

## **Spring 2010 Bhutan Festivals Tour**

**Day 1, Tuesday April 20** 0350 hrs. meet at Bangkok International Airport for 0550 departure to Bhutan. Robin will have your visa and e-tickets plus you will have a copy sent by earlier email. Arrive Paro Airport 0910 hrs. After clearing customs and immigration we will be greeted by Rainbow Tours & Treks representatives, guides and drivers. Transfer to Gangtey Palace Hotel for check-in, welcoming tea and briefing to review the itinerary for the following days

Our first excursion will be to the National Museum, once the watchtower for the Rinpung Dzong, located high on a promontory overlooking the Paro Valley. First constructed in 1645, the Rinpung Watchtower was converted to the National Museum in 1968. While photography within the museum is not allowed, there are numerous photo ops of the exterior and the valley below. This first outing is meant to familiarize you with the history of this amazing kingdom in the clouds and a visit to the National Museum is the very best way to quickly learn the culture and natural history since it houses everything that is Bhutanese in a very different museum style that will delight you.

Then we drive down to Paro Town for lunch in a local restaurant and a walk along the Paro Chu (River) to take pictures of Paro Dzong and the watchtower above. Here we will have photo ops of the covered foot bridge over the river, the huge wooden gate leading to the bridge, and the interior of the dzong. Built in 1645, this massive building now houses the District Administration Office and the Monk Body. A flagstone path leads to the dzong, rising gradually from the bridge that is abutted by two guard houses. The central tower, called the "Utse" of the Dzong, is clad in superb woodwork and is considered to be the nation's most beautiful tower.

We can also visit the Paro archery grounds where there is usually activity, either a formal match or practice. And since the Thimphu weekend market was recently rebuilt as a modern two-story indoor market, we will instead visit the Paro market which still maintains the old and quaint style of vendors sitting on the ground selling local vegetables and Bhutanese handicrafts.

Dinner and overnight at Gangtey Palace Hotel. In the late eighteenth century this hotel was the home of the governor of Paro and is decorated with antiques and traditional Bhutanese crafts. It has some of the best traditional hot stone baths in Bhutan so after dinner those who wish to relax in Bhutan's version of the hot tub may do so. The one-person tubs are long and made of wood--they have four of them, side by side in a semi-enclosed bath house. A board with holes at one end separates the bather from the hot stones. With long steel tongs the attendant picks red-hot rocks from the bonfire and drops them into this chamber causing a cauldron of boiling water. The heated water then courses through the holes in the board at your feet and the water around your body heats up until you tell the attendant, "No More Rocks!" You will also enjoy the fragrant herbs that are dropped into the tub, including mint and marijuana--yes, it grows wild in Bhutan and is normally used for pig food.

Note: Recently, several new modern hotels have been built and several others renovated. Over the past thirteen tours to Bhutan we have sought out these upgraded hotels so you will be staying in the very best available hotels and guest houses wherever we go. In these better hotels you will

still enjoy Bhutanese ambiance, but with greater creature comforts. (In Shingkar and Ugyen Choling you will experience true Bhutanese guesthouses just as ancient travelers did--except for the Western toilets.) Everyone's first impression of the Gangtey Palace hotel has been, "Wow!" The lawn in front has a commanding view of the valley below and the rooms are quite comfortable, all en suite.

**Day 2, Weds April 21** We rise at 6 a.m., pack up and after a quick breakfast drive 45 minutes to Chelila Pass at 12,000 feet. This pass provides a panoramic view of the northern and western Himalayan mountain ranges as well as Haa and Paro Valleys, and with the magic light of sunrise breaking over the Himalayas, we will photograph spectacular mountain and forest scenery. We then head for Thimphu, a 4-5 hour drive. Along the way as we near the junction of the old road we are on and the new Paro-Thimphu highway, we will stop for a picnic lunch. When we arrive in Thimphu we check into the five-star (by Bhutanese standards) Kisa Hotel--the rest of the afternoon is A la carte, just ask your guide and driver to take you to any one of the places listed below. On the top of our list we always recommend a visit to Zorig Chuksum, The School for Thirteen Arts and Crafts. This institute was established in 1971 and students from across Bhutan come to learn the traditional arts and crafts. Robin authored a story on this school for Tashi Delek magazine--it's available on the Rainbow web site. For the remaining hours of the day you are free to roam the streets of Thimphu, Bhutan's capitol and largest city with 45,000 residents. By western standards and compared to other Bhutanese centers of commerce, Thimphu is the only center that rates being called a city. There are no traffic lights here--one was installed and quickly removed after citizens complained--but there are two traffic huts in the center of the main road that provide shade for white-gloved policemen who wave their arms in slow motion, reminiscent of tai chi. Small shops line the street, mostly catering to the locals. There are a few "tourist shops" but you must seek them out. Meet back at the hotel lobby at 6 p.m. for dinner in a local restaurant

Overnight Kisa Hotel.

Things to see and do in Thimphu--remember, we are here again for two nights later on in the tour.

1. Textile Museum
2. Paper factory for handmade paper--great for printing photos of Bhutan
3. National Institute of Traditional Medicine
4. Post Office for Bhutanese collector stamps.
5. Two good book stores for books on Bhutan
6. Paradise Temple for photos of pilgrims
7. Check out the archery field for competition and practice
8. We recommend the Choki Arts and Handicraft store for souvenirs
9. We recommend coffee and sweets at the Arts Cafe next to the Swiss Bakery.
10. Takin refuge--Bhutan's national animal
11. School of Traditional Arts and Crafts
12. Monastery of 300 boy novice monks.
13. A visit to the Tsa Tsa Lama's place to have individual Tsa Tsas made for sick loved ones (See article published in Summer 2009 edition of Tashi Delek magazine on the Rainbow web site.)

...or just roam Thimphu's main street and it's many small shops. All of these "factories" and shops are very small with only a few employees.

**Day 3, Thurs April 22** Arise at 0600 (if you wish) and accompany Robin to the Zangtoepelri Temple (Paradise Temple) in the center of Thimphu, where we hope to find pilgrims who have labored on foot over high mountain passes to worship and seek blessings from the lama there. Then on to the Memorial Chorten where local residents come in the morning to chant their daily prayers as they walk clockwise around the Chorten, spinning prayer wheels as they pass fragrant columns of smoke from smoldering juniper branches that carry a stream of prayers to the mountain deities. Bring a tripod and shoot high ISO--sunlight doesn't hit here 'til late morning. Breakfast at 9 a.m., then pack and meet your guide and driver in front of the hotel at 10 a.m. We then begin our journey to the East, en route stopping at 10,500 ft. Dochula Pass for tea and biscuits and enjoy our first view of the eastern Himalayan mountains. Here we can spend some time photographing the Druk Wangyal Chortens. Built in 2004 to "...celebrate the stability and progress that His Majesty has brought to the nation," this hill of 108 religious buildings in the middle of the pass reflect Bhutan's spiritual and artistic traditions. Pay particular attention to the fields of colorful prayer flags to the right and position yourself within them, shooting back at the chortens using the prayer flags as edges of your frame.

Then it's on to Wangduephodrang--shortened to Wangdi by the locals--where the most prominent feature is the Wangdi Dzong sitting on a mountain spur commanding an archer's view of two rivers. But on the way, after lunch, we visit Punakha Dzong where we can photograph the numerous interior courtyards with massive golden doors and the new cantilevered covered bridge. Built in 1637 between the confluence of the Po Chu (male river) and Mo Chu (female river,) this fortress monastery is the winter residence of Bhutan's spiritual leader, the Je Khenpo or Head Abbot, and the central Monk Body--350 monks in total. It is fronted by majestic jacaranda trees that should be in bloom during our visit, with purple flowers framing the dzong's elaborately hand-carved and painted windows.

Beyond Punakha and Wangdi we check in at Kichu Resort on the edge of the rapids of the Dangchu River. We always get a good night's sleep here, listening to the water tumble over boulders the size of Volkswagens. Kichu is a private resort and there is the slight chance we would be bumped by their own guests, but if that happens the alternative hotel is Dragon's Nest, a classy place overlooking the wide and calm river at Wangdi.

Note: Our guides and drivers will bring along a sufficient number of traditional giant lawn darts and colorful targets--the game is called *Kuru*--so expect impromptu matches to ensue between them and tour participants. We have also made arrangements to have a formal match in Ugen Choling between villagers and guides and drivers. The Bhutanese are very competitive and often engage in a traditional roadside game of *Dago* where rocks are lobbed at a wooden peg, much like horseshoes. We have even seen school children throwing their pencils at targets on the playground during recess. (Robin published a story on archery in Tashi Delek Magazine, available on the Rainbow web site.)

**Day 4, Fri April 23** After breakfast, we leave for the long drive to Trongsa. We're not in any

hurry so we play a game of leapfrog, passing our fellow travelers, stopping for photographs and meeting at the final destination, the Yangkhil Resort Hotel. We will also make numerous stops to photograph yaks and their herders, alpine flowers, picturesque villages, and other roadside and panoramic scenes. After we go through Pelela Pass we get our first glimpse of the Black Mountains. This drive between Trongsa and Bumthang is the most scenic and exciting leg of our journey into the clouds, crossing rivers and streams and passing waterfalls, chortens with water-driven prayer wheels and colorful rock carvings.

An hour away from Trongsa we make our first sighting of the crimson-roofed Trongsa Dzong, with the Mangdechu river cascading in one continuous waterfall down through the valley beneath. You will want to use your long lens to capture this scene, then use it again from Trongsa looking back at the road you were just on--the road at the lookout point is carved out of the solid stone mountain. Just above Trongsa we will check into the first-class Yangkhil Resort, where you will stand on your private balcony and enjoy the majestic view of Trongsa Dzong across the valley. Trongsa Dzong represents Bhutan's link with its historical monarchy since it is the ancestral home of the first king of Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuk. This is also the investiture site for future kings ascending the Golden Throne of Bhutan. The Fifth King of Bhutan was recently handed power from his father and ascended the throne in June 2008.

Trongsa Dzong represents the very best opportunity to capture the true essence of Bhutanese monastic and parliamentary architecture. We will photograph its remarkable succession of street-like corridors, wide stone stairs and beautiful stone courtyards. Here, 25 lhakhangs (small temples, among which is the oldest lhakhang in Bhutan--the Chorten Lhakhang, built by Yongzin Ngagi Wangchuk in 1543) house sacred images and religious relics. Intricate wood carvings and beautiful frescos are emblazoned on the walls and pillars. With a little patience, monks will walk in and out of your frame as you photograph these remarkable and rare structures. We can also visit the newly renovated Ta Dzong Museum, the watchtower above the Trongsa Dzong. Look for Robin's story about the new museum in the fall issue of Tashi Delek Magazine--it should be on the plane on the flight from Bangkok.

Overnight and dinner at Yangkhil Resort.

**Day 5, Sat April 24** Rise at 7 a.m. and after breakfast we leave for the Domkhar Festival, one of the highlights of the tour. This drive is about 3 hours and another feast of photographic opportunities--most likely we will find our favorite yak herder's hut near YutongLa Pass for tea and cultural exchanges. Over the years we've made friends with this family and their 50 or so yaks and are always warmly received to sit on the straw-covered floor and sip butter tea. (That might have something to do with Cathy making a gift of a large aluminum pot on a previous tour, our guests buying yak bells and yak yarn, and our guides and drivers buying yak cheese and yogurt.) If we happen to miss them we'll look for them on the way back.

Around 10 a.m. we leave the paved road and take a side road to the village of Domkhar where we will spend the entire day attending the third and most photogenic day of the Domkhar Festival. This is one of the smallest festivals in Bhutan and as such not many tourists go there--last year I counted just 30 foreigners among 500 villagers and festival dancers. We are good friends with the lama there and will have lunch with him in his private grandstand overlooking

the small courtyard where the festival takes place. We get very special treatment from the festival committee because we sponsored the rebuilding of the kitchen house that burned to the ground just one day before the 2009 festival. Also, Robin wrote a story about the Domkhar Festival that was published in the Spring issue of Tashi Delek--see the Rainbow web site to read that story. Unlike the larger festivals in Paro and Thimphu where thousands of villagers and tourists crowd around huge courtyards, making good photography near impossible, the quaint and intimate festival in Domkhar allows us total access and closeness to the dancers. You can sit or stand on the edge of the cobblestones and work with your tripod and equipment to get great close-ups and wide panoramas. We are allowed access into the dressing room and are invited into the temple to take photos of the lama and his entourage of musicians and chanters during ceremonies. But best of all, we stay late into the afternoon when most everyone has left and get to photograph dancers that will stay behind and pose for us.

Dinner and overnight at the new and nearby Nature Resort lodge.

**Day 6, Sun April 25** We rise early to go back to the festival for the most auspicious event of the festival and that is the unfurling of the Thongdroel, a huge embroidered quilt that signifies the last day of the festival. After a few hours we return to the hotel, pack up and leave for a leisurely one-hour drive to Jakar village in Choekhor Valley. Jakar is situated in the heart of Bhumtang district and Choekhor valley is considered by many to be the most beautiful valley in all of Bhutan. There are plenty of things to see and photograph in Jakar so during lunch at River Lodge, Pema, the colorful and affable owner, will explain the following sites and each traveler can strike out in different directions to see whatever interests you:

1. The Jakar Dzong (Smaller dzong, quaint and colorful.)
2. Wangducholing Palace (The three water prayer wheels are most interesting.)
3. The Swiss Cheese/Red Panda Beer factory.
4. Tamshing Lhakhang (temple)
5. Kurjey Lhakhang (Good possibility of colorful and noisy ceremony)
6. Thangbi Lhakhang
7. Jampa Lhakhang (very old and decrepit, with older people spinning prayer wheels)
8. Jakar Village (Spend an hour walking from shop to shop up and down the main road.)
9. Kharchu Dartsang monastery with 500 monks, attend a debate session and their dinner. (Imagine huge open-fire cauldrons cooking rice for 500 monks--you can go into the kitchen!)

Overnight: River Lodge

**Day 7, Mon April 26** After breakfast we pack and leave for a two hour drive to the cluster village or Ura where we attend a full day at the Ura Yakchoe (festival.) This is the tenth year that we have attended this festival so we have made lots of friends there, including the Ura Lama and his family. We'll stop for tea at the Lama's private temple where we are allowed to photograph the interior, but not the altar. There are two temples in Ura--the Lama's private temple next to his home and the main temple on a hill overlooking the village. Over the years this family has been very kind to our tour and this private temple affords us the opportunity to photograph religious objects like masks, musical instruments and frescos.

Then we will take a 20-minute walk through farm fields to the Ura Temple courtyard where the festival is in full swing. The day will be most memorable, packed with cultural exchanges and lots of photo opportunities. The Lama's eldest son and eldest grandson are in line to inherit the position just like he inherited it from five centuries of ancestors. One of the grandsons who is not in line to inherit the robes of the Ura Lama (except by special circumstances) is thought by many to be the reincarnate of a previous high lama and will soon be tested by the monk body.

Throughout the day there are several dances, each sharing a revered place in Buddhist history. There are lengthy lulls between each dance so you might want to grab a guide and walk down through the village. In the late afternoon we gather up and drive to the nearby village of Shingkar where we will spend the night at Shingkar Lodge, adjacent to Shingkar Temple. Shingkar is a very special guest house and not many tourists go there, usually only Western Buddhist pilgrims. (Our dinner is brought from Thimphu by a cook that comes to the guest house just for us.) Owned by the Shingkar Lama, it is very small and quaint, with no electricity other than solar panels for bare light bulbs hanging in the ceilings. The lodge also has a hot stone bath, Western toilets and running water, albeit cold. The "cluster village" of Shingkar is about 6 miles from Ura by way of a very bumpy stone road--the trip takes about an hour. There are two temples in Shingkar--the one opposite the guest house is the older one and is called the Shingkar Lhakhang, with the other temple a short walk down the hill in the heart of the village. The Patron Saint of both temples is Longchen Rabjampa who established Shingkar village when he discovered a small hut inside a tree. The word "shing" means wood or tree and "khar" means small house or hut.

We are also lucky to be allowed to photograph the interior of this tiny 16th-century temple, resplendent in newly repainted frescos, something not usually allowed.

Overnight and dinner at Shingkar Lodge

**Day 8, Tues April 27** This morning we pack and leave Shingkar after roaming down through the village, interacting with villagers and taking photos of village life. By noon we should be driving in the remote eastern side of Bhutan in the Tang valley. Our journey finds us driving 20 miles, 13 miles of which is on an unpaved road. We stop at a roadside temple and a nunnery, ending in the remote village of Kesum. From the road head we have a one-hour hike over a suspension footbridge, through farm fields and cluster villages, up a "hill" to the mystical Ugyen Choling Palace where we will spend two nights in the owner's guesthouse. (Robin wrote a story on Ugyen Choling for Tashi Delek Magazine--available on the Rainbow web site.) On the way we have arranged for a private and unique photo op--we'll stop by a tiny temple where a young monk will dress up in a festival mask and costume and spin and whirl in the light that breaks through the temple window.

Ugyen Choling is a national treasure, privately owned by the same family for hundreds of years. It's remote location makes it one of the less frequently visited historical sites in Bhutan, hosting fewer than two hundred guests per year. One of the owners wrote a book on Bhutanese folk tales of the Yeti and her brother is the property's caretaker. The best part of the Palace is the quaint museum housing permanent exhibits on three floors in the main building and the *Utse*, the central tower. Traditional living quarters are recreated to capture the realistic ambiance of the

ancient lifestyles and conditions of the households. Everyday kitchen and weaving utensils, war weapons--including petrified yak dung to make gunpowder--tools and farming implements are the main part of the exhibits. We are allowed to take pictures inside the museum and with the caretaker present, even rearrange items into the light.

Overnight: Ugyen Choling Guest House for two nights

**Day 9, Weds April 28** Today is a free day to explore the village of Ugyen Choling and the surrounding countryside. Just take a guide to carry your gear and strike out from the guesthouse in any direction--all paths lead to photo ops. Beyond the village are farmhouses and fields for cultural exchanges, mountains and meadows for landscape photography. We might organize a day trek or you might want to leisurely stroll through the village and observe the daily life of the Bhutanese. You will feel very welcome to enter any farmhouse--they see it as an honor that you would want to see how they live their lives.

This is also the day that we host a formal archery match in the center of the village between villagers and our guides and drivers--you are invited to attend and participate at whatever level you feel up to. It's an all-day event that the villagers look forward to every year, with lots of laughter and singing, folk dancing a revelry. We bring beer, soft drinks, great prizes and archery equipment and after dinner meet for the awards ceremony in the village hall. The cluster village of Ugen Choling rarely gets visitors who meld into their lifestyle like we do and they truly enjoy our interaction.

In the evening, villagers (mostly single ladies looking to meet our guides and drivers) will come to the Palace for an evening of cultural entertainment. You're invited to join in the singing and dancing.

Overnight: Ugyen Choling Guest House

**Day 10, Thurs April 29** After breakfast we leave Tang Valley to retrace our route, returning to Trongsa. Even though you are on the same road you will be surprised to find the return drive just as interesting because new and different scenes still unfold on every turn. Last year we found a troupe of golden languor monkeys in the treetops just off the road. Or maybe a goat herder will have the road blocked for a few minutes with his herd, family and all their belongings on their backs. You will get the feeling that you have not been there before because of the numerous changing scenes. We never tire of making this drive to and from Bumthang because there is always something new to see around every turn.

One of our stops on this rambling return journey is a 30-minute hike over a cable footbridge to Thangbi Lhakhang, a temple built by the first Shamar Rimpoche in the Thirteenth century. Then it's on to Trongsa for another night at the Yangkhil Resort, a welcome respite for showers and en-suite facilities after three nights in remote villages.

Overnight: Yangkhil Resort for two nights

**Day 11, Fri April 30** Today we spend a full day exploring Trongsa and surrounds. We start out

by driving south toward Zengang with a destination of Kuenga Rapten, the winter palace of the second king, about 12 miles south of Trongsa. It is a beautiful old building now owned by the National Library. The drive there and back is quite picturesque with good views of the Mangde River valley. Some of our cars might make a brief stop for a Bhutanese car wash at the waterfall that lands on the road then crosses the pavement and falls over the edge. We'll return to Trongsa for lunch and an afternoon exploring Trongsa Dzong and other important sites in the area.

Overnight: Yangkhil Resort

**Day 12, Sat May 1** Today is another un-hurried drive from Trongsa to Wangdi. We pass close to Rukubji and Chendebji villages, so if you want to you can follow their gravel roads and stroll through these quaint villages, also stopping at the Chendebji Chorten. All along the way you can make frequent stops whenever your photographic eye causes you to shout, "Stop! I see a picture!"

Overnight at the riverside Kichu Resort, that great place next to the whitewater river .

**Day 13, Sun May 2** After breakfast we complete the return drive to Thimphu arriving for lunch at the chic Kisa Hotel. You are then free to take a guide and roam the streets of Thimphu and go to some places that you might have missed on the first day in Thimphu--here is the list of things to see and do in Thimphu.

1. Textile Museum
2. Paper factory for handmade paper--great for printing photos of Bhutan
3. National Institute of Traditional Medicine
4. Post Office for Bhutanese collector stamps.
5. Two good book stores for books on Bhutan
6. Paradise Temple for photos of pilgrims
7. Check out the archery field for competition and practice
8. We recommend the Choki Arts and Handicraft store for souvenirs
9. We recommend coffee and sweets at the Arts Cafe next to the Swiss Bakery.
10. Takin refuge--Bhutan's national animal
11. School of Traditional Arts and Crafts
12. Monastery of 300 boy novice monks.
13. A visit to the Tsa Tsa Lama's place to have individual Tsa Tsas made for sick loved ones (See article published in Summer 2009 edition of Tashi Delek magazine on the Rainbow web site.)

...or just roam Thimphu's main street and it's many small shops. All of these "factories" and shops are very small with only a few employees.

This evening, we dine at the residence of our Bhutanese hostess, Soenam Ongmo, owner and manager of Rainbow Tours and Treks, and her charming husband, Subarna Lam. The menu includes dried yak and native hot peppers and cheese, as well as other, more mild Bhutanese specialties. Soenam arranged for many of the special items on our itinerary and her hospitality and bubbling personality will create a very special memory for you to cherish.

## Overnight at Kisa Hotel

**Day 14, Monday May 3** After breakfast we leave for Tango Monastery, the residence of the Druk Desi Gyaltsen Tenzin Rabgye, a 15-year-old spectacled boy who is the reincarnate of the 16th-century monk who built Tango and Tiger's Nest. We will be the special guests of this monastery and have access to many wonderful scenes of a monk's daily life, and if he is available the little boy lama will give us a special individual blessing. Be prepared for a vigorous 45-minute climb into the clouds. From the top of Tango (means horse, for the horse-head-like rock formation on the side of the mountain) we will photograph distant monasteries through a forest of colorful prayer flags and the interior courtyard of the monastery. After our descent we will enjoy a full hot picnic lunch on the banks of the Thim Chu (Thim River) next to the picturesque Cheri Zam (Cheri Bridge.) This covered wooden footbridge is one of only a handful of traditional cantilevered bridges left in the Himalayas.

In the late afternoon we leave for Paro where we check into Soenam's new multi-million-dollar posh resort and spa, the Nak-Sel Botique Hotel. Situated in an apple orchard above a cluster village on the outskirts of Paro, this new resort has a great view of Tiger's Nest Monastery, tomorrow's destination.

Dinner and overnight: Nak-Sel Botique Hotel (Including hot stone baths, massages and walks in the village. What a great way to wind down from the tour in luxury and still have access to an authentic village and farmhouses.)

**Day 15, Tues May 4** After breakfast at the hotel, we take the short drive to the roadhead of the trail leading to Tiger's nest, and then hike or ride horses part way--you decide--up a forested path to Taktsang Monastery, also known as Tiger's Nest, Bhutan's most famous and scenic icon. (Robin wrote a story on Tiger's Nest for Tashi Delek Magazine, posted on the Rainbow web site.) The climb is steep and takes about 4 hours round trip, but we will be aided by sure-footed ponies and guides to carry our photography gear and urge us on. An important place of pilgrimage and refuge for more than 1200 years, Taktsang Monastery clings to sheer cliffs two-thousand feet above Paro Valley, and from the most popular vantage points on a rocky ledges directly across from it we will still need a 200 mm lens and a steady tripod to get tight photographs. As of 2004 we have received special permission to hike all the way to Tiger's Nest, visit some of the altar rooms and maybe get a grand tour from Lam Renzin, the lama stationed there. We are friends of Lam Renzin, bringing him photographs from previous visits, gifts and food for him and his cat. In 2007 he requested we bring him a pair of binoculars so he could see who was coming to visit him.

This sacred place got its name when Guru Rimpoche rode there on the back of a flying tiger and meditated in a cave behind the present-day monastery. Sadly, in 1998, the central temple was destroyed by fire, leaving the country in mourning for their holiest of spiritual places. But religious leaders and the King quickly developed a plan to rebuild Taktsang and donations poured in from Buddhist centers all over the world. Today, the magnificent temple is completely rebuilt to its original glory and Tiger's Nest is once again the subject of cloud-shrouded posters that say, "Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon." Lunch on the mountain at the "Cafeteria."

After our descent you can spend the remaining time roaming the small town of Paro, with it's main street lined with quaint shops, nearby river and dzong. Hot stone baths, farewell dinner, and overnight at the Gangtey Palace Hotel.

Overnight and dinner Nak-Sel Boutique Hotel.

**Day 16, May 5, Departure** 1000 hrs. transfer to Paro airport for 1100 hrs. departure, arrive Bangkok, 1700 hrs.