

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 52

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SPRING 2014



Just before Christmas some Bhutanese students from the Pestalozzi Institute visited the Bowes Lyons family at home in Harpenden. Here are some thoughts following their visit:

Thinley Dhendup

"Our visit to visit Simon and Caroline Bowes Lyon at Harpenden was one of the most exciting visits I have been on in the UK. I was at the dining table surrounded by other Bhutanese and I still remember those voices breaking into Dzongkha which just filled the room with excitement."

Dawa Zangmo

"The celebration with the Bowes Lyons family was superb - they were very kind and so welcoming and I felt really grateful to have been invited. I was amazed by the huge garden. It was so beautiful with many plants growing there that I would have found in Bhutan."

Lungten Wangdi

"It was a really great visit. We were 12 Bhutanese people and we enjoyed a Ema Datsi with red Bhutanese rice for lunch - I even helped with cooking the red rice. It was good to talk about Bhutan with people who knew where Bhutan is and they had often seen places there that I had not yet visited. We sang and danced traditional Boedra songs. We all enjoyed our visit and it will be a special memory for us all".

Conference report

The Bhutan Nuns Foundation has released its latest report about the 1st Buddhist Nuns Conference held last December in Bhutan. It outlines the many current projects including health and hygiene training, assisting nunneries with basic necessities such as toilets and running water and the building of the first ever Training Centre for all Bhutanese nuns. More information at:

<http://bhutannuns.org/resources/bnf-reports.html>

DIARY DATE

With our current dreadful weather conditions, here is an early summer event to look forward to attending.

Join us on Thursday 15 May at 12 noon for a privately guided tour at the Chelsea Physic Garden in London.



It was founded in 1673 by the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries for the purpose of training apprentices in identifying plants.

Today it has a unique living collection of around 5,000 different edible, useful, medicinal and historical plants.

Not only is the Chelsea Physic Garden the second oldest botanical garden in Britain, but we will have a great opportunity to be among the first visitors to wander through the new garden of medicinal plants opening in late April. This will feature many plants from parts of China and Asia including some Himalayan plants.

Afterwards there will be an opportunity for us to enjoy a light lunch in the Tangerine Dream Café situated in the Garden.

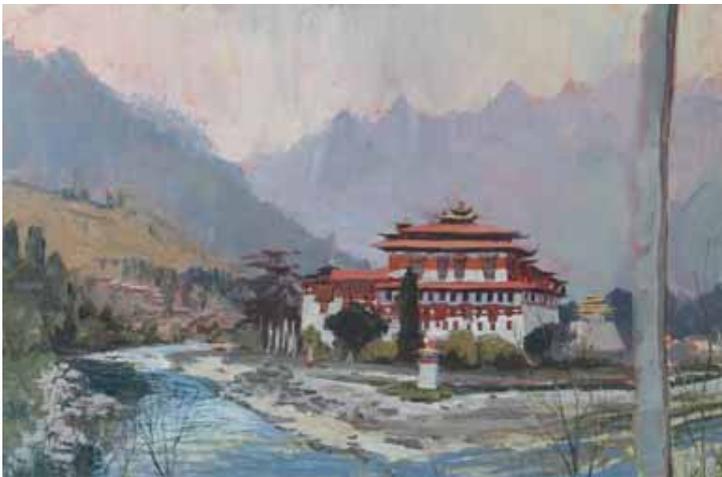
More information to follow soon.

SOCIETY NEWS

“A Brush with Bhutan”



We had an entertaining evening with Tim Scott Bolton who shared Bhutan with us through the eyes of an artist. He described when he had the opportunity of going to Bhutan he leapt at the chance, it being one of the few places in the Himalayas that he had not visited. He and his wife Trisha visited Bhutan first two years ago on a fact finding visit. This was for a return trip planned for last year with a group of other artists. He introduced his talk by referring to Michael Aris's book 'views of mediaeval Bhutan' which had originally inspired his visit. His latest journey started in Paro and via Thimphu, Punakha, Trongsa, Bumthang ending up in Trashigang. Beyond that some of the group went on the fascinating and little-known Merak to Sakten trek which took them over the high Nagchung La pass. As an amusing aside Tim inserted a picture of a yeti dragging off two skimpily clad young ladies, the Sakten reserve being the only one dedicated to this elusive beast. As well as excellent photographs taken by accompanying professional photographer Bill Knight, he had a number of illustrations of the paintings he did while there. He also had at hand the original works and had erected an easel with all the paints to show what he travelled with. Tim is hoping to explore further and perhaps visit and paint all the Dzongs.



This is a summary by Tim Scott Bolton of a talk given to the Society at our meeting in January 2014

If you are a devout Buddhist teacher of English, preferably with a teaching qualification and experience, this could be the challenge and opportunity you have been waiting for!

Tharpoling Monastery has a vacancy for a volunteer to teach English to the monks and the young Rinpoche. The post would provisionally be for six months - from April to September 2014 - although this is flexible. Whilst a visa, local food and accommodation arrangements would be taken care of by the Monastery, all other expenses would need to be covered by the volunteer teacher. These would include international air fares to/from Bhutan, \$40 Visa fee when entering Bhutan, all insurances, including health insurance, and pocket/travel money whilst in Bhutan.



Tharpaling monastery, located at 3,600m, is composed of a series of buildings overlooking the Chumey valley in Bumthang, about 1 hour by car from Bumthang town. A rough road starting from the Gyetsa village on the Trongsa-Jakar highway leads to the monastery in half an hour. The monastery is an important religious landmark of Bhutan, a monastic school where an ancient specific monastic tradition is taught, and holds an annual prayer, a monlam, in the first lunar month. The monk students might come from different regions of Bhutan with different dialects. This is a voluntary job for someone eager to be in Bhutan for a while and into teaching. Nothing is known about what teaching materials may be available, but it is safer to assume there is very little.

Further information is available from Michael Rutland - see page 8 for contact details.

NEWS REPORT

Reconstruction work begins at Wangdu

Work to restore Wangduephodrang dzong to its former glory has begun and is expected to be completed by 2018. "It's a tentative time frame, but we'll try our best to complete the work by then," said Home Minister Damcho Dorji. "It is of a paramount importance for all the Bhutanese people, especially, people of Shar Dhargay." The detailed survey and assessment undertaken after the fire led to preparation of preliminary designs for the reconstruction of the dzong. These have been approved by His Majesty the King for further detailing and implementation on site. The dzong will be restored to its original glory taking into consideration the preservation of traditional Bhutanese architecture. It will also incorporate state-of-the-art technology and provision of modern amenities and facilities in terms of disaster resilience measures.



His Majesty the King and His Holiness the Je Khenpo unveil the plaque marking the beginning of the reconstruction work

Following a Nu 200M grant from His Majesty the King in 2012, significant funding has also been received from the Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation, the Ministry of Finance and the Wangdue rabdey has received contributions of over Nu 40M from individuals and organisations. The Government of India added a Nu 1B grant as part of its project-led assistance in the 11th plan. The total now stands around Nu 1.3B. A steering team has been appointed to oversee the reconstruction and a project team, headed by a project director, will manage the reconstruction work. The Chenrezig Zhiwei Jingsey ceremony was performed at the site at the end of January. It was administered by His Holiness the Je Khenpo to mark the long-awaited commencement of reconstruction work. His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Gyaltsuen, accompanied by the Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the Indian ambassador, members of Parliament, members of the Wangduephodrang dzong reconstruction steering committee, local government leaders and dzongkhag officials, all offered prayers at the site of the dzong. The Society's Dzong Appeal now stands at £12,345 and it is expected the money will be handed over shortly.

A growing market for Tengma

In the wake of the Buckwheat Bonanza (see issue 51) farmers in the Mongar area are also being encouraged to take advantage of the warmer winter weather to cultivate maize on a commercial basis. After four months they are able to sell fresh tengma (beaten maize) even before the season begins for other products. Several tengma outlets have been set up in the Mongar area to cater to farmers who cultivate maize on a large scale for a cash income. One farmer said, "I earn between Nu 60,000 to 80,000 a year from the sale of fresh tengma". Getting into commercial maize cultivation, has made a huge difference for his family. "It was difficult for the family even to survive before I ventured into this business," he said, "but now I can send my four children to school and even save a little."

Website contest

Next month, the Government will hold a competition to grade all its websites. An official from the Department of Information Technology and Telecom (DITT) said the competition is being held to have better and more informative websites for all users. He said they are currently working with private sector experts on developing a set of criteria on which the websites will be judged.

The eGovernment master plan also requires that the Government establishes website interface standards and reflects the Government's increased focus on using information communications technology. How many Government departments are currently online could not be provided by DITT. However, almost 130 Government websites were registered with Druknet in 2011.

NEWS FROM THE

New Appointments

Women have been appointed to two key posts in Bhutan.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has appointed Mrs. Kunzang C. Namgyel as Bhutan's Ambassador / Permanent Representative to the United Nations, New York.



She will be making history as the first woman Foreign Service Officer to be elevated to the position of an Ambassador. She joined the foreign ministry in 1980 and has served in various capacities in Thimphu, Geneva and Kathmandu

The new head of the Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB) is Aum Chhimmy Pem. Prior to this post



Chhimmy Pem worked as the Head of Marketing and Promotion in the TCB. She currently serves as a Member of the Tarayana Foundation and also volunteers with Kilu Bhutan Music School, Bhutan's first music school run along non profit lines where she serves as a Board Member. Chhimmy completed her Bachelors (Hons) from the University of Delhi and her Masters degree from Sussex

University. The tourism industry is the largest source of convertible currency earnings for the country.

Thimphu street names

The Thimphu thromde has already started to work on preparing street signage, to be put up in various places in the capital. The plan is to have all metal plates up before the end of the year.

The thromde officials said the lack of an addressing system made it hard to locate a particular place, especially during emergencies. He said, when all the new and old street signs are in place, an online addressing system will also be made available.

Smartphone to help diagnose epilepsy

A team of experts including Bhutanese will soon be able to diagnose epilepsy in the country using a Smartphone.

Funded by the Canadian Government, "The Bhutan Epilepsy Project" will use standard android Smartphones and a simple electrode skullcap to monitor brain signals and perform an electroencephalography (EEG) - the most accurate diagnostic tool for epilepsy - without any bulky medical equipment.

According to the project, the available technology in Bhutan makes diagnosis and treatment of epilepsy difficult and in addition, there are no specialists available. Currently, neurologists are testing the device in clinical trials on people with normal brains and people with brain abnormalities in Boston, Massachusetts and in Copenhagen. Once the trials are complete, a team will travel to Bhutan where they will work with psychiatrists at the Jigme- Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital. It will be a two year project with the possibility for extension if it proves to be successful in the initial stages. Through this grant the project will also provide Bhutan with the necessary diagnostic tools .

National Council activities

Tobacco

The National Council has decided that supply/ distribution of tobacco products in the Country will again be permitted. The manufacturing of tobacco, however, will remain banned as stated in the Tobacco Control Act. The amendment was necessary because the Act had led to the growth of the black market in the Country. The majority of the members supported the proposal but said that consideration should be given to taxing the sellers.



Mandatory work experience

Anyone aspiring to contest in the next National Council elections must now have a minimum work experience of 10 years. The requirement was felt necessary as the National Council is an important institution with its foremost responsibility to review the government and issues of national interest. However "right" experience has not been defined.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Night life in Thimphu

Thimphu is one of the fastest growing towns in the country with a landscape that has completely changed compared to a decade ago. This has resulted in many developments, not least the growth in the number of bars, discotheques and drayangs, in different locations around the capital.

Official figures now list 620 bars (including discotheques, pubs and drayangs) registered in the capital alone. With a population of approximately 120,000 this means there are about 100 people (excluding children and old people) for every bar in town. This figure might alarm the more elderly whereas the younger population are delighted to see a more active nightlife growing in Thimphu. Today, people in Thimphu are spoilt for choice when it comes to going out at night as there are modern bars to suit all tastes. However, bar owners are quick to point out that with increasing competition, attracting and keeping customers is harder than ever before.

One business that is benefiting from the growth of night life is the sale of Thukpa. Thukpa is a traditional slow cooked broth that street hawkers sell late at night. "It takes about four hours for Thukpa to be perfectly cooked," said Tashi Dolkar, who has been selling Thukpa on the street of Thimphu for about four months. She starts boiling the beef bones mid-afternoon on a slow heat. After an hour or so she adds rice and lets it simmer while constantly stirring. "We have to keep adding hot water to the broth otherwise it will turn thick and lumpy," she said.. Around 7pm, Tashi pounds ginger and adds it to the broth, along with salt, a dash of Sichuan pepper and chili powder to taste, and brings the broth to the boil before turning off the heat.



Along with many other street hawkers she is then all set to hit the street by 9 in the evening. Trade is competitive and they stay until 2 or 3 in the morning when the drayangs and discotheques close. For Tashi and others, the biggest challenge is to stay out the whole night in the cold. The temperature in Thimphu can dip as low as -6°C . "I don't have any options. I have to earn to support my family," she said. As the nights starts getting colder, they make a bonfire to keep themselves warm, with a few of them watching out for the police patrolling team. Making bonfires in the middle of the town is clearly not allowed and despite the popularity, selling anything along the street is also illegal. since it falls under unlicensed business.

However according to a local official. "It is difficult to monitor the street hawkers, especially after hours", he said. Despite the constraints and challenges, these night traders thrive and are optimistic. Many say they earn as much as Nu.5,000 on special occasions and during the time of celebrations. Before Tashi and the others head home, they all work together in cleaning the surrounding areas.

Going electric

Bhutan is planning to replace conventional cars with electric vehicles in what could be an interesting, albeit not easily repeatable, experiment for the rest of the world to watch. It is reported that the first replacements will be government vehicles and then gradually conventional petrol and diesel taxis and private cars will be replaced.

With a per-capita income of just over £1500 it may seem an odd market for an electric car that costs around £13,000. But the government argues that the move would save the country money in the long run because it would no longer have to import expensive oil-based fuel and could instead rely on its vast capacity to produce cheap hydroelectric power. It has been calculated that a typical taxi driver would see his daily fuel costs fall from £8 to about 10p. According to a government report, another benefit is reduced air pollution, which is a growing problem for the country as more of its 740,000 people move to cities like the capital Thimphu. The idea of marketing the country as an "electric vehicle hotspot" to environmentally conscious tourists must also appeal.

NEWS AND UPDATES

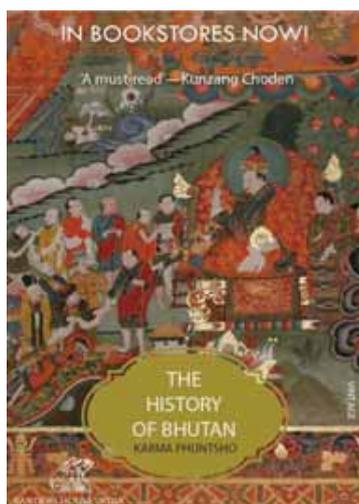
BOOK REVIEW

THE HISTORY OF BHUTAN By Karma Phuntsho
Random House India, 2013 ISBN: 978-81-8400-311-6

I am not the first and certainly will not be the last to congratulate Dr Karma Phuntsho for his magnificent efforts to trace the history of Bhutan and relate it, in English, so eloquently. He draws on available historical records and tells us when evidence is thin as it often is in more distant times. The book has helped me to put into context much of what I have heard and learned over the years. The origins, achievements and legacies of the great figures, Pabmasambhava and Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, are set alongside the contributions of many other key people such as Pema Lingpa and Drukpa Kunley. The story of the country is woven with the influences of many Buddhist missionaries and teachers – Padmasambhava from the south but most, including Zhabdrung, from Tibet.

The story of the Zhabdrung's unification of the country and then the tortuous struggles for succession to his position as ultimate ruler are discussed. Succession was not possible through a direct male hereditary line as Zhabdrung's son fathered no boys. A lateral succession to Tenzin Rabgay was possible and he served successfully as Gyaltshab or Regent while Zhabdrung was on 'extended retreat'.

Later, reincarnations of Zhabdrung's body, speech and mind were identified and a complex network of claims began. The roles of the principal supporters of the ultimate ruler – the Desis (secular) and the Je Khenpos (ecclesiastical) – are described; indeed there are short accounts of the achievements (or otherwise) of the 57 Desis through to the early years of the twentieth century.



The continuous and fluctuating relationships with Tibet are a significant part of Bhutan's history; those with Nepal, Sikim, Cooch Behar and the British unfold. The History leads to the introduction of the monarchy, with Sir Ugyen Wangchuk as the first Druk Gyalpo, after years of factional fighting. Relations between Bhutan and Great Britain warmed considerably when Ugyen Wangchuk mediated

during the Younghusband adventure to Lhasa in 1904 and the respect for each other was further evidenced by the knighthood conferred in 1905 and has continued. Recent events are not related in great detail as they are well covered in contemporary literature. An excellent and satisfying read.

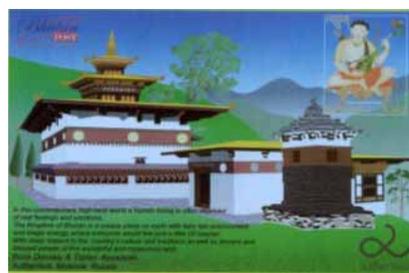
Andrew Sutton

Latest issue of stamps

Bhutan has always been considered at the leading edge of stamp design and distribution and its latest offers are no different!

Bhutan Post has announced the issue of 2 new sets of stamps and one of them is certainly something you may not want to show to an elderly aunt!

The first set is comprised of two miniature sheets, one containing one stamp and the second containing four stamps and on the subject of "Bhutan arts and happiness". The design of the single stamp in the first miniature sheet depicts Lama Drukpa Kunley, also known as The Divine Madman. The stamp



depicts the Lama with bow and arrows, seated on a deerskin with a dramyan - a traditional musical instrument. "Known for his outrageous

behaviour and bizarre humour laden with sexual overtones, said Bhutan Post, "he is loved and respected by the people of Bhutan". The background of the miniature sheet depicts the 15th century Chimi - Lakhang - the "Divine Fertility Temple".

The second miniature sheet depicts "a typical



house with four phalluses painted on the walls. They are variously symbols of fertility as well as methods of defending the

home from *The Evil Eye* and *The Evil Tongue*. Each of these phallus paintings is available as single stamps. No date has been given for the issue of these stamps. However, recipients may well be surprised to receive a letter from Bhutan with one of the above stamps affixed to the envelope!

NEWSLETTER SCHEDULE

During 2014 three issues of the Newsletter will be published - end of February, June and September. Details of meetings not included in the Newsletters will be notified directly to members via e-mail and on the Society's web site. Please make sure that the Membership Secretary has your latest e-mail address.

NEWS AND UPDATES

Spreading a little happiness

The term "Gross National Happiness" (GNH) was conceived in 1972 by His Majesty the fourth Druk Gyalpo. He used the phrase to signal his commitment to building an economy that would serve Bhutan's unique Buddhist culture. At first it appeared to be offered as a casual remark, but the concept was taken seriously. By 1999 the Centre for Bhutan Studies had developed a sophisticated survey instrument to measure the population's general level of well-being, the results from which have been reported widely across the world.



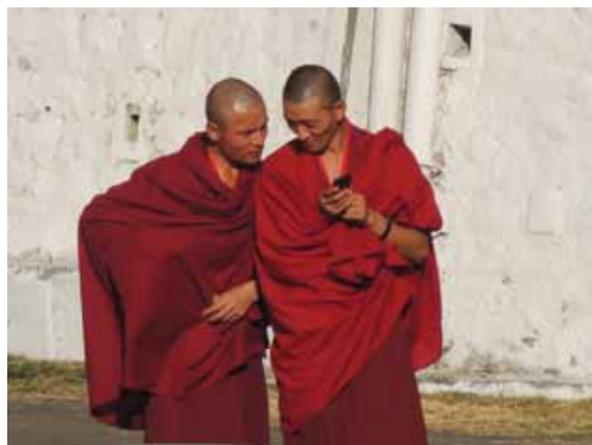
In the last 20 years life expectancy has doubled, almost 100% of its children are enrolled in primary schools and many changes have been made to its infrastructure. In 2012 the UN

adopted Bhutan's call for a holistic approach to development, and is considering ways in which the GNH model can be replicated. Now Northern Ireland is set to try to emulate Bhutan. A report released recently by the Carnegie UK Trust, found that focusing on well-being could drive social change. The report, produced in conjunction with The School of Law at Queen's University in Belfast, says that well-being should be embedded in the Programme for Government. It argued that the current focus on GDP as the sole measure of social progress ignores the failure of GDP as a measure of what really matters to the population. Chief Executive of the Carnegie UK Trust, Martyn Evans said: "GDP is a good tool to see how healthy an economy may be, but it is not very good when it comes to measuring the well-being of citizens." All political parties are quoted as being committed to putting well-being at the heart of Stormont. Even in the centre of Whitehall, matters of well-being are being explored. The Ministry of Defence is urging its most senior officers to attend "happiness" lessons and be taught meditation techniques in a one-day course being held this month. It will be hosted by "Action for Happiness" a movement committed to creating a happier society and moving culture away from "self-obsessed materialism". It is understood that attendees will make the "happiness pledge." Meanwhile in Belgium, the former Prime Minister of Bhutan, Jigmi Y. Thinley, has been conferred an Honorary Doctorate by the Catholic University in Louvain of Belgium. He was awarded the Doctorate for his efforts in sharing the concept of Gross National Happiness with the world. It was also for his contribution to the international discourse to build a New Development Paradigm (NDP) that was submitted by Bhutan to the UN last year.

cont'd

They thanked Jigmi Y. Thinley for his role in setting into motion an international debate on the subject and appreciated Bhutan for being the beacon to a more sustainable and happy human society. The Belgian Parliament then voted on the new set of indicators that were inspired by the example set by Bhutan and they expect the bill to be enacted successfully.

Meanwhile, following the UN's resolution to observe the international happiness day on March 20, the UN requested Bhutan to take the work forward in developing the New Development Paradigm to promote well-being and happiness as a global goal. However save for the discussion at Parliament to observe the Happiness Day on November 11 instead of March 20, discussions on its own development philosophy, let alone the NDP, have not picked up much pace at home. Perhaps Dorji Wangchuck, the speaker at one of our recent Society meetings said, "There is a need to ensure that GNH does not put imaginary boundaries around our thinking. GNH risks becoming a Procrustean bed: with the Government fitting everything within GNH, conversations being driven by GNH and outsiders judging Bhutan through the lens of GNH." He went on to say: " There is an immediate need for the Government to engage the common Bhutanese on what GNH really means, take the GNH debate and discussions to the villages and bring GNH back home. Only then will Bhutan have a common vision which will enable us to overcome the many challenges we face and secure our economic and political future."



Perhaps this is the way the new Government is now thinking about GNH. After all, the enormous changes in Society from the relative isolation in the early 1970's to one where teenagers now chat on cell phones and remote villages have cable TV, must have implications of what Bhutanese people now want, and indeed expect, in terms of their future peace and happiness.

Diversify to stay in the game

While festivals and trekking remain the main tourist attractions today, the need to diversify finds general consensus among tour operators. At present, there are more than 1,300 tour operators selling the same product for both cultural and trekking tourists. This means a similar travel itinerary irrespective of the organising tour company.

Rules governing tourism in Bhutan were established in 1971 and the Bhutan Tourism Council was set up in 1983 and made a fully autonomous undertaking with the Trade Minister as its Chairman in 1989. Tourism activities were privatised in 1991 with 33 tour operators and when the tourist arrivals stood at 7,158. In 2008 the Tourism Council of Bhutan secretariat was established as an autonomous body.

Whilst tour operators agreed the industry lacks creativity, many are reluctant to do anything beyond the usual programme because of increased costs. "To be innovative or to promote a different product is all about expenses," a tour operator said. "At present, the daily tariff is just enough to pay for food, accommodation, transportation and guide or entry fees. Over the years, with the rapid growth in tourist numbers, the increasing pressure on existing products during peak season has however become a threat to the industry".

Previous Newsletters have highlighted several of the activities, other than traditional cultural and trekking holidays, that draw visitors to Bhutan and a few tour operators have started diversifying into these newer areas of activity.

Some are also experimenting with farmhouse stays alongside more community-based cultural programmes. But tour operators find it difficult to promote such community-based tourism, as it lacks standardisation as well as present health and safety aspects yet to be addressed.

Also considered of potential interest is the introduction of fly-fishing, wherein tourists will pay a premium to the existing tariff. According to the Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators, this has already been proposed for Manas Wildlife Sanctuary.

At the same time some operators highlight the importance of keeping tsechus or other festivals as authentic as possible. Not only is it important to ensure that Bhutanese people are made more aware of such festivals, but it is also important to revive old traditions, which could also work towards promotion of tourism. "All tourism stakeholders shouldn't just be profit oriented, but think about sustainability too," one tour director said. "Over the years, people are getting innovative, but innovation has to be guided." Maybe its now also timely to review the scope of the existing tourism tariff policy?

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NOTE

If you have not already done so, we would appreciate you sending your latest e-mail address to the Membership Secretary at:

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who will then add it to the database. There is no plan for the Society to go 'paperless' but there are times when it could be very convenient to communicate information electronically at short notice.

**Published by The Bhutan Society
of the United Kingdom**