

Dear friends,

We travelled to Bhutan at Chinese New year. Maybe some people would be interested in reading about this amazing country.

Best wishes,

Bruce Campbell

## **Beautiful Bhutan**

Try to imagine a country where there are no freeways, no traffic lights, no supermarkets, no fast food outlets, no coffee shops, no traffic jams, no pollution, no criminals, no rip-offs, no shopping malls and no noise. Even in 2010, it exists!

Bhutan, a tiny country with a population of only 600,000 lies nestled in the Himalayas between India and China. It has to be one of the most unique countries in the world. Nowhere else in the world does a nation measure its progress only in terms of the happiness of its people. I presume that there is no other king in the world who sets off into his capital city without body guards and goes into the shops and businesses to check that the owners are happy and making a good profit. He also travels out into the countryside, leaves his car at the end of the roads and walks into the mountains. If he comes across a village where there has been a landslide or a fire, he organizes immediate relief for the local families and replaces their losses.

This is a country where taxi fares are clearly displayed and if a foreigner is charged one cent more than local, the driver immediately loses his license. This is a country where marijuana grows everywhere but people are forbidden from smoking it. This is a country where no animals are killed; where the rivers are teeming with fish because Buddhists will not catch them or kill them. This is a country where not one child or adult asked us for any money. It is a land where ripping off the tourists is forbidden by law. It is a land where anyone can turn up at a farm house and be offered food and shelter, without question. It is a place where people are so open and friendly that you can turn up unannounced at their door and they will take you in and show you around.

It is a place of silence. No traffic noise. No noise from shops. No trains. Usually if you stop by a roadside or pause during a hike, the only sounds you will hear will be the bells tied around the necks of yaks, children playing or axes chopping wood.

It is a land where twenty ladies will crouch by the road breaking the smooth river rocks into small pieces with their bare hands then fit them together to make a road surface. A place where almost every building is created by a family and their friends working together and stamping the clay walls into place in their bare feet. A place where most construction materials are moved around by two people with a pole slung between their shoulders supporting an old hessian bag. A place where most of the fields are ploughed by oxen and wooden ploughs. A place where large family groups do all of the planting and harvesting by hand. A place where half of the population survives by only eating what they grow on their small farms or gather from the local forests. A place where all school children wear a uniform based on the national costume. A place where both men and boys quite unself-consciously wear dresses. A place where parents and teachers are still firmly in control.

So what is the catch? There has to be one, right? There were a few small signs of cracks in the system. In the two major towns we saw some young people with “Western” hairstyles. We saw a few boys wandering around with their jeans at half-mast, a trend they apparently picked up from Korean TV. We saw a few drunks lying around. We heard a couple of stories of alcohol abuse. We heard from our guides that many children are also influenced by what they see on Korean TV channels (why Korea?).

My advice is simple. Get there soon. Less than 10% of the population have used the Internet. There are very few satellite dishes. Tourists numbers are strictly limited. Go before all this changes and experience a country that has amazing temples, beautiful mountain scenery, friendly people and a unique, unspoiled Buddhist culture which is practiced by everyone.

On a purely practical level, the only way to get into Bhutan is with a government approved travel agency. They will arrange everything including your flight in from Bangkok on Druk Air (with the most spectacular landing you will ever experience on a commercial flight!!), your visa, comfortable, warm and clean hotels and all meals and sightseeing. The cost is \$200US per person per day. You need 6-7 days to see the temples and major sights in the west of the country. Take more time if you intend to hike or travel to the east.

We travelled in Chinese New Year with **Bhutan Visit** and would give them our highest recommendation. Their guide, driver, accommodation and services were exemplary.

See: <http://www.bhutanvisit.com> or email: [info@bhutanvisit.com](mailto:info@bhutanvisit.com) and address your letter to Louisa.

Any questions or further information, contact me at [seachange2000@hotmail.com](mailto:seachange2000@hotmail.com)

Bruce Campbell



A typical Bhutanese farmhouse.



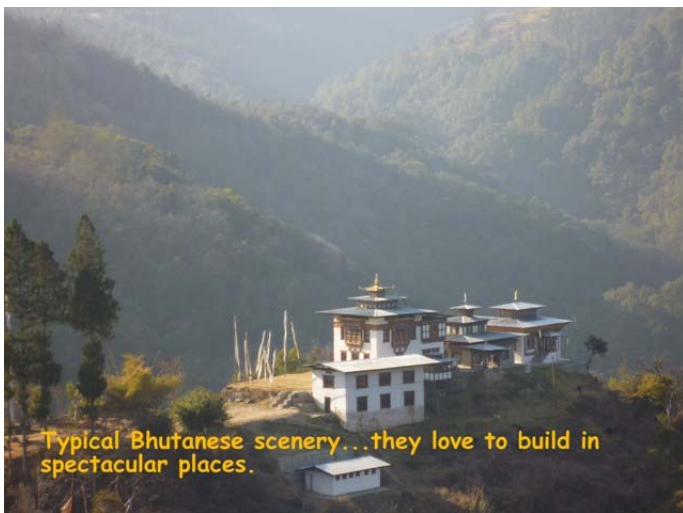
Prayer wheels in action at a temple in Thimphu.



The awesome Tiger's Nest temple.



An old man on his way to pray at a temple.



Typical Bhutanese scenery...they love to build in spectacular places.