

Sketching and Walking in The Enchanted Kingdom of Bhutan

September 24 to October 12, 2009 (from/to US)

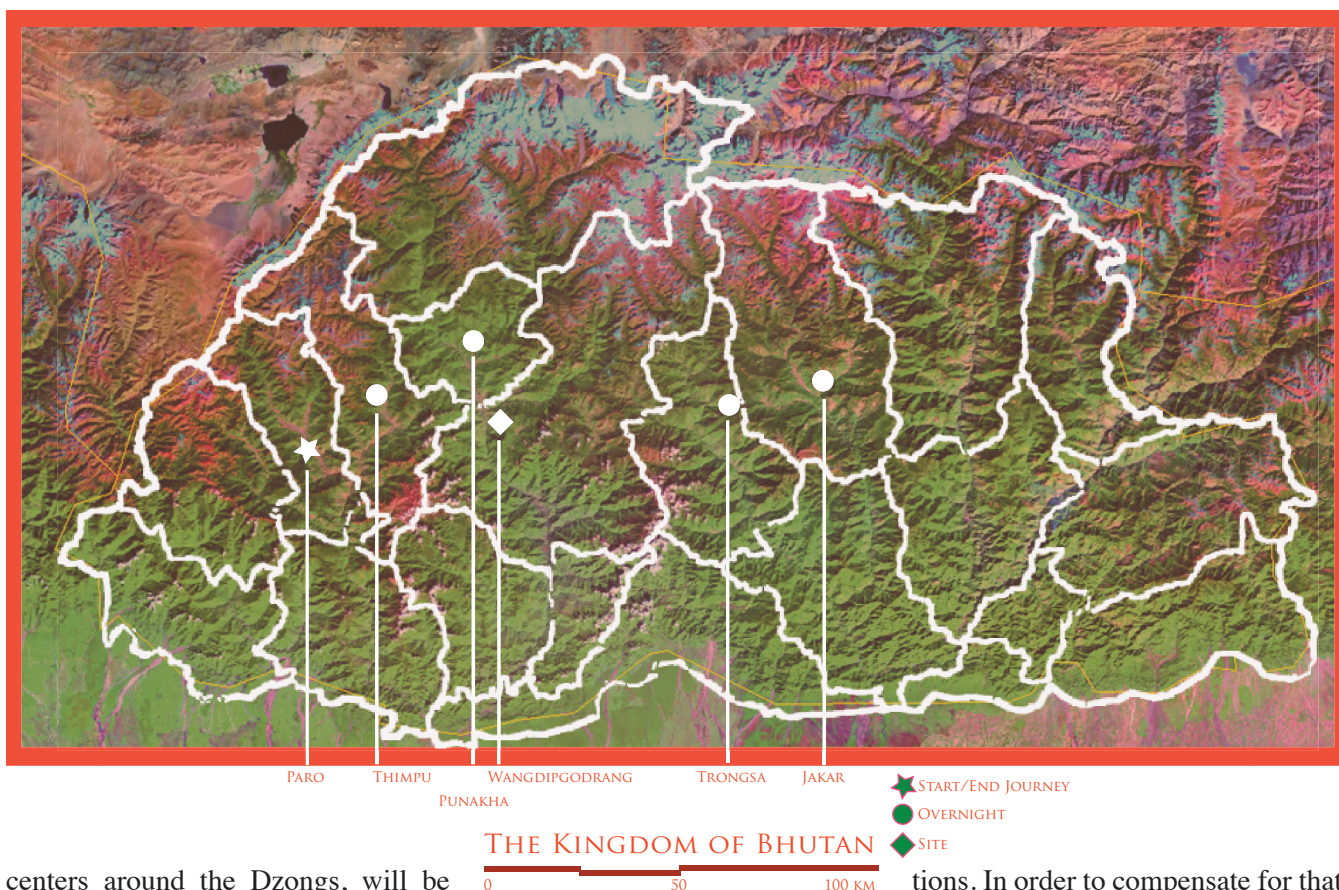
Being opened for Tourism in 1974, Bhutan is one of the World's most exclusive tourist destinations. The few tourists who make the rare journey into this extraordinary kingdom will discover that there is no other destination like this land of pure and exotic mysticism. Bhutan is very possibly one of the last places on earth that has not been swept by the winds of standardization that globalization has brought. This is because it has been until recently an absolute monarchy, unusually enjoying high approval of its subjects, and the kings have sought to preserve the purity and uniqueness of the culture by limiting the number and type of outside visitors (ie avoiding the fate of being invaded by back-packers as in Nepal) and resisting until relatively recently that all pervasive leveler, television. The current holder of the throne has decided to give his subjects democracy, and this past year the country went to the polls with much trepidation. Certainly this new era will bring many changes to the country, and so a visit at this time presents an important opportunity to see it in its "before" state.

One memorable aspect of a visit to Bhutan is its scenery. It is a very mountainous country, and the places we will visit are a relatively high elevation (although not so high as to induce the sort of discomfort visitors to Peru experience). Besides being surrounded by dramatic terrain with Dzongs (more about these later) and picturesque villages clinging to the slopes, there are frequent distant views to the high peaks of the Himalayas. Bhutan is a largely rural agrarian culture, and even its capital Thimpu, boasts that it is the world's only capital without a traffic light! Thus dense urbanity will not be part of our experience. But interesting and unique architecture is plentiful in the form of the Dzong, a building type unique to this region. It is castle, monastery, temple,



Prayer Flags, Chortens and the winding road.

and civic administrative center all rolled into one megastructure-like building. Each of the country's subdivisions is anchored by one, and they are spaced roughly a day's journey apart. In this, they resemble the missions in the Spanish colonial Americas. Given their defensive function, they are sited strategically, and given their many complex functions they have intriguing spatial configurations with many linked courtyards on different levels. In addition to the Dzongs (of which we will see 5 major ones), there are individual temples, smaller shrines or chortens, and villages with their large wooden farmhouses. This makes up the built environment, all of which is remarkable for its purity and traditional character. The distinct Buddhist culture which



centers around the Dzongs, will be vividly manifest to us, as October is the season of festivals, and we can be sure to encounter at least one at Bhumtang. These are multi-day affairs and involve dance, music with long horns and various percussion instruments, and are an experience of a lifetime.

This special invitational expedition has been crafted to introduce visitors to the unique aspects of Bhutanese culture including visits to sacred festivals and pilgrimage sites along with fascinating excursions to villages, temples or scenic spots for a close look at the culture and a land which remains the most unspoiled and most beautiful example of the Himalayan way of life in existence today. The itinerary is unusual in that extra time has been built in to provide time for hiking, walking, sketching and having a more detailed look at the sites than is possible in the typical trip to Bhutan. Most itineraries offer a week or less in Bhutan, but this one provides fifteen nights in the country, covering a similar route as in the shorter trips. Travel by road is slow due to the narrow, winding mountainous condi-



tions. In order to compensate for that, we have provided multiple night stays in most locations so that in addition to travel days, there are unstructured days to provide opportunities to enjoy the sites for extended periods of time to either sketch, paint, take walks or simply relax in the breathtaking settings we will be visiting.

Participants will arrange to get themselves to Bangkok (our gateway for flights two and from Paro, Bhutan's capital city) and may choose to stay there one or two nights on their own to recover from the intercontinental flight and prepare for the adventure ahead.

This trip has been crafted by Stephen Harby based on an earlier trip to Bhutan in 2006 with the same excellent local guide, Karma Needup who he met then. Karma is well versed in the traditions of his country and in how best to share them with visitors, and with the unique expectations of our group. He grew up in the eastern part of the country, in a village a day's walk to the nearest school. He first discovered shoes when he graduated and

came to the capital to work. Stephen Harby, a dedicated and constant traveler was a fellow at the American Academy in Rome in 2000 and is a visiting lecturer at the Yale School of Architecture where he directs the summer program in Rome. A recognized painter in watercolor, he will conduct workshops in sketching and watercolor during the trip.

Hotels in Bhutan are basic, clean and comfortable, but not luxurious. The cuisine is always freshly prepared from local ingredients, featuring local specialties of momos (dumplings), vegetables, and the bizarre sounding, but savory chili with cheese!

Itinerary

Thursday, September 24
[Depart Home for Bangkok](#)

Guests will arrange their own international flights to Bangkok to arrive any time on Saturday, September 26.

Friday, September 25
[International Dateline \(lost\)](#)

Saturday, September 26
[Bangkok](#)

Participants should plan to arrive this day and arrange on their own to spend the night in Bangkok. (Novotel has one of the few hotels near the new airport)

Day 1, Sunday, September 27
[Bangkok to Paro](#)

Our flight to Bhutan on Druk Air, Bhutan's Royal airline and the only carrier to fly there, leaves early in the morning and will be booked for you and is included in the cost of the trip. On a clear day, the flight to Paro is breath taking, with views of major Himalayan Peaks, and on the final approach Bhutan's own snowy peaks, the sacred Jomolhari, Jichu Drake and Tserimang. You will be met by our representative and after completion of arrival formalities we will visit Ta Dzong (National Museum) and then walk down a hillside trail to Ringpung Dzong. In the afternoon we will visit Drugyel Dzong which is a



Trongsa Dzong

14km drive from Paro, and on the way back we will visit Kyichu Lhakhang, which is 18th century temple built by the Tibetan King. In the evening we will check out some local shops.

Day 2, Monday, September 28

Thimphu

Before we drive to Thimphu we will visit Paro's vegetable market. The drive to Thimphu the capital of Bhutan will take us about 2 hours to cover the distance of 57 km. We will stop en route at Chunzom (Confluence) at the entrance to the Paro valley, where the Paro and Thimphu rivers meet. Three Chortens (Bhuddist shrines) on the riverbank at this place, each in a different style, mark the confluence of the two rivers. We will have lunch in Thimphu and the afternoon sightseeing in Thimphu will include a visit to nunnery, handicraft emporium and traditional hand made paper factory.

Day 3, Tuesday, September 29

Thimphu

After breakfast we drive for 20 minutes to get to the road head. We will hike to a temple called Wangditshe, from where you can see the great view of the entire Thimphu valley below. It is a



Native dress is required by legislation

nice easy hike in the countryside. After lunch we will drive 25 Km from the city and starts another hike to the Cheri Monastery. This is the first monastery built by Zhabdrung after his arrival from Tibet. In the evening will return to our Hotel.

Day 4, Wednesday, September 30

Thimphu — Punakha

Note: This itinerary has been revised slightly from the initial one, in order to conform with the schedule of the festival at Bhumtang. Thus we will travel directly there with one night stops in Punakha and Trongsa and then upon our return we will spend more time in these two places. This is the reverse of the earlier itinerary. We will see the same things.

Drive about 2 hours to reach Punakha Bhutan's former Capital. We will stop en route at Dochu-La pass (3088m/10,130ft) where we have 108 Chortens built in one place. On a clear day you will enjoy breath taking mountain views from this point, and while some may wish to spend some time drawing, others will have the chance to

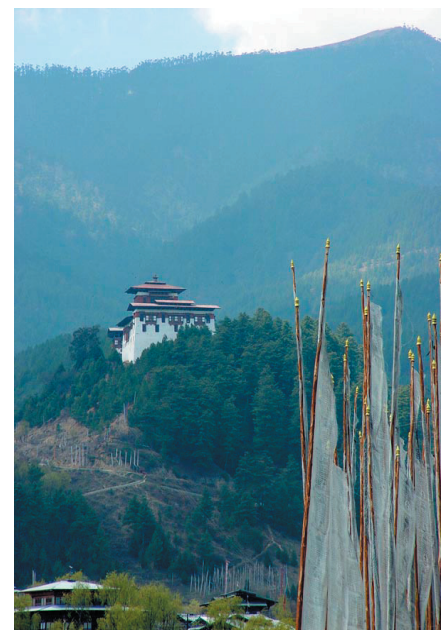
*Left: Paro, Taktshang Goemba, 1692;
Right: Jakar Dzong, 1667*

walk to a Temple. We will have lunch at the cafeteria at the pass. In the afternoon we will continue to our hotel in Punakha.

Day 5, Thursday, October 1

Punakha – Trongsa

After breakfast we will drive to Trongsa, and on our way we will visit the Wangdipgodrang Dzong built in 1638 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. This Dzong, dramatically and strategically site high above a river, is of traditional design and construction without the use of any nails, and the roof is made of wooden shingles. We will continue our drive towards Trongsa, driving through the red Panda country and also we have the best chance to see some wild animals like black face langur monkeys, barking deer, and wild boar. We will stop at the Pelela Pass which is the former boarder between western Bhutan and Eastern Bhutan. We will have lunch near a large stupa where we have a restaurant in the middle of nowhere. After lunch we will drive for about one and a half hours to get to our hotel.



Day 6, Friday, October 2
Trongsa – Bumthang

Our drive today will take about 3 hours and we will cross one pass called yotola pass which marks the border between Bumthang and Trongsa. Bumthang has four major valleys. We will enter the first valley called chumme valley and on the way we will stop to visit the product made out of yak and sheep wool. The other three valleys are Chamkhar valley, Tang valley and ura valley. Our hotel for next three days is in Chamkhar valley.

Day 7, Saturday, October 3 Bumthang

At Bumthang, we have reached our furthest progress to the east, and today is also the first day of Tangbi mani or the festival which is known locally as Tsechu.

Tsechu: Most Dzongs and many monasteries have an annual festival. This is a series of dances in honor of Guru Rinpoche. The biography of the Guru is highlighted by a 12-episode dance drama. The dates and the duration of the festivals vary from one district to another, but they always take place on



Doorway to Jakar Dzong, 1667

or around the tenth day of the month in the Bhutanese calendar. The dances are performed by monks and as well as lay people. Many of the dances were established by shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel or by Pema Lingpa. The dancers take on the aspects of wrathful and compassionate deities, heroes, demons and animals. The dances, known as cham, bring blessings upon the onlookers, instruct them in the dharma (Buddhist teaching), protect them from misfortune, and exorcise evil influences. The

tsechu is a religious festival and people believe they gain merit by attending it. Deities are invoking during the dances; through their power and benediction, misfortune may be annihilated, luck increased and wishes realized. The tsechu is also a yearly social gathering where people rejoice together, dressed in their finest clothing and jewelry.

Day 8, Sunday, October 4 Bumthang.

Drive to witness the second day of the festival. In the afternoon we will include jakar Dzong, Kurjey Lhakhang where Guru Rinpoche had meditated and left his body print on the rock in 8 century, and next we will visit Tamshing lhakhang, the 15 century temple and in this temple we have the original wall paintings done by Pemalingpa himself.

Day 9, Monday, October 5 Bumthang

To day we have the option either to witness the last day of the festival or take a picnic lunch and drive to the last valley of Bumthang called Ura valley. In the evening we will drive back to our hotel.

Day 10, Tuesday, October 6
Bumthang - Trongsa

Drive back to Trongsa and stop at Yotola pass and we will have lunch in the hotel at Trongsa. Free afternoon in trongsa.

Day 11, Wednesday, October 7
Bumthang

After breakfast we will drive back 30 minutes to start our hike. This is the original trail used by the Bhutanese traders before the roads were built. The hike is almost 2 and half hours and on the way we will cross the traditional *Thimpu, Trashe Choe Dzong, 1641 (1902, 1962 rebuilt)*



bridge and climb up to the Dzong. We will visit the Dzong and your guide will explain the importance of this great Dzong in the making of Bhutanese History. After lunch we will drive 23 km south and visit the winter palace of our second King. This palace is now used as the monastery and almost empty, we can go up to the courtyard. After that we will hike up to visit a nunnery which is a 15 minutes gradual climb and drive back to our hotel.

[Day 12, Thursday, October 8](#)
[Trongsa – Punakha](#)

On the way back to Punakha, we will take a side road to Pgobjikha valley and visit a newly renovated temple there. It is the largest glacial valley in Bhutan. Continue our drive to Punakha.

[Day 13, Friday, October 9](#) [Punakha](#)

After breakfast we will drive towards the Dzong and visit the former Capital of Bhutan located between the two rivers called mo chu and pho chu in the right and left hand side of the Dzong respectively. Those of us who want to spend time here drawing can stay and the rest of the group will go on a hike. It is a lovely walk through the paddy fields and then gradually climb up to the chorten from where we have the great view of the valley below. In the afternoon we will visit the famous temple of fertility called Chhimi Lhakhang. We will walk through the paddy field and this temple is also a monastery, whereby we have few monks from the locality studying the Mahayana Buddhism and its practices.

[Day 14, Saturday, October 10](#)
[Punakha - Paro](#)

After breakfast we will drive to Thimphu and we have one more chance to

see the eastern Himalayan ranges from the Dochula pass. We will have lunch in Thimphu and continue our drive to Paro.

[Day 15, Sunday, October 11](#)
[Paro](#)

In the morning we will hike up to the Tiger's Nest. The small temple/monastery structure clings high up to the cliff face, and this is the most serious and demanding climb of the trip, which is optional, of course! But by now we will all be in perfect shape! And in the afternoon we will leisurely walking in the town in a last minutes shopping. Over night at the hotel at Paro.

[Day 16, Monday, October 12](#)
[Paro - Bangkok](#)

After early breakfast drive to the airport for flight to Bangkok. Your escort from our agent will help you with your exit formalities and bid you farewell.....TASHI DELEK.

Due to the possibility of weather conditions in Paro delaying our flight, we advise that onward flights home be booked either in the evening of Monday, October 12 or Tuesday, October 13, to provide a cushion in the event of delays leaving Bhutan. In the latter case, participants should book the hotel in Bangkok on their own.

