

Spring 2017 Bhutan Cross Country and Festival Tour  
April 28 - May 13, Fifteen Days in Country  
Depart Bangkok Friday April 28 at 9:a.m.  
Arrive Back in Bangkok Sat., May 13 at 5:40 p.m.

**Day 1, Friday April 28:** Departure to Bhutan 9:00a.m. Meet at Bangkok International Airport departures row U at 6:30 a.m. Robin will have your visa and airlines tickets plus you will have a copy. Arrive Paro Airport (7,200 ft.) at 12:20 p.m. (Gain one hour.) After clearing customs and immigration we will be greeted by Rainbow Tours & Treks representatives, guides and drivers. We just had a hot breakfast on the plane so nobody is usually hungry and since Nak Sel Resort is 45 minutes from the airport, our guides will take us in different directions and then meet for lunch in a Paro restaurant—frankly stated, we hit the ground running.

#### National Museum

Archery grounds for Friday practice rounds

Rinpung Dzong, aka Paro Dzong

Kyichu Lhakhang (temple), one of the oldest in Bhutan (7<sup>th</sup> century)

Drugyal Dzong, a ruined fortress used to fight off invading Tibetans.

Paro town, walk around and get a feel for this small authentic Bhutanese commercial district

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.

From this point on and throughout the tour the daily itinerary becomes very flexible. Since we are in cars we don't all have to go to these places at the same time. Our 16 guides and drivers are familiar with this concept and stay in touch with each other to notify everyone of any special events in the area, like "You should go to Kichu Temple because there are a lot of pilgrims there," etc. So as you read down through this itinerary keep this important concept in mind-- "...you are the captain of your ship and can make changes to the itinerary on the fly."

We can walk or drive down to Paro Town and walk along the Paro Chu (River) to take pictures of the 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 might be practice going on by government employees mostly—they take long lunches.

Dinner and overnight at Nak Sel Resort, a new five-star resort owned by our Bhutanese partner, Ms. Sonam Ongmo, also the owner of Rainbow Tours and Treks of Bhutan. Sonam has arranged for many of the special items on our itinerary, such as placing our own prayer flags, the Brokpa Festival performed just for our group (we feed over 150 villagers a hot lunch, you will be asked to help in the serving line) and all the many other wonderful events and sights that you will enjoy during your tour. Her hospitality and bubbling

personality ensure a very special evening for us. A multi-million-dollar property, Nak Sel is situated at the edge of a quiet forest on property that was once an apple orchard--the original farmhouse and many of the trees still exist. 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. (Reservations and additional fees are required.) 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 (feet) 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 so ask your guide to locate some while out and about.

**Day 2 , Saturday April 29:** Tiger's Nest and Paro: Something that we just changed on the itinerary in Spring 2016 is a pre-dawn hike to Tiger's Nest to avoid the crowds and heat and watch sunrise over Bhutan's most famous and scenic icon. After a one-and-a-half strenuous hike led by our guides and drivers wearing headlamps, we will be served a hot picnic breakfast as we look across the chasm to young monks lighting morning incense fires at Taktsang Monastery, dubbed Tiger's Nest because of the legend associated with it. Then at 9 a.m we will climb down and up the 1,000 stone steps to visit the monastery. This very early hike will most likely be made by just our group since the tour buses don't start to show up until around 9 a.m. On average, 1,000 tourists a day hike to Tiger's Nest and the parking lot is packed with buses, noisy tourists scare off the birds, monkeys and goats and the sun causes you to peel off clothing as the trail is not in a forest but rather out in the open sun. (Please see Robin's story on Tiger's Nest for Tashi Delek Magazine, the in-flight magazine for Royal Druk Air, posted on the Rainbow Photo Tours web site.) We will have our guides and drivers one-on-one to carry our 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 ledge directly across a chasm from it we will still need a 200 mm lens and a steady tripod to get tight photographs. As of 2004, after the rebuilding from a fire, foreigners have 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 have become friends with Lam Renzin, bringing him gifts such as a Swiss Army multi-tool, saffron colored wool hat and in 2007 he requested we bring him a pair of binoculars to see who is coming to visit Tiger's Nest--Robin delivered them in 2008 and they are sitting under his desk at his open window.

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."

After we descend to the base of Taktsang our cars will take us back to Nak Sel by way of any place around Paro that you might have missed on arrival day. Tonight would be a good night to luxuriate yourself with a hot stone bath and massage and then walk down through the authentic Bhutanese cluster village just beneath the resort, interacting with kids playing in the street.

Dinner and overnight: Nak-Sel Resort

**Day 3, Sunday April 30:** 7 a.m. breakfast, 8 a.m. departure, two-hour drive to Thimphu.

Your guide and driver will take you anywhere you desire. On past tours we found that participants had their own ideas about what is interesting in Thimphu so we include here a list of current events and places to see and leave this decision up to you. Picnic lunch will be served beside the roaring Cheri Chuu (river) around 1 p.m.

List of things to see and do in Thimphu: (\* = Robin's favorites.)

1. \*Memorial Chorten
2. \*Paper factory for handmade paper--great for printing photos of Bhutan
3. \*Weekend Market
4. National Institute of Traditional Medicine
5. Buddha Point
6. Two good book stores for books on Bhutan
7. Paradise Temple (Only if there are pilgrims there—ask your guide.)
8. Check the National Stadium for archery competition or practice.
9. We recommend the Choki Arts and Handicraft store for souvenirs
10. We recommend coffee and sweets at the Arts Cafe next to the Swiss Bakery.
11. Takin refuge--Bhutan's national animal
12. \*Changangkha Lhakhang "Children's Temple" an antique temple where parents bring their children for blessings and to determine names.
13. \*Stop at the "supermarket" to pick up munchies and favorite food supplies (Cadbury chocolates?) for the trip ahead.

**Day 4, Monday May 1:** Thimphu to Punakha to Wangdi. If you missed it the day before, arise at 0700 (just inform your guide and driver the night before) and go to the Memorial Chorten, built in 1974 in memory of the third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who died in 1972. Local residents flock here in the morning to chant their daily prayers as they walk clockwise around the chorten (temple), spinning prayer wheels as they pass fragrant columns of smoke from smoldering juniper branches that carry a stream of prayers to the mountain deities.

Breakfast at 8 a.m., then pack and meet your guide and driver in front of the hotel at 9 a.m. We then begin our journey to the East, en route stopping at 10,500 ft. DochuLa pass to 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 we drive to Punakha Dzong stopping for lunch overlooking the Divine Madman's Temple. (You can walk there if you like, 1.5 hour round trip in the hot sun, usually windy and dusty.) Next we visit Punakha Dzong where we can photograph the colorful exterior, the new covered foot bridge which is the longest cantilevered bridge in the world, and interior courtyards with colorful and intricately painted doorways and temple exteriors. 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.

Beyond Punakha and Wangdi, both at 4,260 ft., we check in at Kichu Resort on the edge of the rapids of the Dangchu River. We always get a good night's sleep there, 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.

**Day 5, Tues May 2:** Wangdi to Phobjekha, AKA Gangtey: After breakfast we leave for a very bumpy drive (recent road widening construction) to Phobjekha, the valley known for being the winter roosting grounds of the legendary black neck cranes that fly in from Tibet

and Siberia. The cranes will have already left the valley but it is a beautiful and authentic place with a new hotel with required Bhutanese architecture but Western style rooms, a quaint village with farmhouses to visit and an ancient temple. The drive follows the national highway to Nobding and just before Pelela Pass we will turn onto a nicely paved farm road and drive another 13-km to Phobjekha, crossing over Gangtey Pass at 3140 m, (10300 ft.) before dropping into the Phobjekha Valley. It is a beautiful pass that is surrounded with blooming Rhododendron at this time of year. Also, there is the likelihood that we will see yaks and their herders as they work their way higher to summer pasture.

Phobjekha is a glacial valley on the periphery of the northwestern tip of the Black Mountain National Park. The valley is a conservation area and lies on the northern boundary of the Jowo Durshing range. People sometimes refer to the entire region as Gangtey after the name of the Gangtey Temple that is situated on a ridge overlooking the Phobjekha valley.

We arrive here in late morning so we have most of the day to visit the Black Neck Crane Information Center, arrange for mountain biking, visit a farmhouse for lunch, and visit an ancient temple for a special puja (ceremony) to bless our tour. Here we are allowed to take pictures of the puja and the inside of the temple. (But never of the Buddha statue.) There will be monks blowing horns, beating drums and chanting so it's a good place for video and close-ups of faces with cheeks puffed out, etc

**Day 6, Weds May 3:** Phobjekha to Trongsa: After breakfast, we leave for a six-hour drive to Trongsa, again through construction but very scenic territory. 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 charming Yangkil Resort in Trongsa. We will 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 (10,825 ft.) we get our first glimpse of the Black Mountains. This drive between Phobjekha and Trongsa is one of the most scenic and exciting legs of our journey into the clouds, crossing rivers and streams, passing farmlands and villages as well as primordial forests that have never been inhabited because of the deities believed to reside there.

We will pass through the village of Rukubji Valley 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 2nd 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 19th century.

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 can 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 handed The Raven Crown by his father and ascended 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.

**Day 7, Thurs May 4:** Trongsa to Chumey Valley, Bhumtang District: At 8 A.M. we leave for a three- hour drive to a two-night stay in Domkhar Cluster Village. The route crosses YotongLa pass (10,800 ft.) which is marked by a chorten and an array of prayer flags--it marks the boundary between western and central Bhutan as well as the western border of Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park. Beyond Pele La is Longte Valley where people raise sheep and yaks.

We arrive at Domkhar just in time for lunch time at our hotel, then afternoon archery competition between our guides, drivers and farmers followed by a Kuru (lawn darts) competition. Evening bonfire for awards ceremony, folk dancing and singing in a circle around the fire. Meanwhile down at the temple they will be setting up for the annual Domkhar Drup (festival) and you can wander there to see what's going on, mingle with the locals as they set up a blue-tarp flea market adjacent to the temple..

**Day 8, Fri May 5:** We begin our day by visiting separate farmhouses for breakfast and cultural exchange and to help the children dress for the festival—this can be really fun if you are proactive. They are not shy and will have fun with you showing you the intricacies of dressing in a gho and kira. (Talk about cultural emersion!) The festival begins around 10 a.m. so we can each walk there with our adopted families. This is one of the smallest festivals in Bhutan and as such not many tourists go there—in 2016 I counted just 10 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. Another major attraction to the first day of the festival is the most venerable dance in Bhutanese Buddhist history, *The Black Hat Dance*.

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 2009 Spring issue of Tashi Delek—see the Rainbow web site to read that story in preparation to attending the festival. Every year our tour sponsors different upgrades to their carved wood masks, elaborate costumes and we have even donated 30 chairs for the “V.I.P. skybox,” the place where the lama watches the festival from. Unlike the larger festivals in Paro and Thimphu where thousands of villagers and tourists sit in grandstands in 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.

**Day 9, Sat May 6:** Departure 9 a.m. Drive on to Jakar, the central town of the Bhumthang district. As you leave the Chhume Valley (the first of the four valleys that comprise the Bhumthang Valley) you will visit a center of Yathra weaving and large gift shop with authentic Bhutanese products. 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. We have been asked many times, “Where is the best place to buy authentic Bhutanese handicrafts?” This is that place! They have a huge assortment of hand-woven cloth, jackets, bags and clothing

as well as a few authentic antiques and rugs woven by Tibetan refugees.

When we reach Jakar we will check into the hotel and then review the following list to see where you want to begin your two day exploration of Jakar. (Turn in laundry when you arrive for pickup the next day.)

1. **Jakar Dzong**
2. **Jambay Lhakhang**
3. **Wangdu Choling Palace**
4. **Beer/Cheese Factory (also full liquor store.)**
5. **Kurjey Lhakhang**
6. **Tamshing Lhakhang**
7. **Lhodrak Kharchhu Monastery**
8. **Roam the main street of Jakar and it's many shops**
9. **Take the 30-minute walk than connects two temples by way of a footpath over a foot suspension bridge. Begin a mile past the beer/cheese factory.**

**Day 10, Sun May 7:** Full day at your leisure to check off the list above. This can be a very busy day if you want it to be as Bhumtang is the religious and cultural heartland of Bhutan. Lunch and a cold Red Panda Beer at the Himalayan Pizza. (Our lead guide Wangdi will collect your order in the morning so that wait time is not so long.)

**Day 11, Mon May 8:** Bhumthang to Mongar: After an early breakfast we gear up for a rigorous 127-mile thrill-ride from Jakar to Mongar on the National Highway. According to the annual Tourism Monitor only 200 foreign visitors go beyond this point each year—most return to Paro to the airport to exit, doubling back on what they have already experienced. This is the longest drive on the tour, approximately 8 hours with plenty of stops. Each car will carry tea/coffee and cookies and folding chairs for breaks along the way, usually in the high passes, and we stop for lunch at a nice roadside restaurant. Along the route there will be plenty of time to make frequent stops for photo ops and we should make it to Mongar in time to roam the streets and interact with locals in the late afternoon. The journey takes us through mist-covered ThumshingLa Pass, which at 13,500 feet is the highest motor-able pass in Bhutan. On the eastern side of the pass the three-hour drive plunges down through a sunless forest almost 10,000 feet! to the village of Sengor. Then after a few miles of level road we plunge again through what is considered by many to be the most "white knuckle" 12 miles of national highway in the country. Here the road was blasted out of sheer cliffs with a guard-railed edge that drops clear out of sight. You will notice that there is very little traffic on this stretch of highway because only 200 tourists per year go beyond Bhumtang, truly the road less traveled. Just go to the Tour Overview of the Rainbow web site and look for the YouTube video with the opening image that of a truck. Click it on and hold on tight. In Bhutan the joke is, "Please fasten your seatbelt to make it easier for the police to find your body." Plus there is bone-jarring road widening construction for part of the ride.

After crossing the bridge over the Kuru River, 15 miles further on the climbing twisting road, we come to the ancient trade route stop of Mongar. Since the area is very mountainous with few valleys, Mongar is built on the side of a mountain. The true homeland of the Eastern People, the Sharchogpas, begins from Mongar. We will settle into the comfortable Hotel Wangchuck, the classiest place in the entire district, for two nights--laundry available if you leave it upon arrival.

**Day 12, Tues May 9:** Day Excursion around Mongar: Today we halt for the day and enjoy the sights in and around Mongar. After breakfast we will visit the local high school of over 400 students on special invitation of the principal, a long-time friend of Robin. After their opening assembly in the courtyard where they sing the morning prayer and national

anthem we are invited by couples into the classrooms to interact with the students. Many past participants have even given short lectures on their personal professions—the principal there encourages this. Then we move to the town's primary school for the same thing only there they perform their annual cultural program in the auditorium and ask for donations to support their annual school picnic. After lunch there are several options that will be explained at lunch. Overnight Hotel Wangchuck for second night, pick up laundry upon return in the afternoon.

**Day 13, Weds May 10:** Mongar to Trashigang: This morning we make the sixty mile, three-hour drive from Mongar to Trashigang. We will cross the 8,000 ft. KoriLa pass and stop there to place our own prayer flag that stretches from hillside to hillside—you can write messages to your loved ones. We stop for tea and cookies as we have all along the way whenever crossing a pass. Beyond the pass, driving through corn fields and patches of banana trees, we come to the village of Yadi where we will stop at a farm house and photograph weavers making natural dyes from native plants. After Yadi the road zigs and zags in what seems like never ending switchbacks descending to SheriChu village at the Sheri River. After SheriChu we come across roadside sheds where oil is extracted from lemon grass. After crossing two more rivers the road climbs up to Trashigang town at 3,775 ft.

Also on this drive we stop at the only ancient temple along the way and gain special access to the room where they store their festival costumes. Dozens of old carved wood masks hang in the ceiling, the walls are painted cobalt blue and the sheer drapes over the windows are saffron colored making for beautiful color pictures—there will surely be a young monk nearby to pose in this remarkable setting.

After lunch at the hotel we can roam the streets of Bhutan's second largest "city" with its quaint shops selling fresh vegetables and all sorts of things stacked high on shelves and hanging from the ceiling—funny how they can make a living all selling the same things. Overnight at the brand new Dothejung Resort.

**Day 14, Thurs May 11:** Exclusive! Brokpa Cultural Program: Today is a very auspicious day for us as we rise early and drive eastward through Rangjung and Radi to Phongmey village. Sonam, our hostess while in Bhutan, is a Brokpa by birth--her father was the hereditary lama there and she is treated like royalty whenever she visits. Sonam and her company, Rainbow Tours and Treks of Bhutan, have organized a special cultural program by the Brokpa people of Merak and Sakten—you are considered the sponsor of this event and will have to ladle out food to about 150 people in the ancient temple courtyard at Phongmey. This is the custom, the visitor serves the local people and even the King does this when he comes to visit, usually pouring tea in their cups. A group of twenty-two Brokpas will make the two-day trek from Merak and Sakten, a district that foreigners were not allowed to visit until 2010. They will bring by horseback all of their cultural trappings as well as festival objects and costumes. Local villagers hear the noise and turn out for the free food and festivities. We bring a quarter section of pork, sacks of rice, chilies and vegetables and cook it all up over an open fire in huge black cauldrons in a typical Bhutanese style. (But we eat Western food brought from the hotel.)

This all has the blessing of the local lama to ensure that the sanctity of anything religious is protected by prayer and ritual. The Brokpas are yak herders from this remote region and have a language, culture and lifestyle that is unique even in Bhutan. An example of cultural uniqueness is the burial process--the body of the deceased is hacked to pieces and allowed to float down the river to be eaten by scavengers. Also, the dating process is something that young suitors call "night hunting"--we'll try to get to the bottom of that when we meet them in Phongmey.

Of this unique and exclusive event, Sonam writes: They will perform the Yak Dance, the Achi Lhamo in honor of Goddess Penden Lhamo and Lady Jomo, folk dances by Maidens, other dance with songs by Maidens, and other cultural items to be discussed with the Brokpas. The dances and singing are not done as in a stage but what they normally do in their village during festivals. It will be a recreation of the festival on a smaller scale the events will not be timed as such but can roll on the whole day with breaks for rest, festive drinking and eating, and posing for photographs. Your tour group will not be seeing the event merely as spectators but participating actively in the festivities – dancing, singing and drinking, etc. The idea is for guests not only to see the cultural performances as such but to experience a crash course in a part of Brokpa culture.

We will have the distinct honor of being some of the first Westerners to witness Brokpa folk dances, including the famous Yak Dance which narrates the story of how the Brokpas first arrived from Tibet led by Lady Jomo, revered as one of the most powerful deities of the region. Included too is the Achi Lhamo, a lion dance performed in honor of Goddess Penden Lhamo and Lady Jomo. Brokpa maidens will also sing and dance as they do during festivals in their highland home.

The Sakten and Merak region remains mostly unexplored by tourists—only about 50 trekkers made the journey in 2012 when the region was first opened to foreigners and since then numbers have dwindled. Sakten and Merak were previously closed to foreigners in an effort to stall modernization of one of the world's last remaining "living cultural museums." Sonam has tried for years to get the government to open her ancestral home as she feels her people should not be denied the modernization that has come to the rest of their countrymen in the form of electricity, roads, schools, and hospitals. Now that the constitutional government is in place she feels strongly that the political representatives of her region will soon convince the government to build the road that is so important to modernization. Overnight again at the Dothejung Resort.

**Day 15, Fri May 12:** Trashigang to Samdrup Jonkhar: This is our last full day in Bhutan and we spend it mostly driving to Samdrup Jongkhar on the southern border with India. Along the way we will visit several sites and make plenty of roadside stops for photos, lunch and tea/coffee. Overnight and farewell dinner at the best available hotel in Samdrup Jonkhar that has air conditioning.

**Day 16, Sat May 13,:** Departure, Guwahati Airport: Breakfast at 9:00 a.m. then three-hour drive to Guwahati airport for a 3:05 pm Druk Air departure to Bangkok, arriving BKK 5:40 pm.

Notes:

On each departure morning always have your bags packed and left in your room, lock the door and deliver the key to the front desk.

The Tourism Ministry has a policy of not allowing tourists to sit in the front seat of cars as they don't want the driver distracted. So please don't ask your guide if you can sit in front—he will let you but he will be breaking the rules.

Bottled water is provided—each car has a case of it in back. So when you leave the car to go to your room please take your open water with you and ask for a bottle or two more because the hotels skimp on offering bottled water. Don't forget to not brush your teeth with tap water because it is right out of the stream, passed through a settling tank.

If you don't feel like stopping for tea and coffee or lunch, don't forget, your guide and driver have those needs too.



There are no proper bathrooms or toilets along the national highway so learn to say to your guide, "I need to find a bush." There is toilet paper in all cars. He will find a trail leading down into the woods, just watch out for wild bears.