

October 3, 2007

The Peaceful Kingdom

Bhutan is certainly that. The country has only about 650,000 citizens. Thimphu, the capital city, has only 60,000 people and 80,000 dogs. One dog starts barking at 3:00 a.m. and every other dog in the city joins in. Earplugs are a blessed relief. 73% of the country is forest. Many of the younger Bhutanese speak English, which makes life easier for us. It is a Buddhist monarchy with rigid control over the country. There has been no religious freedom and many have been jailed for trying to exercise the same. It is such an unusual country in Asia with all the natural beauty, relative prosperity and peace.

In 2008 they will be celebrating the 100th year of the monarchy; the inauguration of the new, young king; and the introduction of a parliamentary form of government. The new king, 'The Dragon's Gift', Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk, a god incarnate, is a graduate of Wheaton College and Oxford University. There is great hope for change with this 28 year old king. We met with the leader of one of the political parties yesterday whose goal is to see freedom of religion introduced. It is a tremendously crucial time in the history of this area. "The heart of the King is in the hand of the Lord".

We traveled to the town of Paro where the only airport in the country exists. It is an airport, although new, makes the 7 hour drive back through the mountains to India look safe. The runway is very short in tight valley at 2300 metres. The mountains surround the valley 360 degrees to height of over 3000 metres. We watched a 737 dive down perform several 'S' maneuvers around the mountains and swoop onto the tarmac. It would not be possible in fog or wind. There is no margin of error.



Bhutan is the country to visit if you are into white water rafting or kayaking. There are hundreds of kilometers of Class 4 & 5 rapids with not a single rafter in sight. Tourism is just beginning in the country. Hotels are springing up all around the centre of the city. You are only allowed to visit if you spend at least \$200 US per day and pay in advance.

We had to be quite careful in where we traveled as tourists. We registered at checkpoints throughout the country. We could not speak in public gatherings, although our partners arranged for us to encourage believers at various points. There is a high risk to contact. I waited until we returned to India to write this letter.

We had our 7 hour trip back to India by road. You can only understand how isolated this country is when you travel this road through astonishing heights of the surrounding mountains and realize that it is the *only road* to the outside world.



Wolf and I have a couple of days in rural Assam, North Bengal, 2 more in Calcutta before we start heading west to Canada. The day with the 100 orphans in Sitali was a highlight. We wanted to stuff a few in our suitcase and bring them back to Canada.

Thanks for your interest and prayers

Phil Dempster

You know you have been traveling too long when.....

- You think putting your hands together and bowing is a normal way to say hello
- Nasi Goreng sounds like something good to eat
- You actually sit down to write something like this
- You can calculate the time back home without your world clock
- You are able to clasp and unclasp your seatbelt without the Flight attendant showing you how
- You can recite the airline safety procedure better than the stewardess
- You purposely leave change in your pocket going through security so they will frisk you
- These signs make sense;

"Please leave your values at the front desk."

- -In a Paris Hotel

"The flattening of underwear with pleasure is the job of the chambermaid."

- -In a Yugoslavian Hotel

"Stop: Drive Sideways."

-Detour sign in Kyushi, Japan

"When passenger of foot heave in sight, tootle the horn. Trumpet him melodiously at first, but if he still obstacles your passage then tootlehim with vigor."

-From a brochure of a car rental firm in Tokyo

-

[Return to Travelogues](#)



[Ministry info](#)

