

BHUTAN
Blessings of the Heart, Meditation & Service
December 9-21st, 2010
Trip Leader: Sheri Rosenthal

Not many people have actually heard about

Bhutan – Land of the Thunder Dragon, or even know where it is located. For many years this little country about the size of Switzerland has been off limits of foreigners. If you look at a map you will find Bhutan to be east of Nepal at the same latitude, with a tiny piece of India separating the two countries – and the northern edge touching the Himalayas. You must realize that Bhutan is not like any place you are likely to travel to.



Shamans & Buddhists

The people are Tantric Buddhists who also have a Shamanistic background called Bon – and a fantastic history filled with legends and mythology. In fact, one of the highlights of our spiritual journey is hiking to Tiger’s Nest where Guru Rinpoche flew to on the back of a flaming tigress! Indeed, the monasteries are magical and beautiful in ways that I cannot begin to describe.

Finding the Buddha Within

Everyone who visits is touched in the most astonishing ways, by the landscape, the heart of the people, and their philosophies. By the time we leave, the experience will have opened your heart in a manner that that is totally unexpected. Through meditation, chanting, prayer and ceremony – we will expand our consciousness and cultivate the compassion of Buddha within us.

Compassion & Blessings

Thankfully we'll have the opportunity to spend a day at Tongsa Tsechu, one of the annual religious dance festivals to immerse ourselves in ancient tradition where elaborate, spellbinding masked dances at the festival are performed by specially trained monks. We'll also spend time visiting the very rare and endangered Black Necked Cranes in Phobjikha. And as a special gift, a Lama will be preparing a prayer and blessing ceremony for us. As



service is an important part of our spiritual experience, we'll be giving of ourselves and helping the Bhutanese people during our visit.

Inner Peace & Contentment

On our last two nights we'll be staying at the incredible Hotel Zhiwaling which is beautiful and restful – a proper end to our journey. You can have spa services here to relax from our journey and prepare for the long trip home. This is one of those once-in-a-lifetime journeys, and you will not come back the same person you were when you arrived. If there is any way that you can get away for this mystical journey, I encourage you to come!

Itinerary for Bhutan: Blessings of the Heart - December 9-21st, 2010

Day 0-2 Dec. 6-8th

Most folks will be leaving December 6th or 7th and will meet in Bangkok December 7th or 8th in the evening. We will stay overnight at the Novotel Suvarnabhumi Airport Hotel (approximately \$160.00 USD for a double room) near the new Bangkok airport (BKK) and wake up early for our flight on Druk airlines to Paro, Bhutan at ~7:00am.

Day 3 Dec. 9 (l, d) Bangkok to Paro (altitude: 7,400 feet)

We'll gather in the hotel lobby in the early morning and, as a group, proceed to the airport to check in with Druk Air. If we are lucky, we'll have glorious views of the snow capped Himalayas. On its way to Paro, **Druk Air flies over eight of the ten tallest peaks of the world including Mt. Everest and Kanchenjunga.** The remarkable and steep

descent into the Paro Valley is an awe-inspiring beginning to our adventure. Already you can feel the pace of life slow down.

In the afternoon, visit the ruins of **Drukgyal Dzong** (the fortress of Victorious Bhutanese), built in 1647 to commemorate Bhutan's victory over the Tibetan invaders led by Mongolian warlord, Gushri Khan in 1644. On a clear day, **Mt. Jumolhari (24,000 ft)**,



Bhutan's most sacred mountain peaks that marks the border between Bhutan and Tibet, can be seen from here. Accommodation: Kichu Resort, Gangtey Palace or similar

Day 4 & 5 Dec. 10-11 (b,l,d) Thimphu (altitude: 7,700 feet)

After breakfast, the short drive to Thimphu takes us past traditional farmhouses, small villages and terraced field. **We have one and half days to explore Thimphu**, Bhutan's exotic capital city—a fascinating combination of traditional and contemporary life. We'll attend a **special prayer ceremony with red-robed monks and a Lama** (Buddhist Teacher). Together with the monks we'll participate in a butter lamp and rice Mandala offering. We may also receive an introductory talk on Buddhism and an empowerment or initiation of one of the important Buddhist prayer mantras from the Lama.

During the rest of our time in Thimphu, we'll hope to visit some of the following key sights (there won't be time for all):

A visit to Mothithang Takin Preserve for a chance to see the takin, Bhutan's national animal.

The Farmers vegetable market (open Friday through Sunday) where you will also find all kinds of items that the local people use at home, including ritual and religious objects, and wonderful textiles.

A walk to the Memorial Chorten, a sacred shrine built in honor of the current King's grandfather. The Chorten is an impressive three-story monument with Tantric statues and wall paintings of three different cycles of Nyingma teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. You will find many elderly people making the Kora (pilgrimage circuit).

A beautiful hike to Cheri Gompa Meditation Center. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, the man who unified Bhutan, built this gompa (monastery) in 1619 and established the first monk body in Bhutan at this monastery. The one hour hike to Cheri Gompa starts from a picturesque wooden bridge decorated with colorful prayer flags.

Visit a few interesting handicraft shops, where they sell masks, beautiful hand-woven textiles, carpets, and jewelry and Bhutanese wooden products.

A visit to a Bhutanese Handmade Paper Factory. Handmade paper has been a traditional craft in Bhutan going back into the distant past. The paper is made mainly from the Daphne plant with aipin, a gum obtained from the root of a creeper, as the other major ingredient.

A Bhutanese Archery Game – Bhutan’s national sport and an integral part of all festivities. During major competitions, women dance and sing, extolling their team while teasing and mocking the adversaries with funny comments to make them lose their concentration. Accommodation: Riverview Hotel or similar

Day 6 Dec. 12 (b,l,d) Paro to Punakha (altitude: 4,500 feet)

After breakfast, we will head eastward to Punakha and Wangdi Valleys. The first hour of our drive takes us past traditional farmhouses, small villages and terraced field. Later the road winds through pine forests and passes by chortens (Stupas) and prayer flags before heading up to Dochula Pass (10,000’). The prayer flags on mountain slopes,



bridges and high passes, transmit prayers to the Gods and keep up a constant communication with the heavens. For the next two hours of drive, the road slowly descends into the lowlands of Punakha Valley. In the village of Lobesa, we’ll enjoy a nice **hike to visit Chimmi Lhakhang**, a temple dedicated to Drukpa Kuenley, who as a favorite

saint of the Bhutanese people is known affectionately as “the Divine Madman”. The temple is on a hillside in the middle of rice fields and has become a pilgrimage site for childless couples. Accommodation: Meri Phunsum Resort or similar

Day 7 Dec. 13 (b,l,d) Punakha Sightseeing

This morning we will visit the Punakha Dzong, the “Palace of Great Happiness” built in 1647 by Shabdrung Nawang Namgyel, the Buddhist Lama who unified Bhutan. The Dzong lies between the Fo Chu (male river) and the Mo Chu (female river), and is the winter home of the Central Monk Body. When the Shabdrung arrived in Punakha, he set up a camp at the confluence of the two rivers and that very night had a dream in which he heard the prophecy of Guru Rinpoche, the second Buddha and the founder of Tantric Buddhism. He then built a Dzong on that spot and placed the Rangjung Kharsapani there, the most sacred relic that he brought with him from his monastery in Tibet. You will be seeing the most magnificent architectural and artistic masterpiece in the Kingdom.

After lunch, we will enjoy a **beautiful optional hike to Khamsum Yuley Lhakhang**, through paddy fields and past traditional farmhouses. It contains some of the best

Tantric art in Bhutan, and a visit there will serve as a balance to the more traditional Buddhist statuary and wall painting visible at the Punakha Dzong. Accommodation: Meri Phunsum Resort or similar

Day 8 Dec. 14 (b,l,d) Punakha to Phobjikha (altitude: 9,800 feet)

After breakfast, we'll continue our drive eastward to Phobjikha, reached by a side road near Pelela Pass. This hidden valley in the Black Mountains at 9840', is one of the most beautiful valleys in Bhutan. It is surrounded by mountains with rhododendron, pine and dwarf bamboo, which is a favorite food of the Yaks. The famous Gangtey Gompa, the oldest and largest Nyingma Buddhist monastery in Bhutan, is located on a hill overlooking the beautiful valley. **This valley is also the chosen winter home of the very rare and endangered Black Necked Cranes.** The rare Cranes migrate from Tibet to Bhutan and use the swampy center of this valley as their winter residence from mid November to mid March. Accommodation: Hotel Dewachen

Day 9 Dec. 15 Phobjikha to Tongsa (altitude: 7,300 feet)

This morning, we will enjoy a short walk through this beautiful valley among clusters of traditional house and see the beautiful Black Neck Cranes in their natural habitat. We'll also visit the Information Center to watch a short video and to listen to a talk on Black Neck Cranes. After an early lunch, we'll drive to Tongsa enjoying magnificent views of small villages, terraced fields, diverse forests of exotic Himalayan plants, and trees. After crossing the Pelela Pass (10,825 feet) the vegetation changes to a beautiful forest of rhododendron and fields of dwarf bamboo.

Before reaching Tongsa, we'll see the 18th century **Chendebji Chorten**, a whitewashed stone chorten (or stupa) built in order to nail into the ground a demon who had been terrorizing the inhabitants of the valley. The first sight of the Tongsa Dzong (a "dzong" is a fortress), the largest in Bhutan, is from across the valley. But the road winds another 12.5 miles before we'll actually get there. Magnificent views around every turn!

Accommodation: Yangkhil Resort or similar



Day 10 Dec. 16 (b,l,d) Tongsa Festival

We will spend a full day at the Tongsa Tsechu, the annual religious dance festival that takes place in Tongsa Dzong. Built in 1647, it is the largest dzong in the country. It is also

the ancestral home of the Royal Family, and both the first and second kings ruled the country from Tongsa. **Elaborate, spellbinding masked dances at the festival are performed by specially trained monks.** From the roof of the temple, monks blow on a pair of long horns, and the sound of cymbals, drums and trumpets fill the air. These dance festivals revive the people spiritually and in many ways refine them culturally because the dances communicate moral lessons, and both the performer and the observer benefit from the exchange. The Bardo dances, the main event of the festival, serve as a reminder to people of their future destiny depending on their past and present deeds. This festival is also an occasion for seeing people and for being seen. In olden times it provided the most important opportunity for unmarried men and women to find their life partners. People dress in their finest clothes and wear their most precious jewels. Men and women joke and flirt.

Day 11 Dec. 17 (b,l,d) Tongsa to Wangdi (altitude: 4,500 feet)

After breakfast, we'll drive back westward to **Wangdi Valley**, crossing once more the Pelela Pass and spend the night in a small resort by the beautiful river. Upon arrival in Wangdi, we'll have the rest of the afternoon free.

Accommodation: Kichu Resort or similar

Day 12 Dec. 18 (b,l,d) Wangdi to Thimphu (altitude: 7,700 feet)

After a leisurely morning, we will return to Thimphu, crossing the Dochula Pass.

This evening, we will have a farewell dinner of home cooked traditional Bhutanese food together with a special cultural program of mask dances, folk songs and dances.

We may also have a chance to experience Bhutan's fascinating weaving culture directly by **visiting the home of an expert Bhutanese traditional weaver and designer.** You will



have the rare opportunity to see some of the best weavers in the country at work and discover how Bhutanese have developed a textile art that is unmatched by anywhere else in the world. You may also have a chance to buy some beautiful pieces of their weaving directly from the weavers.

Accommodation: Riverview Hotel or similar

Day 13 Dec. 19 (b,l,d) Paro Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) Hike (altitude: 7,400 feet)

After breakfast, we will return to Paro for our last two nights in the Dragon Kingdom.

Upon arrival in Paro, we'll hike to the magical monastery known as Taktsang (the "Tiger's Nest"). Taktsang is one of the most sacred pilgrimage sites in the Himalayan

World. The monastery itself is perched on a granite cliff that drops 2,000 feet to the valley floor. The name is derived from a legend that **Guru Rinpoche** flew across the mountains to this spot on the back of a tigress, reaching a cave in which he meditated for three months, converting the people of Paro Valley to Buddhism during his stay.



The path takes us through a forest of oak, blue pine and rhododendron, arriving at a small Chorten surrounded by prayer flags. With a little more effort, we will reach a teahouse and a spectacular view of the Taktsang temples. That will be our lunch stop and then onto the amazing temple. Accommodation: [Hotel Zhiwaling](#)

Day 14 Dec. 20 (b,l,d) Paro

Today you may decide to spend time at this luxury hotel to relax, rewind, pack and rest. Or you may go for last minute shopping, and sightseeing. **The hotel's spa offers all the amenities of a modern fitness center:** sauna, steam room, gym, and a traditional Bhutanese stone bath. For after-hours fun, everyone gathers at the **Mad Monk Bar**.

Sightseeing Options:

Visit to the **Ta Dzong**, the watchtower of the Paro Dzong which now houses the National Museum. The museum is an important center for the preservation of Bhutanese artifacts, culture and history. After the Museum, we will visit the **Rinpung Dzong** (the full name of the Paro Dzong), which means "the fortress of the heap of jewels." This complex houses the administrative and religious headquarters for the Paro district. A part of Bernardo Bertolucci's movie, "Little Buddha," was filmed inside this dzong. Accommodation: [Hotel Zhiwaling](#)

Day 15 Dec. 21 (b,l,d) Paro to Bangkok

Back to the airport to depart from the Land of the Thunder Dragon and return to Bangkok. Today we leave our hosts and make our way back to the airport and get ready for our flights home. We say our last goodbyes, hugs and kisses as we prepare to take our new dream of heaven back to our lives.

Day 16 Dec 22 (-) Bangkok to Home

You will cross the dateline again, arriving home on the same day that you leave Bangkok.

Important Information for Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon Spiritual Journey

What's Included:

- All daily meals are included in this program and are noted next to each day and are in parentheses
- All spiritual teachings, meditations and ceremonies
- All ground transportation in Bhutan
- Your local guides
- Admission fees to the temples and sites are included.
- All tips for the drivers, guides, and bell boys
- Special blessing prayer ceremony with the Lama
- Two nights at the exquisite Zhiwa Ling luxury hotel
- Your roundtrip flights from Bangkok to Paro, Bhutan on Druk Airlines

What's Not-Included:

- Non-included lunches and dinners during your trip to and from Bhutan may need to be paid for in cash so plan accordingly.
- Other non-included items would be travel insurance, excess baggage charges & airport taxes (~\$10.00), beverages (alcohol, soda), personal items, spa services at Zhiwa Ling, and souvenir shopping!
- Your international round-trip air flight is not-included in the cost of the journey.
- Tips for the maids (we recommend you leave \$1.00 USD per person per day)
- Your donation to our humanitarian project (we suggest planning on donating anywhere from between \$100.00 – \$500.00 USD – it's personal and up to you)

Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon Trip Costs

The 2010 trip cost is: \$5195.00 USD per person double occupancy. Single occupancy for the main part of the trip (except the last two nights) is \$40.00 USD per person – *if* the space is available. The single occupancy for our last two nights in Paro at the [luxury hotel ZhiwaLing](#) is: \$200.00 USD. A deposit of \$700.00 USD with your trip registration forms is preferred by: September 1st, 2010. Final payment is due: October 1st, 2010.

Want to Join Us?

Give us a ring at 727-421-0849 (or register on the website) – we can't wait to hear from you! This is a profound and heartfelt trip – meant to connect you with your inner divine consciousness. Our intention is for you to become the highest expression of Spirit and light that you can be!