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Travel with Strabo Photo Tour Collection

THE SPIRIT OF BHUTAN

Photographic and Cultural Tour

Led by Karen Gordon Schulman

April 20-May 3, 2017

Trip Highlights ~

- **Land cost includes** Bhutanese Travel Visa and estimated Business Class round trip airfare Bangkok/Paro, included meal tips, and hotel tips.
- Glimpse the traditions and customs disappearing from the rest of the Himalayan world.
- Full day hike to **Taktsang Dzong**, more commonly known as the **Tiger's Nest**.
- Photographing amidst the ancient **Buddhist Monasteries and Temples**.
- **Phobjikha**: Valley of Gangtey is one of the most beautiful spots in Bhutan.
- **Bumthang** Region: unique candlelit prayers at a private monastery.
- Twelve days with acclaimed tour guide and professional photographer **Karen Gordon Schulman**.

For more information or to register contact the
Strabo Photo Tour Collection: 607-756-8676
www.phototc.com



Spring is possibly the most beautiful time of the year, ablaze with a fabulous array of bright colors from spring blooms. The valleys are green and lush and fruit trees and Rhododendrons are blossoming. Join Karen Schulman, as she returns to share Bhutan with you and fellow photographers alike. This will be Karen's third trip to Bhutan and she invites you to continue on a wonderful sharing opportunity with her. On Karen's first trip to Bhutan, she found it was very difficult and expensive for the Bhutanese to obtain corrective eyeglasses. We encourage you to start collecting items, and disburse amongst her Bhutanese friends as you travel the countryside.



Karen is also a wonderful photography instructor, and there will be opportunities in the evenings to have photo discussions, and photo review, so everyone can learn and share from one another. If you prefer a private photo review, Karen will be pleased to set aside some time for you.

Bhutan's ancient history relies heavily on Buddhism, local mythology, and legend. This country, nestled in the heart of the Himalayan Mountains, has, for centuries, remained a mystery to the rest of the world. Ghosts, angels, yetis, demons, and saints shaped the past. Fortunate are the few travelers to visit the Buddhist kingdom of Druk Yul (Land of the Thunder Dragon), or Bhutan as it is known to the outside world. Bhutan is holding on to its cultural traditions despite the homogenization process that has engulfed so many other small countries.



The tour includes opportunities to photograph some of Bhutan's most visually exciting places, including the famed Tiger's Nest monastery, dramatic landscapes, villagescapes, and the beautiful Bhutanese people. Our adventure includes the Shangri-La setting of the Paro Valley, the remote Wangdi Valley, the capital city of Thimphu, and the cultural heartland of the country, its thriving spiritual center abounding with numerous centuries old temples, shrines, and monasteries. There will be unique photographic opportunities that other travelers do not have the opportunity to experience, such as a private monastery and nunnery in the Bumthang Region. These provide intimate moments where you witness and photograph members during their candlelit prayers.

We invite you, the inquisitive traveler, to join photographer **Karen Gordon Schulman** on this special tour of Bhutan. We will have a cordial welcome in this country with its brilliant colors, compelling architecture, irresistible allure, and warm hospitality.

Photo Leader:

Photographic artist, writer and educator, **Karen Gordon Schulman** is based in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. She majored in education and psychology at Penn State and continued her studies at UCLA in 1979 to shift gears and study fine art and commercial photography. She uses a camera to capture the essence of a place and as a tool in the lifelong process of self-discovery. She is known for her hand colored black and white imagery and eclectic travel photography. Her current passion is exploring the exciting world of 'iPhoneography.' In addition to creating art with her own iPhone, Karen leads iPhone and iPad specific photo workshops throughout the year and offers guidance during international photo tours to those who are interested. Since 1985, when Karen created Focus Adventures, she has been offering small group photographic workshops and tours that emphasize using the camera for enrichment of creative spirit and development of personal vision. She has experience working with all ages, from 7 to 70 and beyond, and is dedicated to incorporating trip participants' personal awareness with once-in-a-lifetime travel opportunities. Karen has been working with Strabo Photo Tour Collection since 2000.

"I encourage each person to give themselves permission to make mistakes, permission to create," Karen says. "The more we learn to "see" with our mind, heart, and spirit, the more of an adventure life becomes. I welcome all skill levels and enjoy offering guidance to those with stronger left-or right-brain approaches to photography, to strengthen the other side."

"On a photo tour, I enjoy guiding participants to expand their creativity and/or technical skills, increase their confidence and have fun! Instruction can be as much or as little as they prefer. I look forward to seeing you on one of my tours!"

"For over 30 years I have followed my heart and mind to pick up a camera and use it to reflect on my inner consciousness. Though I am not a Buddhist, nor do I have extensive knowledge of Buddhist teachings, I have been influenced by various Buddhist Masters, including the work of the late Zen Abbot, John Daido Loori, whose photography and teaching about the Zen of Creativity very much resonates with my own work. He believed that there are practices to guide one to a new way of seeing and creating. Through my reading, research, practice and expression, I have learned that the work I do best is with the subjects that I resonate with, and I am happy to share my own practices with trip participants." www.focusadventures.com

Testimonial

I went on the trip to Bhutan expecting to watch my wife, the avid photographer, take pictures while I enjoyed touring and learning about an exotic land and people. In truth, it was successful at that level, a rich cultural experience. I was caught by surprise, however, at how much Karen taught me about photography, largely using my iPhone. The root of it was Karen's ability to encourage and inspire, while also providing feedback and constructive advice. I left for Bhutan uninterested in photography. I returned passionately dedicated to becoming a photographer. It certainly has changed how I see. In fact, I believe it has changed my life. I look forward to taking future trips with Karen. ~ Joe Turner



What to Expect

This tour is designed to be a photo tour, and, as such, we must be flexible in our scheduling. Much of what we do, and when we do it, will depend upon weather, light, and the permission of the government-operated Bhutan Tourism Corporation. In the event that changes may occur, we will need to be flexible, which will also allow us to take advantage of new photographic opportunities.

Bhutan has made great strides in tourist accommodations and services in recent years, but please remember this is still a developing country, so we may experience occasional inconveniences. All our accommodations will be clean and comfortable, with private toilet and shower/bath. The hotels have been chosen for their proximity to prime photographic locations. Majority of accommodations do not have elevators, and rooms are on second or third floors, although there will be porters for your luggage.



Health and Fitness

Tour participants should be in good health and good physical condition to get the most out of the trip. You will find that every day includes many steps to gain access to each Dzong we visit. Although we will not be running marathons, we will be taking long walks in order to reach the prime photographic locations. We will be at various altitudes ranging from 4,000' above sea level to 11,000'. While you will not be required to climb these peaks, some of the best scenic views are from the tops of these formations. There will be a few long drives on very winding, narrow roads.

Itinerary

April 20/21 and prior Travel Days (It is necessary to add travel days to tour dates)
In order to experience such a remote country, it is necessary to fly in to Paro, Bhutan on Druk Airlines. You cannot make your own reservations for your flight into Bhutan. The airfare from Bangkok-Paro-Bangkok has been included in your land cost. Pending changes by Druk Air, our group will need to be at the Bangkok Airport at 4:45am on April 22. It is therefore necessary for you to book at least one night stay in Bangkok, Thailand. Although there are many hotel choices in Bangkok, we do recommend spending the evening of April 21 at the Novotel Airport Hotel (reservations and payment made through hotel website which will be sent upon enrollment). The group will take hotel transfer to the airport very early on the morning of the 22nd, where you will present your e-tickets sent to you prior to departure (***business class has been included for additional baggage limit and faster check-in***). If you have any questions, please contact our office.

Your departure from home will need to be **April 20 or prior** in order to arrive in Bangkok April 21; the actual date is dependent upon your departure city. Most flights arrive in the evening, but Cathay Pacific lands mid-morning, making for an easier transition. There is a complimentary shuttle to the Novotel Suvarnabhumi Hotel.

Note – The flight from Bangkok to Paro departs very early tomorrow morning. If your flight into Bangkok is delayed by even just a few hours, it would be easy to miss the group departure flight to Paro. You may want to take advantage of visiting a few of the Bangkok

sights, recovering from jet lag, and assuring yourself that you will be on time for the Bhutan flight, by spending additional evenings in Bangkok.



April 22

Bangkok – Paro - Thimphu

This morning we will return to the BKK airport via the hotel shuttle service for the flight to Paro, flight departure time 6:50am (reporting time 4:45am) on Druk Airline. We will be met by our guide in Bhutan and driven an hour and a half to the capital, Thimphu. After checking into the hotel and lunch, we will spend some time in town. Thimphu has a population of approximately 45,000, composed mainly of monks, the Kingdom's royal family, government and civil service, and a growing middle class. Its emergence as a capital city began in 1952. *Overnight Migmar Hotel (B, L, D) two evenings.*

April 23

Thimphu

After breakfast we will photograph the National Memorial Chorten, with its sun-catching golden finial, making it one of the most visible religious structures in Thimphu; for many people it is the focus of their daily worship. *Chortens* are Buddhist reliquaries and memorials to the teachings of the Buddha. Sometimes

stupas carry relics of the Buddha or revered monks. Whether or not there are relics inside, the stupas mark the landscape with reminders of the Buddha's teachings. Also this morning, it may be possible to gain entry into Tashichho Dzong (dzong is a fortress-monastery), the most important monastery in the kingdom. In addition to housing the offices of the king's government, Tashichho is also the summer residence of the central monk body.

After lunch we will visit a traditional weaving studio and the Choki Traditional Art School (if school is in session), which focuses on education of Bhutanese traditional painting, woodcarving, and embroidery for socially and economically disadvantaged youth of Bhutan. These visits will be wonderful photographic opportunities in the long-established art and craft techniques of the Bhutanese people.



April 24 Trongsa

Today we continue our journey across the Dochu La Pass, from where we will get our first look at the chain of Himalayan peaks strung along the northern horizon. The pass has 108 chortens, honoring those who laid down their lives while flushing out insurgents from southern Bhutan in December 2003. Next we reach Pelela Pass, which was, during ancient times, the boundary between western and central Bhutan. From Pelela, we drive down through dwarf bamboo vegetation, grazed by the migrating yaks during winter. En route visit Chendebji Chorten erected in the eighteenth century by a Tibetan over the remains of an evil spirit that was subdued at this spot. The *chorten* has painted eyes at the four cardinal points.

We drive for another hour after lunch, reaching the spectacular landscape of Trongsa and its impressive *dzong*. We shall stop for a few minutes at the view point to see the *dzong* stretched along a ridge above a ravine. This town is right in the middle of the country, separated from both east and west by high mountain ranges. A large influx of Tibetans immigrated here in the late 1950's and 1960's. *Overnight Yangkhil Resort (B, L, D).*

April 25-27 Trongsa - Bumthang

The Trongsa Dzong is considered one of the most magnificent pieces of architecture in Bhutan, and the strategic location gave it great power over this part of the country. The only trail between eastern and western Bhutan still leads straight through Trongsa and used to run directly through the dzong itself. Given time we will also visit the Ta Dzong on the hillside above the town. During ancient times, Ta Dzong used to be a watchtower to guard Trongsa.

We drive further east, taking time to photograph the beautiful landscape of this region. Arriving to our hotel in the late afternoon, we will have a bit of time for rest, dinner, and perhaps some evening photography.

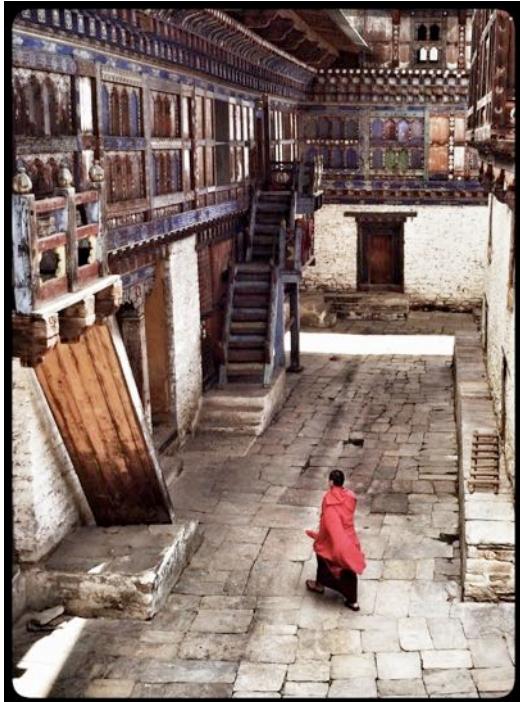
The fabulous temple is believed to have been built in the year 659 by the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo in order to subdue a Tibetan demoness. Inside the main Jampey (or Jampa) Lhakhang are three stone steps representing ages. The first signifies the past, the age of the Historical Buddha. This step has descended into the ground and is covered with a wooden plank. The next age is the present, and its step is level with the floor. The top step represents a new age. It is believed that when the top step sinks to ground level, the gods will become like humans and the world, as it is now, will end.

We will experience rare opportunities not afforded other travelers, such as being invited to a private monastery and nunnery in the Bumthang region. Here we will join monks during their evening candlelit prayers. Given time we will visit a traditional farmhouse, providing opportunity to interact with the local families and learn more about their lifestyle. *Overnight River Lodge/Bumthang (B, L, D).*

April 28 Gangtey

After breakfast in Bumthang we continue west to Gangtey, with photographic stops along the way; we may even see the red Panda at Pelela. Driving through the mountains and over a high pass, we then enter Phobjikha Valley, popularly known to be the home of the black-necked cranes. The Bhutanese have great respect for these heavenly birds. We will also visit

Gangtey Goenpa, the only Nyingmapa (oldest of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism) monastery in western Bhutan. *Overnight Yolouke Guest House (B, L, D).*



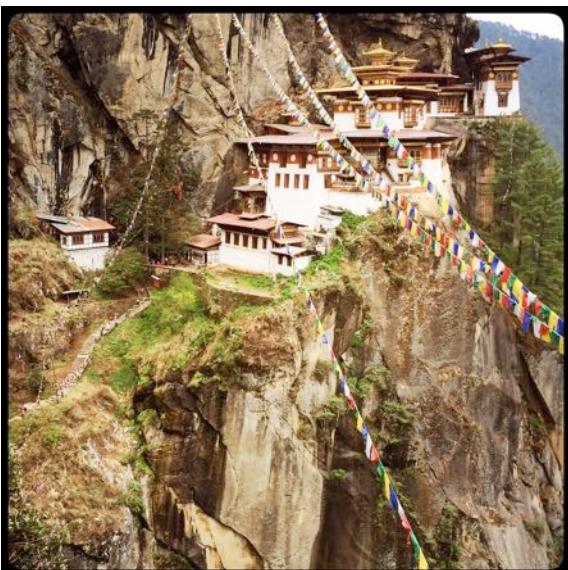
April 29-30 Wangdi - Punakha

After breakfast, we will continue our drive to Punakha, stopping for lunch and photograph the nearby Wangdiphodrang Dzong from a distance (current renovations taking place due to 2012 fire). Like many other dzongs, it is situated on a dramatic promontory overlooking the valley, because its first purpose was that of fortress, protecting the valley against potential raids from Tibet. They later took on their second purpose, that of a monastery for the training of monks and places of worship for laymen in the vicinity. In addition to photographing in and around the dzong, we will also take advantage of its setting to photograph this fertile, lowland (4,400') valley, with its quaint houses and terraced fields.

Wangdi sits in the heart of the Punakha Valley, and we will devote a full day today to exploring this valley. The Punakha Dzong dates back to the seventeenth century and was the winter seat of the highest lama in Bhutan until the 1950's. It is spectacularly situated at the confluence of the Mo and Phu Rivers. After lunch we will hike to the fifteenth century temple of the Divine Madman, walking through rice fields and farm houses. It will provide opportunity for those wishing to photograph the phallic paintings on the houses; these paintings are believed to keep away the evil spirits and bad luck. *Overnight Vara Lodge (B, L, D).*

May 1 & 2 Paro

After an early breakfast we will continue back to Paro, arriving in the afternoon. Depending on weather and photographic opportunities along the way, we may have time to visit the Ta Dzong, once a watchtower, or the Rinpung Dzong, built in 1646. The southern approach to the dzong has a traditional roofed cantilever bridge called a Nemi Zam. A walk across the bridge offers a spectacular view of the architecture and an opportunity to tread the same path as the ancient warriors.



Our next day we will have a full day hike up to Taktsang Dzong, more commonly known as the Tiger's Nest. It was established in the eighth century when Padmasambava, the country's patron saint, who brought Buddhism to Bhutan, flew here on the back of his mythical tigress consort to meditate. The main buildings sit astride a sheer rock cliff face more than 2000' above Paro Valley. The most prominent building burned to the ground in 1998, but was rebuilt with no visual architectural differences from its predecessor. Our hike begins at roughly 8,000' and goes to just over 10,000'; we return to the valley floor in late afternoon, and enjoy a farewell dinner with our local guide this evening. *Drukchen Lodge or similar (B, L, D).*

May 3

Paro - Bangkok

After breakfast we will transfer to the airport for a morning flight back to Bangkok, arriving at approximately 5-6pm (subject to change by airline). The majority of carriers have flights returning to the States around midnight* (landing May 4 in U.S.). You can choose to stay at the airport until your return flight, return to Novotel via the shuttle for day room, or additional night(s), or travel onward to other destinations. (B)

*Please note: We cannot be responsible for miss-connections between Druk Air and your other flights. Careful attention needs to be paid to flight times, and dates of travel.

Note: This itinerary has been carefully constructed to assure participants the best Bhutan has to offer; however, should events arise that are beyond our control, itinerary, activities, and hotel arrangements are subject to change without notice. Be assured that we will make substitutions that are as similar in quality and interest as possible.

General Information

Land cost: \$6595*, based upon minimum of 7 paying participants. There is a small group surcharge of \$400 if 4-6 participants. ***This includes estimated cost (approximately**

\$1150) of Business Class airfare Bangkok-Paro-Bangkok, if the fare changes an increase may need to be charged. Departure taxes in Bangkok and Paro will need to be paid by individual participants at the airports.

Single room supplement: \$695, Single rooms are subject to availability. We try to accommodate single travelers who request single accommodations, as well as single travelers who are looking for a roommate. If a single room is requested, we are unable to find a suitable roommate, or you are in a single for another reason, you will need to pay the single charge. *The availability of single rooms is determined by the policy of the Bhutan government, and is determined on a daily basis; therefore, there may be a maximum number of singles allowed at each accommodation. Travelers will need to remain flexible; rest assured your guides will do their best in accommodating all of our guests.

Note: Trip pricing is based on current exchange rates; should these rates change significantly, there may need to be an adjustment in the trip price.

The land cost includes:

- Transportation: All group ground and air transportation within Bhutan. A bilingual driver/guide will escort you.
- Accommodations as listed in itinerary, based on two people sharing a room.
- Meals as indicated in itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner).
- Miscellaneous fees and service charges: hotel taxes, accommodation staff tips, meal tips for those meals included, and entrance fees.
- Predeparture information: You will receive information on all aspects of the tour, including packing recommendations, plus readings on the history and culture of Bhutan.

The land cost does not include: International air fare; transportation and transfers for those not traveling with the group; air tax; foreign airport departure taxes; excess baggage charges; passport fees; meals not listed in the itinerary; personal medical and travel insurance; any activities not specified in the tour itinerary, or those listed as optional; all items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone charges, beverages; film and processing, medical expenses, and room service; tips for meals not included in itinerary, tips to driver/guides.

Please contact Strabo Tours if you would like rates on **International Airfare**, a charge may need to be added for this service. If making your own arrangements, it is important to discuss flight days with Strabo Tours before booking any airline tickets, to avoid paying airline cancellation penalties, or additional fees for private transfers.

Deposits, Cancellations AND Refunds

A deposit of \$750 (\$500 on domestic tours) per person is required. Specific tours may require an additional deposit due to accommodation bookings or transportation requirements. If applicable these will be noted on your invoice. Payment in full is required when bookings are made less than 120 days before the departure date. Space is subject to cancellation by Strabo if payment is not received when due.

If a passenger wishes to cancel they must send notification in writing to: Strabo International Tour, Co., P.O. Box 580, Dryden, NY 13053; fax 208-545-4119. At the time we receive your notification, the following per person charges apply:

- 91 days or more before departure: \$300 cancellation fee (\$150 fee on domestic tours), plus Strabo' costs, as well as fees that are charged by the suppliers providing the services included

in your tour, and/or the airlines providing the air transportation.

- 61-90 days before departure: \$500 (\$250 on domestic tours) minimum cancellation fee, plus Strabo' costs, as well as fees that are charged by the suppliers providing the services included in your tour, and/or the airlines providing the air transportation. Fees may range from 25% to 100% of tour costs.
- 60 days or less before departure or anytime after departure: NO REFUND.

Refunds for services that are voluntarily not used by you cannot be made.

Insurance

Each participant must be covered by medical insurance that is valid overseas.

We strongly urge you to evaluate your risk and to take out insurance on your trip. It is vital for you to realize that if you experience a delay or find it necessary to cancel or cut short your trip for any reason, you will lose part or the entire sum you've invested in it (see the section "Deposits, Cancellations and Refunds" in the trip brochure). Travel insurance helps to minimize the risk of monetary losses you would incur in the event of a delay of your departure due to weather, airline strike, missed connection, etc., your inability to travel for reasons such as illness, injury, unforeseen financial complications and other personal circumstances, or if you were required to cut your trip short for medical or any other reasons.

There are restrictions and limitations on any insurance program. For this reason, please read carefully the enclosed pamphlet, which outlines their program of trip cancellation, baggage, and medical insurance. Trained agents are available to answer your questions, so don't hesitate to call the number in their brochure. It is to your advantage to apply for insurance at the earliest possible time, so don't delay in making a decision.