th of November?

Pippa

I'm going to say the 20th of June, because it would be sunny in the UK.

Neil

OK, let's find out if you're right at the end of the programme.

Now, briefly, Gross National Happiness means preserving Bhutan's natural environment and culture through sustainable and eco-friendly development. Bhutan's government sees these goals as more important than growing the economy at any cost.

Pippa

For many years, Bhutan was closed to the outside world – the first foreign tourists arrived in 1974, and television was only introduced in 1999. The King of Bhutan wanted to **modernise** the country and give it the benefits of modern technology, but without damaging traditional culture, so he invited outside experts to develop the idea of Gross National Happiness. One expert was Dr Ha Vinh Tho, speaking here to Charmaine Cozier, presenter of BBC World Service programme, The Inquiry:

Dr Ha Vinh Tho

So, his idea was: 'How could we **modernise** and open our country without losing its culture, its environment, and its very strong **social fabric**?' Because Bhutan was one of the only countries in Asia that was never colonised therefore its culture is very **intact** and vibrant, mainly Buddhist culture. And so the idea was that Gross National Happiness should be the focus on all governmental decisions and policies.

Charmaine Cozier

So the wellbeing and happiness of citizens **took centre stage**.

Pippa

Bhutan has a strong **social fabric** meaning there are good relationships within communities and these hold society together.

Neil

Unlike other Asian countries, Bhutan was never colonised, so its Buddhist culture and traditions are **intact** – they're complete and unspoiled.

Pippa

As a result, the happiness of Bhutan's people **took centre stage**, it became the most important thing.

Neil

Bhutan's emphasis on happiness has been admired around the world, but there have been problems too. One is the migration of Bhutanese workers to India and other countries in search of better paid jobs and opportunities, something known as the **brain drain**.

Pippa

So in 2023, the King of Bhutan announced a multi-million dollar project called, The Mindfulness City, a new Himalayan city built on spiritual and environmental principles, all powered by renewable energy.

Neil

Originally from Bhutan, Dr Lhawang Ugyel, is the project's director and spoke with Charmaine Cozier for BBC World Service's, The Inquiry:

Charmaine Cozier

The project is also about reversing Bhutan's **brain drain**.

Dr Lhawang Ugyel

The intention is to have locals run this whole Mindfulness City, so in that sense it's also to attract the migrants that have left, and in the process of having worked abroad, gained the extra skills, come back to the Mindfulness City and work.

Pippa

As well as being a futuristic eco-city, the Mindfulness City hopes to stop Bhutan's **brain drain** by attracting workers back home to Bhutan. These local workers can then use the extra skills that they've learned abroad through **upskilling**. And **upskilling** is the process where workers' skills are improved through training.

Neil

The idea of Gross National Happiness might sound unusual, but it's interesting to see Bhutan balancing economic growth with the happiness of its people.

Pippa

Yes, that's true – and it reminds me of your question, Neil...

Neil

Yes, I asked you what the date of International Happiness Day is?

Pippa

I said it was the 20th of June in the summer in the UK.

Neil

Well, maybe it's better for people in the Southern hemisphere because it's the 20th of March.

Pippa

Nice.

Neil

And if you got that answer right, why not try our interactive quiz which you'll find on our website, bbclearningenglish.com! OK, let's recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with **modernise**, to make something more modern, for example through introducing technology.

Pippa

A country's **social fabric** means the relationships which connect a community together.

Neil

The adjective **intact** means complete and undamaged.

Pippa

If something **takes centre stage**, it becomes more important than anything else.

Neil

A **brain drain** happens when large numbers of educated and skilled people leave their own country to live and work in another country where they can earn more money.

Pippa

And finally, **upskilling** means improving workers' skills through training and experience. Once again, our six minutes are up. Goodbye for now!

Neil

Goodbye!