



PATA and Creative Travel fam trip to Bhutan

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[PATA Norway Chapter](#)

In April 2016 a group of PATA members visited Bhutan. Astrid Margrethe Sølvik, PATA board member, in charge of arranging the study tour, reports:

After more than one year of planning, we could finally enter the flight and start this journey to Bhutan, the country where Gross National Happiness is more important than gross national product...

The flight to Paro is one of the most spectacular in entire Himalayas. Flying along the Himalayan range from Kathmandu, the journey offers fascinating views and an exciting descent into the Kingdom. Bhutan's first gift to us as we disembarked the aircraft was cool, clean fresh mountain air.



We landed in Paro and were wished welcome by Creative Travel representatives.

Creative Travel was our key partner for this trip, and they did a great job, first of all putting together a good program, but also give us their best guide and their best driver for the entire week.

In addition representatives from Creative office in India and Europe joined us.

During the week in Bhutan, we created both memories and friendships that will last forever.

After all formalities was done, we drove to Thimphu, the capital town of Bhutan.

We stopped en-route in Chuzom, the confluence of Thimphu and Paro rivers.





The capital town of Bhutan and the centre of government, religion and commerce, Thimphu is a unique city with unusual mixture of modern development alongside ancient traditions. Although not what one expects from a capital city, Thimphu is still a fitting and lively place. Home to civil servants, expatriates and monk body, Thimphu maintains a strong national character in its architectural style.





During our days in Thimphu we visited some highlights of the city.

King's Memorial Chorten continuously circumambulator by people, murmuring mantras and spinning their prayer wheels. Construction of this landmark was the idea of Bhutan's third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk ("the father of modern Bhutan") who has wished to erect monument to world peace and prosperity. Completed in 1974 after his untimely death, it serves both as a memorial to the Late King and as a monument to peace.





Buddha Point (Kuenselphodrang). You can pay your obeisance and offer prayers to the Buddha, the largest statue in the country and then walk around. The area also provide excellent view of the Thimphu valley from the west.



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Trashichhoe dzong: This impressive fortress/monastery houses Secretariat building, the throne room of His Majesty, the King and various government offices. It is also the summer residence of Chief Abbot and central monk body.

Pangri Zampa, 16th century one of the oldest monasteries in Bhutan located just north of Thimphu. Here is a monastic school where Buddhist students learn Lamaism and astrology based on Buddhist philosophy.

Some other interesting places to visit is the Weekend Market and Paper factory visit. Every Saturday and Sunday most of Thimphu's scant population and many valley dwellers congregate on the banks of the river where weekend market is held.

Institute for Zorig Chusum: Commonly known as Arts & Crafts School or Painting School, the Institute offers a six-year course on the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. On a visit, you can see students learning the various skills taught at the school.

One morning we had a great hiking excursion to Tango Goempa, a Buddhist Monastery a bit north of Thimphu.

This is a university located up in the mountains. Tango University is considered to be the premier university for Buddhist learning.



Archery is the national sport of the Kingdom.

Archery was declared the national sport in 1971, when Bhutan became a member of the United Nations.

Bhutan also maintains an Olympic archery team.

Previously, competitions were held only at dzongkhag and gewog levels. However, in modern times, archery tournaments and competitions are held throughout the country.

Archery in Bhutan is culturally distinctive because it is a martial art practiced among a modern population that abhors killing. Bhutanese people from different social strata find archery one of the most enjoyable sports, being both fun and physical exercise. In addition, archery builds concentration, which contributes to mental development; according to a Bhutanese proverb, both sailing and archery require intelligence. Archery in Bhutan is a way of socialization, communication, and development of relations between people. Emotions run high during competitions, and support for archers and ridicule or distraction of opponents can become as violent as in other countries' sporting events.





After some days in Thimphu we took off towards Punakha.

It is a long drive, over Dochu La pass, but it was really nice to see other parts of the country as well.

One of the first things you see when you drive towards Punakha, is the great Punakha Dzong, well worth a visit.

Punakha Dzong is arguably the most beautiful dzong in the country, especially in spring when the lilac-coloured jacaranda trees bring a lush sensuality to the dzong's characteristically towering whitewashed walls. This dzong was the second to be built in Bhutan and it served as the capital and seat of government until the mid-1950s. All of Bhutan's kings have been crowned here.



We had a short excursion to Chimi Lhakhang, also called Temple of Fertility.

After this visit we took a stroll through the nicely decorated Pana village.

We stayed at Dragons Nest Hotel. Beautifully situated beside the Punakha River, below the National highway between Wangdiphodrang and Punakha.

The next morning we drove back to Paro descending back down from Dochu La pass, follow the way back up the dramatic Wang Chhu and ParoChhu river valleys, before crossing through Paro Town towards the north end of the valley. 125 km, approx... 4.5 hours' drive

En route we visited SimtokhaDzong, the place of profound tantric teaching, this dzong now houses a school for the study of the Dzongkha language.

A highlight in Paro was the visit to RinpungDzong.

ParoDzong, built to defend Paro from the Tibetan invasion, is also known as RinpungDzong which means „the fortress of a heap of jewels'. This fine example of Bhutanese architecture now serves as a central monastic and administrative seat of the Paro district.

A stairway leads down to the monastic quarter, which houses about 200 monks.

Many of the students in this school are orphans, the boys both live and go to school here. We wanted to try to contribute, and bought School supplies for them.

We bought pens and pencils, rubbers, rulers and notebooks and brought this with us to the Dzong, hoping we could meet up with them and give this to the students directly.

We got to meet both the students and their teachers in the dzong.

We delivered the school supplies, and we all got blessed by the monks.



We also visited Ta Dzong, originally built as Watchtower, which now houses National Museum. The extensive collection includes antique thangka paintings, textiles, weapons & armour, household objects and a rich assortment of natural and historic artifacts.

Our accommodation was The Village Lodge

The Village Lodge, Paro. Inspired by the rich culture of the Bhutanese people, the lodge was built to capture the unique Bhutanese architecture in the valley and ...

The closest neighbour to our hotel was a farm house. We were invited in to their house to see how the local people actually live.

We met the grandmother and was offered to taste the local butter tea.

Traditionally, it is made from tea leaves, yak butter, water, and salt, although butter made from cow's milk is increasingly used, since the cost is lower and is easier to get hold of.



And so, finally the day had come, our excursion to Taktshang Monastery, better known as Eagles Nest. This is an walk of approx. 5hrs, starting at 2195 mas going up to 3120 mas.

It is one of the most famous of Bhutan's monasteries, perched on the side of a cliff 900m above the Paro valley floor. It is said that Guru Rinpoche arrived here on the back of a tigress and meditated at this monastery and hence it is called 'Tiger's



Our last evening in Bhutan we had our very own private Cultural evening with cocktails at The Village Lodge – some local dancers were performing, showing many different show dances, this was colourful and interesting and we also got to join them in the Dance.





We spent one night in Kathmandu on our way home to Europe.

After the great trip we had in Bhutan, with the best guide and driver who had been with us for the full week, we did not have much expectations for Kathmandu.

But we were greeted by another great guide who showed us the highlights of this city that where hit by a big earthquake just one year ago.

We visited Bhaktapur, one of the 3 Royal cities in Kathmandu valley.

It is considered a cultural gem, rich with a fascinating history and packed with Buddhist and Hindu culture and art.

Followed by Patan, Patan Durbar Square is situated at the centre of the city of Lalitpur in Nepal. It is one of the three Durbar Squares in the Kathmandu Valley, all of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Thamel is a commercial neighbourhood in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. Thamel has been the centre of the tourist industry in Kathmandu for over four decades, starting from the hippie days when many artists came to Nepal and spent weeks in Thamel.

Pashupatinath, Nepal's most important Hindu temple stands on the banks of the holy Bagmati River,

And Boudhanath stupa, it is the largest stupa in Nepal and the holiest Tibetan Buddhist temple outside Tibet. It is the centre of Tibetan culture in Kathmandu and rich in Buddhist symbolism. The stupa is located in the town of Boudha, on the eastern outskirts of Kathmandu.

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