

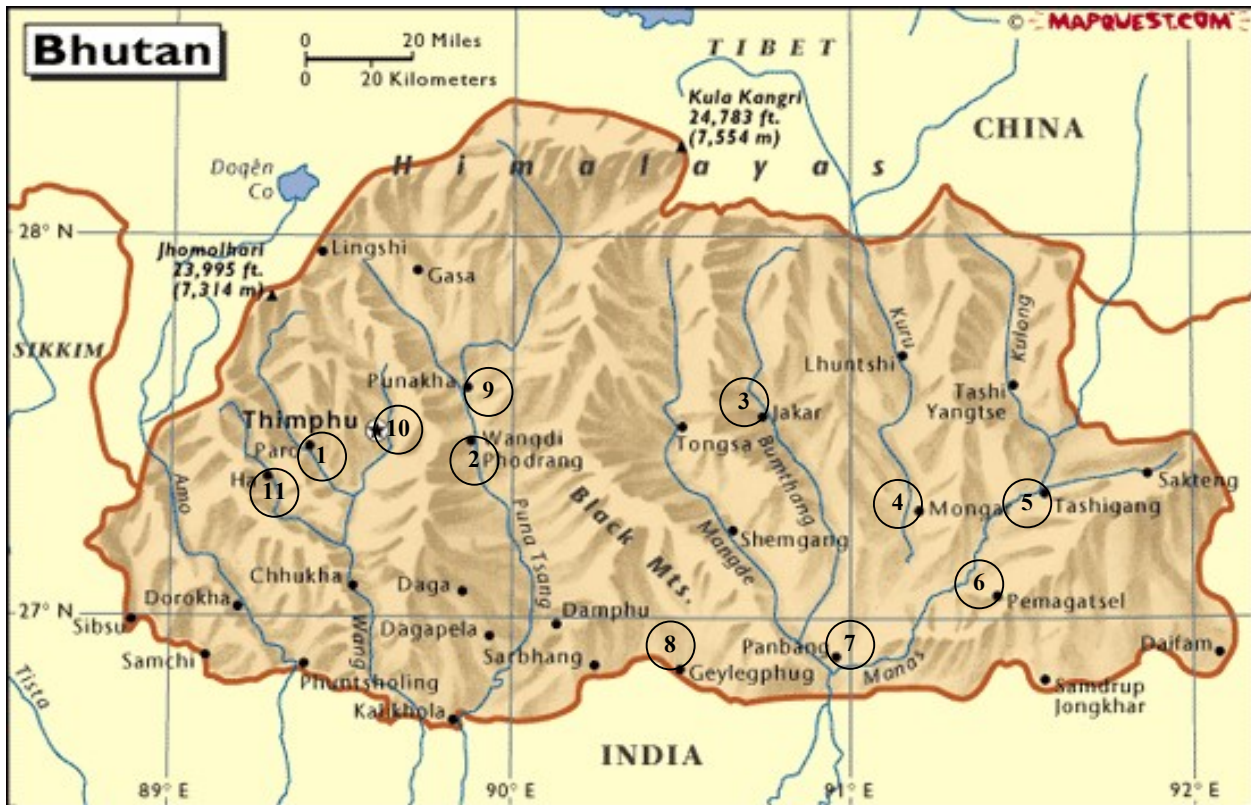
The Thunder Dragon!



www.WorldOnWheels.tours

*If you're not living on the edge
you're taking up too much room!*

The Thunder Dragon Motorcycle Safari



Overnight Destinations & Places of Interest

- | | | | |
|-----------|---------------|------------|------------|
| 1. Paro | 4. Mongar | 7. Panbang | 10. Thimpu |
| 2. Wangdi | 5. Trashigang | 8. Gelephu | 11. Haa |
| 3. Jakar | 6. Pemagatsel | 9. Punakha | 1. Paro |



The Thunder Dragon Motorcycle Safari

Itinerary for October 2024

Day	Date	Details	Distance
1 S	Oct 05	Arrange your international flights to arrive in the Bhutan city of Paro	
2 S	06	National highway for the first day's ride, eastwards to Wangdi Phodrang	120k
3 M	07	Continuing east through more remote areas, to Jakar in Bumthang region	175k
4 T	08	Forested hillsides and river valleys to Mongar	165k
5 W	09	To the eastern regional capital of Trashigang	100k
6 T	10 *	A 'rest day' exploring Trashigang; optional ride to Gomokora Valley	---
7 F	11	Striking south on a spectacular mountain road, then west to Pemagatshel	130k
8 S	12	Way off the beaten track, to Panbang	140k
9 S	13	Through even more remote regions to Gelephu	180k
10 M	14	North, to rejoin the National Highway and visit Punakha	190k
11 T	15 *	A rest day exploring Punakha Dzong and surrounding area	---
12 W	16	Westward ho. Via Thimpu for lunch, then on to Haa in the mountains again	120k
13 T	17	We cross the highest pass in Bhutan! (3,900m) to return us to Paro	80k
14 F	18 *	A final 'rest' day climbing (on foot) to the magnificent Tiger's Nest monastery	
15 S	19	Fly out of Paro, homeward bound	-----
			1,400k

* indicates consecutive night in same hotel, allowing for laundry, etc.

Departure Date:

For **The Thunder Dragon** motorcycle tour through Bhutan, you'll need to arrange your flights to arrive in Paro on or before **Saturday 5th October 2024**. Please see further discussion on International Flights herein.

Tour Operator:

This Motorcycle Safari is one of several itineraries offered by **World On Wheels**, Australia's original tour operator specializing solely in professional international motorcycle adventures. Operating for 20+ years as **Ferris Wheels**, Mike Ferris pioneered the Himalayan Motorcycle Safari concept in 1994 with his first crossing of the world's greatest mountain range by a private group of Australian riders. In 1995, by now a qualified travel agent, he took his first commercial safari to the Khardung La in Ladakh (India), at 5,602 metres the highest road in the world. Mike now operates and personally leads annual **World On Wheels** motorcycle safaris to such diverse destinations as the Indian Himalaya, Rajasthan, Turkey, Morocco, the Dalmatian coast, the Andes, South Africa, Iceland, Mexico-Guatemala-Belize, the Baltic States, as well as this tri-nation one, all of approximately three weeks in duration.

Mike Ferris is Australia's only international motorcycle guide who is also a fully qualified and government-accredited motorcycle riding instructor.

Be aware that this itinerary is a guide only and may need to change due to weather, road conditions or other factors. Please be flexible, but rest assured your Tour Leader will make the final day-to-day decisions only after consultation with our local agents, local authorities and of course, group members.



Package Price

The Thunder Dragon tour price, excluding airfares and **joining in Paro**, is US\$7,000-00. Riders must have an unrestricted rider's licence. Pillions are welcome and we also have a limited number of seats available in our support vehicle, a 15-seater minibus which accompanies the riders for the Safari – price for pillion or passenger is US\$6,000-00. Please note that our prices are subject to exchange rates and we reserve the right to alter any pricing, pursuant to Clause 9 of our Terms and Conditions herewith, up to the date of final payment.

In this itinerary our tour prices are shown in US\$ for greatest stability but we ask for the equivalent in AU\$ at the prevailing daily exchange rate. The international website (unaffiliated with any bank) to be used for daily foreign exchange calculations is: www.XE.com/currencyconverter We request a US\$1,000 deposit and will invoice you in US\$ thereafter for the remaining balance, but you have some flexibility as to when to pay. Final payment will be due 60 days before the tour date, but if you choose to pay us say 90 or 120 days beforehand because you feel the forex rate is favourable, this works well for everyone all round.

Price includes

- Full motorbike rental for the duration of the Safari (modern 400cc Royal Enfield '*Himalayan*')
- Clean, friendly, mid-range accommodation throughout the Safari, nights 1 to 14 inclusive
- Twin-share basis; (single room supplement, additional US\$900-00) ¹
- All meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner) – but on rest days you might want to explore options on your own
- Experienced guide, local Bhutan agent and Enfield mechanic
- Minibus support vehicle and driver, for luggage transport and assistance
- Spare parts, tools, medicines, first aid equipment
- All fuel costs, maintenance and repairs, third party insurance for the bikes
- Bhutan visa fee, Regional Permits, and Government-imposed Environment Levy
- A complimentary *World On Wheels* T-shirt, cap, luggage tags, Bhutan map

¹ Accommodation is provided on a twin-share basis and if you're on your own we'll do our best to bunk you in with an acceptable roommate (same gender, similar age). But if you're the last person to book, there's obviously a 50-50 chance you'll have to take a room on your own and will therefore be liable for the single room supplement. So the moral of the story here is, book early or bring your own roommate with you. Or preferably both!

Price excludes

- International airfares to/from Bhutan (approx. Au\$2000-00)
- Travel insurance policy including use of a 400cc motorbike ²
- Medical examination and vaccinations before departure (recommended)
- Expenses of a personal nature such as postage, laundry, souvenirs and drinks
- Tips for our support staff at the end of the tour – optional but appreciated; US\$100-00 suggested ³

² Please note that a motorcycle safari overseas must be considered one of life's more adventurous pursuits and therefore personal travel insurance is mandatory. If you already have existing travel insurance, you will need to ensure it covers use of a motorcycle of 400cc capacity. For Australian clients we can suggest www.AussieTravelCover.com.au where you can easily issue your own policy online. **Be aware**, however, that any travel insurance ceases immediately on return to your own country, even if on-going medical treatment or surgery is required. Private health cover or government Medicare automatically resumes at that point.

³A note on tips. We recognise tipping is not automatically part of the antipodean psyche, but it is pretty much expected in most other parts of the world. Daily hotel porters will expect a small reward for carrying your bags

to your room, and our driver and support staff anticipate reasonable tips to supplement their modest wages whilst on tour with us. We suggest something like US\$100-00 is affordable for your two weeks (about US\$7 per day), distributed amongst the crew. If you've had a good time, we would encourage you to contribute generously! (... if you haven't, please let us know why and we'll contribute on your behalf).

International Flights

It's a pretty simple procedure to book airline tickets yourself online these days. There are several internet sites such as FlightCentre, Expedia, SkyScanner, etc which will give you comparisons on all available carriers to/from your required destination. But at this moment, as the world gradually reopens following the Covid shutdowns, the only viable international gateway into Bhutan appears to be via Bangkok on Druk Air, Bhutan's national carrier. We'll meet you at Paro airport and transfer you to our hotel in the town.

Food & Health

Quality of food can obviously be a concern when visiting exotic foreign lands. We take care in selecting clean and reputable establishments for our meals and the local fare is not always as fiery and spicy as some people would have you believe. Our participants are often pleasantly surprised by the delicious meals available. Even so, an occasional upset stomach cannot always be avoided in remote areas, so we advise initial caution and we carry various medicines to ensure as much comfort as possible. Participants in any of our adventure activities are obviously expected to have a reasonably high level of health, fitness and capability, but **in all cases a consultation with your doctor is recommended** in order to identify necessary vaccinations and precautions, particularly if traveling overseas for the first time.



Climate & Clothing

Our tour is scheduled for October which is autumn ('Fall'), possibly the best climate for touring in this part of the Himalaya. It can also be quite cool in Bhutan, and single-digit temperatures but almost zero chance of rain will be the order of the day. At times there might be little shade available, so plenty of sunscreen, sunglasses, hats and long sleeves will also be required. Jeans and our long-sleeved *World On Wheels* shirts tend to be the norm, with strong boots and riding gloves. Helmets should be brought with you from home, full-face or open-face a matter of personal preference. The modern flip-top lids offer the convenience of both.

Professional quality riding gear such as Cordura jackets, Goretex overpants and other protective clothing is an excellent investment and will go a long way to ensuring your comfort in what may sometimes be adverse conditions. Jackets are particularly versatile if they have a zip-in / zip-out padded liner for extra warmth and protection. But if you're susceptible to the cold, then maybe a good set of thermal underwear would also come in handy. A couple of other products we've used for several years and are happy to endorse are the Kevlar-lined jeans and clothing from Draggin Jeans in Melbourne (www.dragginjeans.com.au) and those Velcro alternatives to 'occy' straps from Andy Strapz (www.andystrapz.com).



And while we're giving plugs, we'd like to suggest you consider a Rider Improvement course, regardless of your experience or perceived ability on a motorcycle, to brush up on your skills prior to joining an international riding safari. Our recommendation here is the renowned operation Stay Upright, who offer a varied range of courses designed to progressively increase your riding ability. Mike Ferris completed his Riding Instructor's course with Stay Upright and works with them on a part time basis. In his spare time.

Other important information you should note

The Asian subcontinent is not everyone's 'cup of tea'. It can be an extreme assault on the senses. In order to fully appreciate its true beauty you will need the ability to leave behind western values and to turn a blind eye to some of the harsher aspects of life in developing nations. If you can do this, you will find it truly a rewarding experience.

The riding conditions are also sometimes arduous and whilst 200k or so would *appear* to be quite an easy day's ride, this is not always so. Some days will require us to be on the road by 8:00am to beat the morning traffic, and the days can be long and tiring. It is obviously expected that you are able to handle a motorbike competently and are fit and strong enough to cope with some demanding conditions. An important part of this is your mental approach and attitude. If you are the type of person who prefers lounging by the poolside with a dry martini, then perhaps this motorcycle safari is not for you. Try Club Med instead !

When we venture into the more remote and less-developed parts of the country, obviously the standard of accommodation might be somewhat more rudimentary. Bhutan sometimes suffers from occasional power shortages, so don't automatically anticipate a long hot shower every single day. Be prepared to rough it a bit, be prepared to accept delays and hastily changed plans, be prepared to be tolerant of some grinding bureaucracy and ineptitude. Be flexible and above all, bring your sense of humour.

But let's not pull any punches here. This is not a trip for the faint-hearted; you'll notice there are only two 'rest' days out of 14, and these rest days can consist of strenuous (but optional) activities. And a tour such as this is potentially a dangerous undertaking; it's inherent in the very nature of the trip. You'll be on an unfamiliar bike, on unfamiliar roads in unfamiliar traffic conditions. It is important for you to recognize this and accept ultimate responsibility, firstly for joining and secondly for riding in a circumspect manner for the duration of the tour. Please read and acknowledge Paragraph 16 of our Terms and Conditions! (End of sermon)

The Royal Enfield

Originally manufactured by The Royal Enfield Motorcycle Co of Redditch, Worcestershire, production ceased in Great Britain due to financial difficulties in the mid-1950s. The Indian subsidiary acquired the production line, transferred operations to Madras and simply continued to build Enfield Bullets without bothering to change any original design specifications. Until recently they pretty much continued to churn out brand new, 60 year old bikes! But the later releases, particularly the 'Himalayan' has seen them modernise their production lines to catch up with the rest of the industry's international standards.

The modern Enfield is still a true classic, with the single cylinder 400cc engine producing a deep, throaty rumble and powerful torque that have prompted some to christen it the two-wheeled tractor. At idle speed you can audibly count the engine revolutions per minute. High speed is not what the Enfield is about (any faster than about 50kph on these roads is suicidal anyway!), it's about aesthetics, comfort and style. Riding an Enfield gives a pure, unadulterated pleasure - particularly through the stunning scenery where you're going. It is the perfect bike for touring in this part of the world, taking the rough roads easily in its stride. Our late-model Himalayans have the modern conventional left-foot gears, right-foot brake configuration, as opposed to the original 1950s Brit-biking standard of the other way round. And a disk brake. And a starter motor!

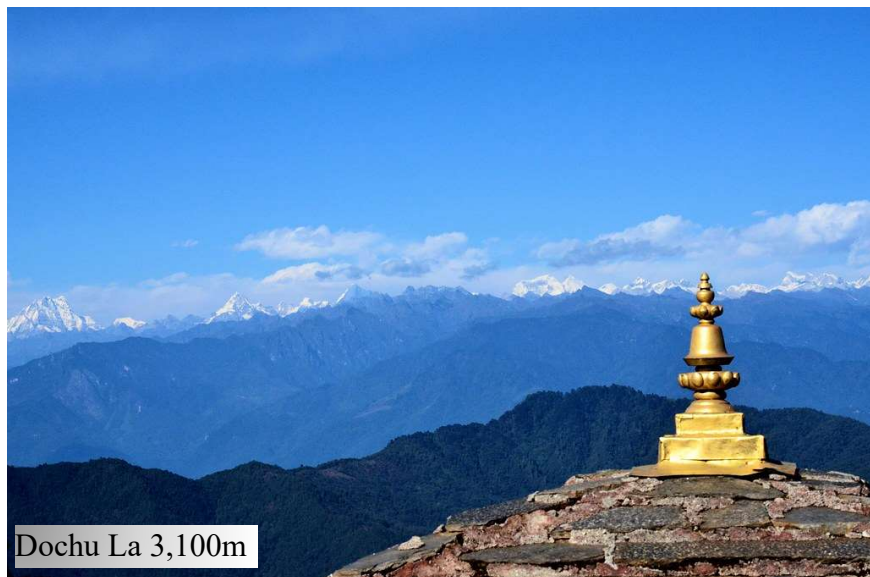
Detailed Daily Itinerary

Day 1 Your flights need to get you into Paro by today, preferably in the morning so we have time to introduce you to your motorcycle. We'll have a short familiarisation ride around the Paro Valley on your Enfield in the afternoon so you can get used to the feel, and bond with your bike. We may have time to visit the National Museum and learn a little about this fantastic country.

You will have heard Bhutan is not a cheap place to visit. The Kingdom has imposed an artificial minimum Tourist Tariff of US\$300 per person per day. The main reason for this is, they saw what happened to Nepal in the 70's and 80's, when hippy backpacker tourists flocked to Kathmandu in droves and spent \$3 a night on cheap hotels and \$2 a day on cheap meals. Kathmandu and the whole country consequently suffered and became impoverished, and Nepal is now one of the poorest nations on Earth.

The King of Bhutan decided, in his wisdom, this was not going to happen to his beautiful Bhutan. And this money (US\$300 pp pd) is well spent. The hotels get a fair share, restaurants and ground operators are well compensated, and the remaining 50% or so to the government is used to subsidise free national healthcare for all Bhutanese, and free education for every child, to tertiary level. So rest assured, your tourist dollar is being very well used here.

Day 2 For our first day's ride we're going to stick to the sealed national highway – although nothing is guaranteed in this part of the world and roadwork maintenance is always an on-going project. Following China's annexation of Tibet in 1951, Bhutan feared they might be next, and subsequently forged a strong strategic alliance with neighbouring India in the south. The Indian Army protects Bhutan's borders, and the highways are maintained by India also. And we should mention of course we are riding Indian-built motorbikes! Perfect for the conditions.



Dochu La 3,100m

So we head east, and we'll bypass the capital city Thimpu for now, to visit later in the itinerary. We'll climb our first pass, Dochu La, at 3,100m offering spectacular views of the Himalaya.

After a nice warming cup of tea or coffee we continue down the other side and proceed through river valleys into forested regions. Bhutan still boasts 75% virgin forest which is pretty impressive, given its location sandwiched between hugely-populated India and China. We head further east and pass through the rural township of Wandue Phodrang, affectionately known as 'Wangdi'.

Day 3 We climb another pass, the 3,420m Pele La, and continue east, to arrive at the spectacular Trongsa Dzong. The *dzong* is an architectural marvel unique to Bhutan; a huge stone fortress which houses both the local administrative authority (ie. Government) and a Buddhist learning centre (ie. Monastery). There are literally dozens of these impressive structures throughout the country and we shall visit a few; the one here at Trongsa is one of the largest. Then we push further on across Yotong La at 3,435m (you know by now that 'La' means 'pass') into the Bumthang district, to find our hotel in the regional centre of Jakar. This region is renowned for its local cheese production and perhaps we can find a small factory open for a visit.

Trongsa Dzong



Day 4 will probably be quite a cold start to the day (we've often seen ice on the seats of the Enfields...) so have your hand warmers in your pockets – and guess what? We cross another couple of passes today including the 3,780m Thrumshing La which brings us into the district of Mongar, where we stay in the town of the same name.

We're getting into more remote areas now and it's another long day in the saddle, but we spend most of it riding through a national park on superb roads with virtually no traffic.

Day 5 Mongar is a pleasant little town to stroll around this morning, and there's no great hurry today because we have a relatively short ride to our next destination. It's no less spectacular than previous days however, and you might be running out of superlatives for your Social postings by now. We climb and drop and climb again for the 90k to Trashigang, the country's most easterly town of any decent size.

Day 6 Trashigang has a bustling little town centre, and is a major trading post for the region. We can spend a rest day here just wandering around the markets, or visiting the dzong, or those who wish can mount up again for a short loop ride into the Gomokora Valley to the north. Nomadic yak herders frequently pass through here, wearing traditional clothing knitted from yak wool, and hats fashioned from animal pelts.

Day 7 sees us turning due south on yet another sensational twisty mountain road, towards Samdrup Jongkhar on the border with India. We turn off beforehand however, now on smaller, unmade, almost single lane roads, to the little-visited hamlet of Pemagatshel. Visitors are so infrequently encountered, the locals usually doff their hats at the sight of an approaching vehicle in the expectation it must contain somebody of high office! You won't even find some of these remote roads on Google Maps yet, as they are new and not well known.

Day 8 You probably will have noticed several of these adornments by now, on local homes and buildings. It's a combination of warding off evil spirits and wishing fertility upon the household, and some of the detail can be quite graphic and amusing.

We continue west, clinging to the high hills as we skirt the northern extremities of India's huge low-lying plains clearly visible across the border. We are entering the least-developed region of Bhutan, where the typical housing is a basic structure of bamboo with a thatched banana-leaf roofing. Subsistence farming is the main game here in Panbang, growing maize and millet, corn and wheat.



Tourist girls will be girls...

Day 9 We traverse the oldest wildlife park in Bhutan, the Royal Manas National Park, to eventually emerge from these remote and somewhat primitive regions and re-join 'civilisation'. Gelephu is on the border with India and is therefore a significant trading centre between the two countries. It has the newest airport in Bhutan (domestic only) and is the largest town we've seen for the past several days. It's also a bit warmer here, as we are lower in altitude and out of the mountains for the first time!

Day 10 sees us re-joining properly sealed roads as we wind our way back up into the hills. The highway from Gelephu completes our loop back up to Wangdue Phodrang and then on to Punakha Dzong. Hopefully you're not already *dzonged* out by now, because this one is absolutely worth a visit. Built on the river bank at the confluence of two sacred streams, it was once the capital of the country and is stunningly beautiful. It's been a long day, so we'll leave til tomorrow to explore this wonderful edifice.

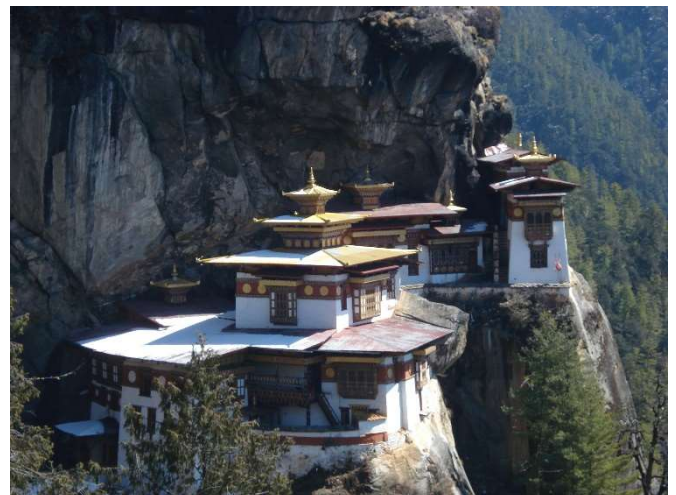


Day 11 is a rest day wandering through the *dzong* and exploring some of the other attractions in the area. You are free to go for a local ride of course, if you haven't had enough saddle time recently...

Day 12 From the old capital to the new, we'll head west to Thimpu in time for lunch and a visit to the huge statue of Buddha guarding the entrance to the city. Thimpu also has the only zoo in the country, where we can observe the mysterious takin. This strange beast, the national animal of Bhutan, is said to be the result of a god known as The Divine Madman slaughtering a few animals in order to have a huge feast. He got a little intoxicated, and stuck the head of a goat on the body of an ox and brought it back to life. From here we continue back past Paro to the westernmost town in the country at Haa, high in the hills once again.

Day 13 We have a surprise for your last day on the bikes. It's only a short 65k back to Paro but to get there we cross the highest pass in Bhutan, the 3,800m Chele La – so don't think we're going to knock off this 65k in an hour or so! It's a good half a day's ride on tight switchbacks. At the top there is a commanding view of the Himalaya once again, including the country's highest peak, Jomolhari, some 60k away on the border with China.

Day 14 is our final day here in the magical Kingdom of Bhutan. Just a few kilometres out of Paro is the start of a challenging 4-hour trek up to the spectacular Tiger's Nest monastery clinging to a high rocky ledge. Optional of course, but it just has to be done! We hand back our Royal Enfields and complete any necessary paperwork, and we'll have a Farewell Dinner tonight to sign off with.



Day 15 will see us transferring you after breakfast to Paro International Airport for your flights home. We hope you've enjoyed your visit to this enchanting part of the world. Please go tell 100 of your closest friends!

We invite you to do your own further research online; Google and Wikipedia have a wealth of information on all that we have touched upon briefly here. Search for 'Gross National Happiness', for example.

Further detailed trip notes, including a list of essential clothing and equipment to take, health considerations, visa formalities, etc, will be sent upon receipt of a completed Booking Form and deposit. Contact our office any time for further information via email Adventure@WorldOnWheels.Tours