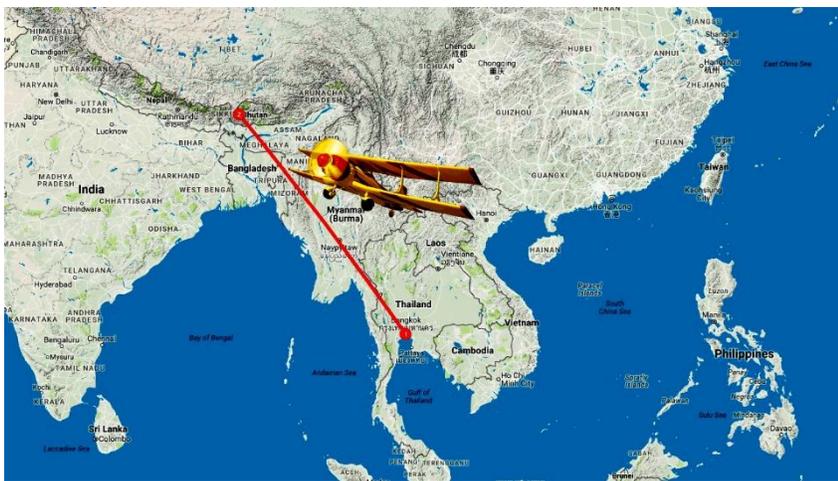


# The Land of the Thunder Dragon



We boarded our Royal Bhutan Airlines' Druk Air flight 651 from Bangkok, Thailand with a

whistle stop in Bagdogra, India. We experienced an astonishing approach and landing at the airport in Paro, Kingdom of Bhutan.



In our brief conversation with the Druk Air Captain in the terminal building, we learned that

Paro, Bhutan is an Extreme Airport –VQPR- and only eight pilots in the world are currently certified to land here. Paro is surrounded by the towering peaks of the Himalayas. Landing at Paro Airport, located in a deep valley, involved weaving through a series of closely-spaced 18,000 foot mountain peaks, frequent banking of the wings to avoid peaks with trees and mountainside houses just a few feet away, steep descents and then a very steep bank to the left immediately before the much-longed-for landing on a runway a mere 6500 feet long. At all the airports in the world at which we've landed, this approach and landing was

especially thrilling and memorable. But then any safe landing is noteworthy.



Immigration and Customs entry was without incident with the right Letters from the Bhutanese government.

Bhutan doesn't issue visas to tourists. Letters of Entry require a specific travel itinerary with checkpoints at various provincial borders during the journey. We chose Windhorse Tours because it provided a private Guide and Driver just for our specific photographic holiday and will also take us to Sikkim and Darjeeling, India.



Kinley, our Bhutanese guide, and Kunzang, our driver met us at the terminal. We checked into the Ariya Hotel before exploring Thimphu, the



capital of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Unlike other Asian countries, English is a part of all student curricula beginning in first grade. English is practiced in all business transactions. Kinley, our guide, not only speaks perfect English, but he even looks like me!

Our experience in Myanmar (Burma) advanced our decision to visit this destination because Bhutan is deeply steeped in its unique Buddhist heritage and like Myanmar has remained intact because of its

isolation from the rest of the world until the mid-20th century.

It's only a matter of time before this incredible kingdom will rival other major destinations in Asia.

Here in the Land of the Thunder Dragon and sacred home of Guru Rinpoche, Bhutanese tradition adheres to the basic philosophical tenets established by their previous king. The Royal concept of "Gross National Happiness" (GNH) was established to ensure the preservation of Bhutanese culture and traditions of the country through its secular and spiritual tantric principles. This metaphysical concept has been in place since 1970s and is probably the reason Bhutan has become known as the Xanadu of the eastern Himalayas.

The Road to Nirvana takes a circuitous tangent through the Eastern Himalayas to the Land of the Thunder Dragon whose philosophy of "Gross National Happiness" is congruent to its practice of the Tantric Buddhism.

From our balcony room at the rustic Padmasambhava Lodge, dawn burst through the night at the Gangtey Summit with an unmistakable quietude that permeated the Black Mountain Range of Bhutan. Here, one can fully understand what peace there is in solitude.

The early morning silence was deafening with only the "mourning" cries from the thousands of fluttering prayer flags communicating their messages to the pantheon of gods willing to listen. Diane and I attached our Prayer Flag wishing all our family and friends good health and happiness.







































