



*Journey to Bhutan --
Land of the Thunder Dragon*

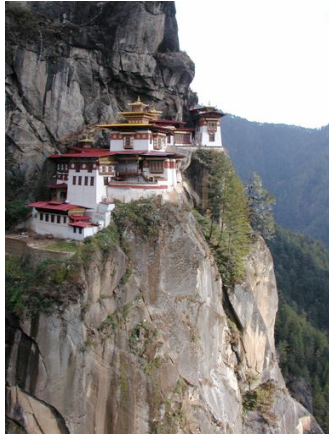
May 1 - 19, 2011

A Customized Travel Program to the Kingdom of Bhutan
prepared for
The University of Texas at El Paso
and
The El Paso Opera

-- Documentation Summary --

JOIN US FOR
AN EXTRAORDINARY CULTURAL ADVENTURE . . .

OPERA IN BHUTAN !!!



Few places on Earth compare to the great natural beauty and rich cultural heritage that is found in the remote Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. Located between India and China in the high Eastern Himalayas, Bhutan rises within just a few hundred miles from the steamy plains of Assam to some of the world's highest peaks along its northern border with Tibet. This diversity of ecosystems -- representing most of the climatic zones found on planet Earth but packaged within an area only about the size of Switzerland -- also provides refuge to many thousands of species of birds, plants, insects and animals that make Bhutan one of the world's most treasured environmental sanctuaries, too.

The history of Bhutan is closely associated with the spread of Buddhism throughout the Himalayas, and Bhutan is the last place on Earth where the Vajrayana form of Mahayana Buddhism is practiced as a way of life that influences all aspects of society. Because Bhutan has never been colonized or occupied by any foreign invaders since the coming of Buddhism more than a thousand years ago, its cultural heritage and traditions remain authentic and intact. The authenticity of its robust cultural life also stems from the fact that Bhutan remains largely isolated from the rest of the modern world -- with the first road to the outside (India) constructed only in the early 1960s and with the number of permitted tourists admitted to the Kingdom still averaging below 20,000 annually.

This especially unique experiential travel opportunity is offered in conjunction with development and production of the very first Western opera that will incorporate important artistic elements reflecting Bhutanese culture. The opera is 'Acis & Galatea' by GF Handel, whose pastoral themes and celebration of metamorphosis resonate deeply with the most transformative spiritual experiences represented in classical Western as well as Eastern philosophical traditions. This production of 'Acis & Galatea' is a cooperative project between the University of Texas at El Paso and the El Paso Opera, the Royal Government of Bhutan, opera professionals resident in Rome, and other important international collaborators.

Throughout the trip, European and American artistic and educational directors from the project will be working with their Bhutanese counterparts on important production elements; and, accompanying travelers will have the chance to attend behind-the-scenes creative meetings with Bhutanese artists, weavers, dancers and musicians as the elements of the opera begin to take shape. Because of the unique nature of the trip as part of a historically important musical work-in-progress and to ensure the highest quality cultural experience possible in Bhutan, space is limited.

This very special journey into the heart of Bhutan -- from the Western highland areas and the capital of Thimphu continuing with overland travel to Bumthang that will include visits to Bhutan's most important cultural and environmental sites and the opportunity to attend a sacred masked-dance festival in Ura (one of Bhutan's most picturesque villages) -- is designed to provide an introduction to the culture and environment of the Eastern Himalayas and the gentle way of life of the Bhutanese people -- an intellectually and spiritually exciting journey designed to provide a sense of discovery, adventure, and renewal.



DAILY PROVISIONAL ITINERARY & SCHEDULE

Day 1: Sunday, May 1, 2011 -- *Travel to Bangkok*

Departures to Bangkok.

Day 2: Monday, May 2, 2011 -- *Arrivals in Bangkok*

Arrivals in Bangkok (usually late evening around midnight). Transfer on arrival to the Novotel Hotel adjacent to the airport terminal (advance discount reservations available).

Day 3: Tuesday, May 3, 2011 -- *Bangkok*

Leisure day to rest and re-set the body-clock to the new time zones, as well as an opportunity to explore some of Bangkok (one of the world's most interesting and exotic cities). Overnight at the Novotel (recommended).

Day 4: Wednesday, May 4, 2011 -- *Travel to Bhutan*

Very early morning departure from Bangkok for the flight up into Bhutan with late-morning arrival at the Kingdom's only airport in the beautiful Paro Valley. Afternoon visit to the National Museum in the Ta Dzong and the main Rinpung Dzong (center of monastic and civic life in the Paro Valley and site of the filming of 'Little Buddha' in 1995). Lodging at the Gangtey Palace (historic 19th-century compound that was once the residence of the Paro Penlop).



Day 5: Thursday, May 5, 2011 -- *Travel to Thimphu (Capital of Bhutan)*

Early morning departure for Thimphu -- capital of Bhutan. The drive will follow the flow of the river out of Paro until forking near Chhuzom. Stop en route to see Tachogong Lhakhang and the rebuilt traditional 'chain'-bridge (where monkeys also can sometimes be seen). After lunch in Thimphu, afternoon visits to the Folk Heritage Center, National Institute for Zorig Chuzom (Bhutan's Thirteen Traditional Arts), Textile Museum, and (time-permitting) paper-making and incense-making sites. Lodging in downtown Thimphu.

Day 6: Friday, May 6, 2011 -- *Thimphu*

Continued visits to cultural and historical sites in and around Thimphu. Lodging in downtown Thimphu.

Day 7: Saturday, May 7, 2011 -- *Thimphu*

Morning visit to Thimphu's weekly market for a colorful slice of Bhutanese life followed by a visit to the main dzong housing the offices of His Majesty the King and the summer residence of the Je Khenpo. Lunch at the Royal Golf Club just outside the dzong with views of the mountains surrounding Thimphu. Afternoon at leisure to explore the streets of Thimphu. Lodging in downtown Thimphu.

Day 8: Sunday, May 8, 2011 -- *Thimphu*

Morning drive up the Thimphu Valley for a picnic lunch and an afternoon hike in the forest to the historic cliff-side Cheri and/or Tango monasteries. Afternoon return to Thimphu. Lodging in downtown Thimphu.

Day 9: Monday, May 9, 2011 -- *Thimphu*

Final opportunities for visits to cultural and historical sites in and around Thimphu (and shopping). Lodging in downtown Thimphu.

Day 10: Tuesday, May 10, 2011 -- *Punakha*

Early morning departure for Punakha -- with lunch at Dochu La providing (weather-permitting) some of the best views of the high Himalayas towards Tibet. Stops en route at points of interest (including Chime Lkaxhang (temple built by Lama Drukpa Kunley (affectionately known as the 'Divine Madman' because of his unorthodox ways of sharing Buddhist teachings)). After lunch, an afternoon visit to Punakha Dzong -- one of Bhutan's most beautiful situated on an island on the river. Lodging at a hilltop inn with views overlooking the river valley.



Day 11: Wednesday, May 11, 2011 -- *Trongsa*

Early morning departure for Trongsa -- ancestral home of Bhutan's Royal Family (the Wangchucks). After crossing Pele La (one of the highest mountain passes in the Kingdom), travel on towards Trongsa Dzong -- considered the most impressive in all of Bhutan (built in 1644 and described as being perched so high in the mountains that the clouds float below). Visits to the dzong and to the new museum dedicated to the history of Bhutan's Royal Family. Overnight in Trongsa.

Day 12: Thursday, May 12, 2011 -- *On to Bumthang (Jakar)*

After breakfast, continue on to Bumthang -- the cultural and environmental heart of the Kingdom. Periodic stops at points of interest along the way. Overnight in Jakar.

Day 13: Friday, May 13, 2011 -- *Jakar*

Visits to cultural and historic sites of interest in and around Jakar (providing also time simply to relax). Lodging in Jakar.

Day 14: Saturday, May 14, 2011 -- *Ura*

Early morning drive to Ura -- which will be hosting its annual masked-dance festival ('tsechu') rarely witnessed by foreigners. The masked-dance festivals (including the great black-hat dance with drums, the black-hat dance with magical daggers, and the dance of the judgment of the dead) are a defining aspect of Bhutan's remarkable cultural heritage, and the festival at Ura is one of Bhutan's most vibrant. Return to Jakar for the night.



Day 15: Sunday, May 15, 2011 -- *To Wangdue*

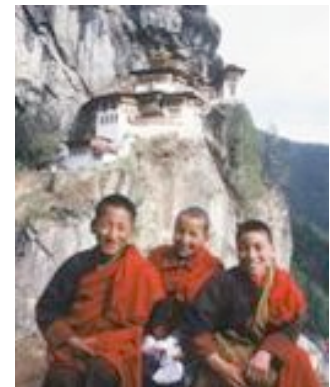
Begin the return to Western Bhutan with stops en route for lunch and at points of interest along the way (including rhododendron forests). Overnight near Wangdue at Kyichu Lodge (situated along a white-water river just outside Wangdue).

Day 16: Monday, May 16, 2011 -- *To Paro*

Early morning departure for Paro with mid-afternoon arrival (allowing time for a visit to the village or simply time to unwind). Lodging at the Gangtey Palace.

Day 17: Tuesday, May 17, 2011 -- *Taktsang*

Travel up the Paro Valley towards Taktsang -- most sacred monastery in Bhutan hugging the cliffs 2,000-feet above Paro Valley. The upward path towards Taktsang passes through forests of fir and rhododendron before reaching the higher elevation forests of live oak and hanging mosses. Every effort will be made to accomplish the climb to enter the monastery, which was rededicated in early summer 2005 with completely restored paintings and sculpture. Lodging at the Gangtey Palace.



Day 18: Wednesday, May 18, 2011 -- *Departure from Bhutan*

Morning flight to Bangkok with late night connections back home (unless additional stay-over has been arranged).

Day 19: Thursday, May 19, 2011 -- *Arrivals Back Home*

Arrivals back home . . .

The Setting of the Trip . . .



Weather-factors are highly variable in Bhutan (depending on the season). But, May is one of the most beautiful times to travel to the eastern Himalayas, with daytime temperatures typically ranging in the mid-70s with nighttime temperatures ranging to the mid-50s (depending on location).

Flowers are abundant (particularly the forests of remarkably diverse rhododendron near the high-mountain passes en route to Jakar in central Bhutan).

Health Information

There are no immunization requirements for entry into Bhutan. Anti-diarrhetics (it can happen) and motion-sickness pills (because of the mountain roads) are recommended. Bottled water is available throughout.



Traveling into Bhutan



Travel from Bangkok to Paro (Bhutan) is provided by DrukAir (the only airline permitted to fly into the Kingdom). Entry visas are secured in advance as part of any customized travel program to the Kingdom. Travel to Bhutan on Drukair as well as for the return to Bangkok is included in the program.



Traveling in Bhutan

All over-land travel in Bhutan is provided by private vehicles with local drivers .

Transportation logistics allow for maximum possible flexibility to ensure comfort as well as opportunities to stop at multiple sites of interest for photography or other individual needs.

Water and refreshments are provided.

High-Altitude Considerations

The elevation of most lodgings is between 6,500 ft –8,000 ft (depending on locale // similar to the elevations at Yellowstone National Park). Short passes as high as 12,000 ft may be experienced on the road.

A Note about Accommodations

Hotels with cultural interests as well as optimum settings (most are situated on hilltops or along rivers providing quiet views of the surrounding areas) are being selected. Most traditional Bhutanese lodges are pleasant, clean and comfortable with friendly and attentive staffs -- but not 'luxurious' by international standards. Baths and showers are simple and functional with plenty of hot water. Nights can be cool in Bhutan (depending on locale and the season) -- extra blankets are the norm where and when necessary. Food is generally well-prepared, plentiful and delicious. Every effort is made to try to accommodate any special dietary needs with advance notice.



Accompanied by . . .

In addition to knowledgeable and professional local Bhutanese guides, the program will be joined by the following professionals from the international opera in Bhutan project and their prominent Bhutanese counterparts from Bhutan's leading cultural institutions and the Royal Government:

David Grabarkewitz is the Artistic and General Director of the El Paso Opera as well as Resident Stage Director for the New York City Opera at Lincoln Center. He holds his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the Hartt School of Music in West Hartford, Connecticut, and has taught and directed master classes at the Hartt School of Music, Boston Conservatory of Music, the New England Conservatory of Music, Georgia State University, Louisiana State University, and the Juilliard School of Music. He has directed works for the Florida Grand Opera, Connecticut Opera, New Jersey Opera, Opera Omaha, Ft. Lauderdale Opera, Central City Opera and the Colorado Symphony Orchestra. His production of *la Bohème* was described by *The New York Times* as “gripping, the best *Bohème* in New York” and an “inspired direction” by the *New Yorker*, and his production of *Madama Butterfly* was awarded the 2008 Prime Time Emmy Award for Best Live Classical Music or Dance.



Elisa Fraser Wilson is Associate Professor of Music and Voice at the University of Texas at El Paso and Director of Educational Programs at the El Paso Opera. Dr. Wilson holds degrees in music education and performance from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Wichita State University (KS) and a doctoral degree in Choral Conducting and Literature from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Dr. Wilson also is an active performer with experience in a variety of musical styles including opera, musical theater, jazz and popular music, including performances with the El Paso Opera as Annina in *La Traviata*, with the UTEP Union Dinner Theater as Eva Peron in *Evita* and Victoria Grant in *Victor/Victoria*, and with the Music Theatre Company as Mama Euralie in *Once On This Island* and Camille Penza in *Romeo and Bernadette*.

Aaron Carpenè is a conductor, soloist and ensemble member who performs extensively in Europe and abroad as a keyboard interpreter of early music. Born in Perth (Australia) but now living in Rome, Mr. Carpenè studied at the University of Western Australia and the Conservatory of Music of Venice. Mr. Carpenè is currently Professor of Music Studies at John Cabot University in Rome, and is frequently invited to hold specialist masterclasses in Early Performance Practice. He has recorded the world premiere recording of the keyboard works by Paolo Quagliati for Tactus records. He also has a special interest in the musical traditions of the Middle and Far East, and performs as artist-in-residence at the Conservatory of Music in Damascus and the Academy of Performing Arts in Hong Kong.



Stefano Vizioli is an internationally recognized director of opera currently resident in Rome, whose work has been staged in leading opera houses throughout Europe, North and South America, and Asia. Collaborating with outstanding artists and designers and promoting emerging talent, he takes a special interest in contemporary opera, baroque masterpieces, and in producing opera for wider audiences. Mr. Vizioli holds a degree in piano from the Conservatorio San Pietro a Majella in Naples, and has produced radio and television programs dealing with the world of opera in Europe as well as the United States. He also has been a Visiting Professor of Music at Cincinnati University and the Indiana University School of Music in Bloomington, as well as an instructor at the Opera Theatre and Music Festival of Lucca in Tuscany.



Preston Scott has been working with the Royal Government of Bhutan since 1998 on a range of environmental and cultural conservation projects. A graduate of the college and law school of the University of Virginia, he has worked in more than 30 countries on five continents and is frequent traveler to the eastern Himalayas. Between 2004-2008, he developed and was curator of the historic Bhutan program at the Smithsonian Institution's 2008 Folklife Festival in Washington DC, which was the largest celebration of Bhutanese life and culture ever hosted outside of the remote Himalayan Kingdom. Mr. Scott has developed this very special travel program to Bhutan for the opera project with an eye towards maximizing participants' opportunities to experience direct and close-up the rich diversity of artistic life found throughout the Kingdom that many visitors never see.

Costs

This exclusive trip to Bhutan is offered at US\$8,500 per person, and includes round-trip economy airfare from Bangkok to Bhutan, all hotel accommodations in Bhutan on twin-sharing (double-occupancy) basis, all meals/tea in Bhutan (breakfast/lunch/dinner), local transportation (private vehicle) while in Bhutan with professional guides & drivers, entrance fees to all places of interest in Bhutan, Bhutan visa and handling fees, and all other fees and taxes charged by the Royal Government of Bhutan. The cost does not include trans-Pacific or other airfare or transportation costs to Bangkok, transit hotel or meals in Bangkok, extra baggage charges (if any), 'bar', laundry, single room supplement (if requested), internet, telephone, tips, and other personal expenses. Travelers will receive acknowledgement that \$5,000 of the costs may be treated as a tax-deductible charitable contribution to support the educational and artistic objectives of the opera project through the University of Texas at El Paso and the El Paso Opera.

For more information or to reserve space on the trip, please contact Dr. Elisa Wilson at the Department of Music at the University of Texas at El Paso (tel (915) 747-8708 // email: ewilson@utep.edu) or Preston Scott (tel (941) 351-7571 // email: ptscott@aol.com).





Selected Suggested Readings and Publications . . .

***BHUTAN: HIMALAYAN MOUNTAIN KINGDOM*, by Francoise Pommaret (current ed.).**

***TREASURES OF THE THUNDER DRAGON: A PORTRAIT OF BHUTAN*, by HM Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck (2006).**

***BHUTAN: MOUNTAIN FORTRESS OF THE GODS*, by Ralph Von Gersdorff (1997).**

***BEYOND THE SKY AND THE EARTH: A JOURNEY INTO BHUTAN*, by Jamie Zeppa (1999).**

***LONELY PLANET BHUTAN*, by Stan Armington (current ed.)**

***A PAINTER'S YEAR IN THE FORESTS OF BHUTAN*, by A.K. Hellum (2001).**

***SHANGRI-LA ON THE BORDER: THE BHUTANESE ARCHITECTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO, UTEP* (University Communications) (2001).**

***BOLD BHUTAN BECKONS*, by Tim Fischer & Tshering Tashi (2009).**

