

## **Bhumbtang Festivals Tour Oct. 23 – Nov. 7, 2009**

**Day 1, Friday Oct 23, Bangkok to Bhutan** 0350 hrs. meet at Bangkok International Airport for 0550 departure to Bhutan. Robin will have your visa and airlines tickets. Arrive Paro Airport 0910 hrs. After clearing customs and immigration we are be greeted by Rainbow Tours & Treks guides and drivers. Transfer to Gangtey Palace Hotel for check in, tea in the courtyard and briefing to review the day's itinerary and ideas for photo opportunities.

Our first excursion is to the National Museum, once the watchtower for Paro's 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 walk or drive down to Paro Town for lunch in a local restaurant and a walk along the Paro Chu (river) to take pictures of Rimpung Dzong and the watchtower above. Here we 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. 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," is clad in superb woodwork and is considered to be the nation's most beautiful dzong tower.

Today we will 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 visit the Paro market which still maintains the old and quaint style of vendors sitting on the ground selling all kinds of local vegetables and Bhutanese handicrafts.

Dinner and overnight at Gangtey Palace Hotel. This hotel was once 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 set side by side in a semi-enclosed bath house. At your feet is a board with holes at one end that separates the bather from the hot stones. Using long steel tongs the attendant picks red-hot rocks from the bonfire and drops them into this chamber creating a cauldron of boiling water. The heated water then courses through the holes in the board 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 eleven tours to Bhutan we have sought out these upgraded hotels so you will be staying at what we consider 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 Choeling you will experience true Bhutanese guesthouses just as ancient travelers did--except for the Western toilets.)

**Day 2, Saturday October 24, Paro to Thimphu** We rise at 6 a.m., pack up and after 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 2-3 hour drive. After arrival and lunch at our hotel, we visit Zorig Chuksum, The School for Thirteen Arts and Crafts. This institute was established in 1971 and students from across Bhutan come here to learn traditional arts and crafts. (Robin authored a story on this school in Tashi Delek magazine, the in-flight magazine for Royal Druk Air, and it's available on the Rainbow web site.) You are then free to take a guide or driver and 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. You should meet back at the hotel lobby at 6 p.m..

Remember, we also spend days 12 and 13 here in Thimphu so you should not feel pressed for time to see everything and visit all of the important sites on this first day here.

Evening dinner at a local restaurant, hosted by Soenam's charming husband, Subarna Lam. (Soenam will be out of town today.) Subarna is the Director of the Intellectual Property Division with the Royal Government of Bhutan and it is partly because of his contacts that we are able to enjoy so many "insider" events in Bhutan.

Overnight: Kisa Hotel

**Day 3, Sunday October 25, Thimphu to Wangdi** Arise at 0600 (if you wish) and accompany Robin to the Paradise Temple or the Memorial Chorten where we hope to photograph pilgrims who have labored on foot over high mountain passes to worship and seek blessings. Local residents flock to these places each morning to chant their daily prayers as they walk clockwise around these holy places, 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 ASA--sunlight doesn't hit here until 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.

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. On the way, after lunch, we visit Punakha Dzong where we have obtained special permission to photograph the interior courtyards. 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 framing the dzong’s elaborately hand-carved and painted windows.

Beyond Punakha and Wangdi we check in to 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 bows, arrows, giant lawn darts and colorful targets, so expect impromptu matches between them and hotel workers on the lawns at many of the hotels. Tour participants are encouraged to participate. (For archery, we have protective leather gear for our forearms and fingers.) 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 about archery in Tashi Delek Magazine, available on the Rainbow web site.)

Overnight: Kichu Riverside resort.

**Day 4, Monday October 26, Wangdi to Trongsa** 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 also make numerous stops to photograph yaks and their herders, alpine flowers, lovely 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 Bhumtang is the most scenic and exciting leg of our journey into the clouds, crossing rivers and streams and passing chortens with water-driven prayer wheels.

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 should use your telephoto lens to capture the scene of the dzong and our hotel on the other side of the chasm, 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 in to the new first-class Yangkhil Resort

where you will stand on your private balcony and enjoy the majestic view of Trongsa Dzong across the gorge. 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, ascending the throne in November 2008.) We will photograph its remarkable succession of street-like corridors, wide stone stairs and beautiful stone courtyards. Trongsa Dzong represents the very best opportunity to capture the true essence of Bhutanese monastic and parliamentary architecture. 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. Overnight and dinner at Yangkhil Resort.

**Day 5, Tuesday October 27, Trongsa to Bhumtang** After spending the morning at the Trongsa Dzong and wandering Trongsa town, we leave for the leisurely three-hour drive to Chumey Valley in Bhumtang. There will be ample time to stop at a moment's notice as your photographic eye spots every sort of cultural scene that can be imagined. The route crosses YotongLa pass (10,800 ft.) which is marked by a chorten and an array of prayer flags. If the weather is clear we should see Jhomolhari (23,540 ft.) and other peaks from the pass, which marks the boundary between western and central Bhutan as well as the western border of Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park. Beyond Yotongla is Longte Valley where people raise sheep and yaks. We will pass through the village of Rukubji with its big secondary school and Gompa. The houses here are clustered amid extensive fields of mustard, potatoes, barley, and wheat.

As we descend the pass we drive down through rhododendrons and ferns and reach Chendebji village. This was a night halt for mule caravans traveling from Trongsa during the reign of the 2<sup>nd</sup> King of Bhutan. Just below Chendebji village is the Chendebji chorten, a large white structure beside a stream. This chorten is modeled after Swayambhunath in Kathmandu and was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As you enter the Chhume Valley (the first of the four valleys that comprise the Bhumtang Valley) you will visit a center of Yathra weaving. Yathra is the name for the locally produced hand-woven woolen cloth. Distinctive patterns and bright earthy colors enliven the fabric which is used for a wide variety of purposes and much sought after throughout Bhutan.

From Chumey Valley we take a feeder road up to Choedra Goenpa at Tharpaling and meet with our old friend the Domkhar Lama. We will have lunch with him and visit with the monks and nuns who are at Choedra Goenpa for meditation. The Domkhar Lama trusts us to not abuse (i.e. throw in dust bins or tread upon) photographs of religious items so he allows us to take a few photos of things that most Westerners are not allow to even see much less photograph.

Continue on to Jakar, the central town of the Bhumtang district. Overnight: River Lodge and in the evening walk around Jakar Town

**Day 6, Wed. Oct. 28, Full day at the Jakar Festival.** The Bhumtang Dzongkhag is one of 20 political districts that make up the country of Bhutan. Although it is commonly referred to as the Bhumtang Valley it is actually made up of four distinct and separate valleys: Tang, Chokor, Chumy, and Uru. Spacious and surrounded by tree-covered mountains, the Chokor Valley in which Jakar is located is considered to be one of the most beautiful in all of Bhutan--it is commonly referred to as "Little Switzerland". Jakar Dzong means the 'Fortress of the White Bird,' and it was first constructed in 1667. The cluster of villages below the dzong, which are collectively known as Jakar Town, have a population of around 5,000 with the main bazaar comprised of a wide street lined with single storey buildings.

The Jakar Dzong is one of the largest and most impressive dzongs in all of Bhutan--it currently houses the Monastic Body for the Bhumtang district. Today we visit the Jakar Festival in the main courtyard of the Dzong and after tea with the Head Abbot, Lam Nyten, we will spend the day watching and photographing several religiously significant Buddhist mask dances and independently tour the dzong and surrounds with our guides and drivers who carry our gear and assist with photography.

The Jakar Festival is as authentic as they come in Bhutan, visited by only a few Western tourists--it was first observed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Lama Nagi Wangchuck. We will enjoy numerous cultural exchanges as we roam among thousands of Bhutanese who travel from the far reaches of the district to attend this annual social gathering and celebration of Buddhist history. We also have special permission to enter some of the monk's living quarters and kitchens, the Water Dzong and other places normally off limits to foreign visitors. Our picnic lunch will be on the lawn overlooking the valley and we will be joined by the Mayor of Jakar and some elderly pilgrims, tradition in Bhutan. Overnight: River Lodge

**Day 7, Thurs. Oct. 29, Jakar to Ura and Shingkar** Before dawn we return to the Jakar Dzong to receive the "blessing of witness" that comes with the unfurling of the stunningly beautiful Guru Tsengye Thongdroel. It is believed that the merit gained by onlookers of the unfurling of this huge embroidered quilt will wipe out misfortunes, cure illness, increase luck and grant personal wishes. The Dance of the Hero ends the festival.

Then after breakfast at River Lodge we depart for Ura Valley where we are scheduled to have lunch with the Ural Lama and his family and spend some time roaming the cluster village of Ura.

Over the years the Ura Lama has become good friends of our tour and he always treat us with kindness rarely offered the average tourist. He allows us to photograph ancient masks, wall frescos and other colorful religious artifacts. Our group, including drivers and guides, have lunch in the main chamber of the temple with the Ura Lama and his family and then each get an individual blessing--the Lama places the *Relic* on your

forehead and chants a prayer. His 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.

After strolling through Ura we gather up and drive to the nearby village of Shingkar (35 households) where we spend the night at the Shingkar Lama's Guest House, adjacent to the 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.) It is very small and quaint, with no electricity other than solar panels for bare light bulbs hanging in the ceilings. The guest house also has a hot stone bath, Western toilets and running water, albeit unheated. The cluster village of Shingkar is about 16 miles from Ura by way of a very bumpy stone road. There are two temples in Shingkar--the one opposite the guest house is the older one, founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, 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 "kar" means small house or hut.

Twelve little monks in training reside at Shingkar Lhakhang, 9 through 14 years old. On some of our previous tours these bright-eyed boys met us at the foot of the mountain and carried our luggage, happy to greet rare foreigners who come to visit. At dusk and dawn they marched clockwise around the temple singing their prayers, their tiny voices cutting through the fog, attracting the attention of a few lucky photographers. 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. In the evening the guides and drivers build a bonfire and welcome village ladies to come and dance folk dances around the fire. Overnight and dinner: Shingkar Lama's Guest House

**Day 8, Friday October 30, Shingkar to Ugyen Choeling** This morning we pack and leave Shingkar after walking down the hill through the village, interacting with villagers and taking photos of village life. By noon our cars should be driving in the remote eastern side of Bhutan in the Tang Valley--we'll stop for a riverside picnic lunch along the way. Our journey finds us traveling 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 Choeling Palace where we spend two nights in the owner's guesthouse. (Robin wrote a story on Ugyen Choeling for Tashi Delek Magazine--available on the Rainbow web site.)

Ugyen Choeling 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.

In the evening, single ladies who look to meet our guides and drivers come to the Palace for an evening of cultural entertainment--you're invited to join in the singing and dancing.

**Day 9, Saturday October 31, Full day at Ugyen Choeling** After erecting our own prayer flags near the chorten overlooking the valley, we spend the day in celebration and frivolity as our guides and drivers have a formal archery match in the center of the village and a formal lawn dart match next to the Palace--you are invited to attend and participate at whatever level you feel up to. The villagers always look forward to our tour coming to visit, with lots of laughter and singing, dancing and revelry. We bring prizes and gifts that are not usually available to them including beer, sodas, prizes and archery equipment and after dinner meet for the awards ceremony in the village hall. The prizes are useful to farmers, like axes and saws that are made in Korea—they value them more than those made in India because the steel is harder. Also during the day the Dasho (literally “most important person”) of Ugyen Choeling has arranged for a local lama and lay monks to dance and pose for photos in the courtyard wearing the masks and clothing worn in the local festival. The lama will be present to protect the sanctity of the dances and explain their meaning in Buddhist history. The cluster village of Ugyen Choeling rarely gets visitors who meld into their lifestyle like we do and they truly enjoy our interaction. They have even started calling Robin, *Dasho Robin*. You can also explore the village of Ugyen Choeling 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. You can leisurely stroll through the village and observe the daily life of the Bhutanese. You will feel very welcomed to enter any farmhouse as the Bhutanese see it as an honor that you would want to see how they live their lives. Overnight: Ugyen Choeling Guest House

**Day 10, Sunday November 1, Ugyen Choeling to Trongsa** After an early breakfast we leave Tang Valley to retrace our route, returning to Trongsa. Even though you are on the same road you will be pleased to find the return drive just as interesting because new and different scenes will again unfold on every turn. Last year we found a troupe of languor monkeys in the treetops just off the road. And on another tour a goat herder blocked the road for a few minutes with his herd and family carrying 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 Bhumtang 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.

**Day 11, Monday November 2, Trongsa to Wangdi** Today is another leisurely drive from Trongsa to Wangdi. We pass close to Rukubji and Chendebji villages, so we'll 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!" Even though we traveled this route on our way west, you will get a sense of seeing something new and different around every curve. Overnight at the riverside Kichu Resort or Dragon's Nest Resort.

**Day 12, Tuesday Nov. 3, Wangdi to Thimphu, free day in Thimphu** 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, Bhutan's capitol and largest city with 45,000 residents. Dinner at a Thimphu Pizza restaurant, overnight at Kisa Hotel.

**Day 13, Wednesday November 4, Full day in Thimphu** 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. 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 there, the 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. (Horses are available for those who don't feel they want to make the climb, but be advised that horses do not carry riders down.) 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 afternoon, we return to Thimphu where your guides and drivers are available to take you (individually or in small groups) anywhere you desire. On past tours, we found that participants had their own ideas about what is interesting in Thimphu so we inform you of current events and give you this list of places to see, then leave this decision up to you.

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. Monastic School of Astrology at Pangrizampa Monastery
- ...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 the many special items on our itinerary, such as having Bhutan National Photography School graduates as our guides, placing our own prayer flags, lunch with the Ura Lama, and all the many other wonderful events and sights that you enjoyed during your tour. Her hospitality and bubbling personality will create a very special memory for you to cherish. Overnight: Kisa Hotel

**Day 14, Thursday Nov. 5, Thimphu to Paro** After breakfast we pack and head back to Paro by way of the scenic route through Haa Valley, then over Chelila Pass and down into Paro Valley. After check-in and lunch in at the Gangtey Palace Hotel you are free to take a guide and driver to anywhere in the district or just hang around the hotel and rest up. We will provide you with a list of current events and local sites to visit—take a guide and driver and have the afternoon at your leisure. Overnight: Gangtey Palace Hotel or Soenam's new Spa and Guest House if it is complete.

**Day 15, Friday Nov. 6, Full day in Paro--Tiger's Nest** Today we spend the morning hiking (or riding 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, which is 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. As of 2004 we have received special permission to hike all the way to Tiger's Nest, visit some of the altar rooms and if he is there, get a grand tour from Lama Renzin. We have become good friends with Lama Renzin, bringing him photographs from previous visits, books on Buddhism and food for him and his cat.

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. 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 its main street lined with quaint shops, nearby river and dzong. Hot stone baths, farewell dinner, and overnight at the Gangtey Palace Hotel.

**Day 16, Saturday November 7, Departure Day:** 1000 hrs. transfer to Paro airport for 1120 hrs. departure, arrive Bangkok, 1630 hrs.