



Bhutan: Birds, Culture, and Natural History

March 16-April 3, 2015

**Price: \$6,950 from Bangkok, Thailand
Single Supplement: \$450**

High in the majestic eastern Himalayas and nestled between Tibet and India, sits the small Kingdom of Bhutan, increasingly renowned as one of Earth's precious, unspoiled spots. In this mountain Kingdom, an intact Buddhist culture is integrated into every aspect of daily life set amid spectacular mountain scenery, pristine forests and picturesque valleys. The breathtaking landscape is dotted with fluttering prayer flags, colorful farmhouses amidst terraced fields, and impressive monasteries clinging to impossible cliffs.

This shining cultural gem is also a birder's paradise. Over 60 percent of the country is forested, and unlike other Himalayan countries, much of Bhutan's original forest remains intact. As a result, Bhutan lies in an area designated as one of the world's ten biodiversity hotspots. Its wide altitudinal range—from sub-tropical lowlands to alpine peaks—provides an array of climatic conditions and habitats, from sub-tropical jungles to temperate forests and tundra that support over 650 bird species. The diversity of bird life in Bhutan is further augmented by numerous migrating species that pass through Bhutan on their travels north and south. For these reasons, Bhutan's bird list includes some of the rarest and most sought after species in the eastern Himalayas. Thirty-four species of birds classed as threatened or near threatened are found in Bhutan, including the critically endangered White-bellied Heron. Because of Bhutan's progressive forest conservation practices many of these species still thrive in Bhutan and can be found easier here than elsewhere in their range.

In addition to having an astonishing diversity of bird life in a country no larger than Switzerland, Bhutan is home to at least 165 species of mammals, including Golden Langur, Leopard, Rhinoceros and Asian Elephant in the lowlands; Red Panda, Himalayan Black Bear and Musk Deer in the middle-elevation forests; and Snow Leopard and Takin on alpine meadows. Although very rarely seen, Tigers might be found anywhere from the base of the foothills to above tree line. The diversity of Bhutan's flora is no less impressive. More than 600 orchid species (including at least 50 that are endemic), 46 species of rhododendrons (4 endemic), and more than 300 species of medicinal plants are found within its borders.

During our expedition we will see a wide variety of birds, wildlife, and scenic wonders. Our walks and drives will take us through virgin forests, across high open pastures, to Bhutan's most extensive high-elevation wetland, as well as to mountain villages and monasteries. On this spring excursion, along with forests full of bird song we should encounter a number of breeding species that we wouldn't find on our November trips, including a variety of flycatchers, cuckoos, swifts, and the very special Satyr Tragopan. This spectacular resident is far easier in the spring than the fall. With a little effort, over 330 bird species are possible.

Throughout the tour we'll occasionally stop to visit the impressive goembas (monasteries), dzongs (the monastery/fortresses that serve as Bhutan's administrative and religious centers), lhakhangs (temples), and chortens (stupas) that are important features of Bhutan's religion and culture, both past and present. We'll have opportunities to enjoy traditional Bhutanese arts and crafts, which represent Bhutan's living heritage, and reflect the culture's spiritual and intellectual life. Surrounding us at every turn will be examples of Bhutan's distinctive architecture with its traditional shapes, colorful patterns, outrageous "motifs," and an unmatched combination of engineering skill and aesthetic beauty.

ITINERARY

Day 0, March 15: Pre-trip meeting in Bangkok

We will hold a pre-trip meeting in the lobby of KT Guesthouse in Bangkok, Thailand on the evening of March 15th to make sure everyone made it this far, answer last minute questions, and plan our departure for the airport the next morning. Exact time of the meeting TBA. For more information on the KT Guesthouse see the section “In Bangkok” on page 9.

Day 1, March 16: Arrive Paro and drive to Thimphu.

Our Druk Air flight leaves Bangkok early, around 7 AM. The flight may make a brief stop en route in Dacca, Bodhgaya or Kolkatta. We'll arrive in Paro, Bhutan mid to late morning. Upon arrival in Paro you will immediately be struck by the transparent purity of the air. After Immigration and Customs formalities, we'll be welcomed by our local host and guide and drive the two hours to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. Leaving the airport we will see our trip's first birds: Gray-backed Shrike, White Wagtail, and Hodgson's Redstart. A little further into our drive we will stop along the Paro Chhu (River). Some of the birds we may encounter here include Ibisbill, Brown Dipper, Ruddy Shelduck and River Lapwing.

During our afternoon in and around Thimphu, we may visit the slopes above the town to see the Takin, Bhutan's national mammal, and a few other Himalayan mammals in captivity, while birding the forested surroundings. Kalij Pheasant is possible on the slopes above town.

Overnight at hotel, Thimphu (2,320m/7,656 ft).

Day 2, March 17: Morning: Birding Dodena Valley; Afternoon: Drive to Punakha

Like Paro, the Thimphu valley is relatively dry and is surrounded by blue pine forests. But to the north of Thimphu city is the valley of Dodena, part of the Jigme Dorji National Park. Here the vegetation consists mainly of evergreen oak forest with bamboo. With an early departure we may encounter Assamese Macaques, Common Gray Langurs and even Goral (a small brown, native goat), as well as many birds, such as Crested Kingfisher, Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Spotted Nutcracker, and Oriental Cuckoo. We'll stop at a place with rock-bee hives hanging from a cliff to look for the rare Yellow-rumped Honeyguide feeding on the honeycomb.

After lunch we'll drive to the subtropical valley of Punakha. The drive will take us through blue pine forests and as we ascend the vegetation gradually changes to higher elevation conifers. We'll make our first stop at the Dochu La Pass (3,050 m/10,004 ft) where on a clear day, the view of the Himalayas, including Gangkar Puensum (7,541 m/24,734 ft), the world's highest unclimbed peak, is breathtaking. Dochu La is one of the most spectacular spots in Bhutan with its 108 chortens beautifully laid out across the mountaintop, prayer flags fluttering from the towering pine trees, and the high Himalaya in the distance. The lovely Fire-tailed Myzornis is a distinct possibility, along with an assortment of tit & warbler species, minlas, and fulvetas.

From Dochu La we'll continue driving east and down in elevation to the town of Wangdue Phodrang (also called Wangdi) on the banks of the Punak Tsang Chhu, then from Wangdi we turn north and drive a short distance to the town of Punakha. The road descends through a temperate broadleaf forest where rhododendrons and magnolias bloom in profusion from March to May, and then through a semi-tropical zone where banana, orange trees, and cactus are found.

Overnight in Hotel, Punakha (1,250 m/4,125 ft)

Day 3, March 18: Punakha

This morning, we will drive along the Puna Tsang Chhu (River) all the way up to Tsekha village to seek out one of the world's rarest birds, the White-bellied Heron. Another spectacular and globally threatened species that is occasionally sighted along this river is Pallas's Fish Eagle. From our turn around point we'll bird our way back to Bhutan's longest suspension footbridge (the world's second longest) and walk across the bridge to the Punakha Dzong.

Originally known as Pungthang Dechhen Phodrang, (The Palace of Great Bliss) Punakha Dzong was built in 1637 by the Great Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the Unifier of Bhutan. The Dzong has been destroyed several times by floods, fire and earthquake, but it has always been rebuilt to its original grandeur, and the latest renovation was completed in 2004. The wood and metallic works are superb, not to mention the fantastic sculptures. We will spend the rest of the day birding along the Mo Chhu River in the forest of the Jigme Dorji National Park. Bar-headed Geese, Ruddy Shelduck, and Crested Kingfisher are all possible along the river.

Overnight in hotel, Punakha (1,250 m/4,125 ft)

Day 4, March 19: Punakha to Tsirang

Today we'll mainly be birding in a sub-tropical region. From our hotel, we will drive south along the Puna Tsang Chhu (Punakha River), crossing through farmlands, hydropower construction sites and sparse forests of chir pine. On this drive, we again have a chance of seeing the White-bellied Heron and the Pallas's Fish Eagle. Another big bird to be on the lookout for is the Great Hornbill. About mid way through today's drive we enter the Tsirang region. This region has only recently been opened to tourism and it is here that the north literally meets the south. The people from southern Bhutan are mostly of Nepalese origins and at Tsirang the culture is a mixture of the two ethnic groups. We'll also get our first chance at some of the southern Bhutan avifauna. We will continue past the town of Tsirang and camp at a site called Darachu, on the way to Gelephu.

Overnight in tented camp at Darachu (2,000 m/6,600 ft)

Day 5, March 20: Darachu to Gelephu

Today we descend through cool broadleaf forests to the tropical region of Gelephu, but before leaving Darachu we'll look for the much sought after Beautiful Nuthatch. Other possibilities here include Dark-throated Thrush, Lesser Necked-laced Laughingthrush, Lesser and Greater Racket-tailed Drongos, and Lesser and Greater Yellow-naped Woodpeckers. We will spend plenty of time birding in this pristine forest until we arrive in the Plains of Sarpang. From Sarpang, we'll drive through the flattest region of Bhutan. The 20 mile stretch of road will provide us the best opportunity to add the birds typical of the Indian Plains to our list. The possibilities include, Black-headed and Maroon Orioles, Indian Roller, Jungle Babbler, Hill and Jungle Mynas, four species of parrot, Red-collared Dove, Indian Pond-Heron, Wreathed, Pied Hornbill, and Great Hornbill, Red Junglefowl, Indian Peafowl, and Flame-backed Woodpecker. Gelephu is the main town in the district of Sarpang and one of the three main entry points into Bhutan from India.

Overnight hotel, Gelephu (230 m/770 ft)

Day 6, March 21: Gelephu to Tingtibi Camp

After spending the early morning birding the lowlands around Gelephu, we say goodbye to the southern lowlands and ascend towards the District of Zhemgang. The drive through the broadleaf forest is not only

beautiful but is rich with bird life. We will be driving mostly up hill with occasional birding stops and the last two hour drive is downhill until we arrive in Tingtibi at 540 m/ 1780 ft. We plan to spend three nights in Tingtibi, but we may consider spending the first of these three nights about 30 miles before Tingtibi.

Overnight at a camp near Tingtibi (540 m/1,780 ft)

Day 7-8, March 22 and 23: Tingtibi

We'll spend two full days birding the Tingtibi area. Here we have a chance to find Lesser and Greater Rufous-headed, Grey-throated, and Black-throated Parrotbill, Collared Falconet, White-hooded Babbler, Red-faced Liocichla, Blue-winged, Laughingthrush, Common Green Magpie, Pallas's Fish Eagle, and Himalayan Cutia. In addition to the bird life, we will be in the range of the Golden Langur, a beautiful and rare near-endemic primate of Bhutan.

Overnight at Tingtibi Camp (540 m/1,780 ft)

Day 9, March 24: Tingtibi to Trongsa

Today, we leave for Trongsa. If we have yet to find Beautiful Nuthatch, we'll have one last chance this morning at a site near Tingtibi. Besides the varied bird life, it will be difficult not to notice the diversity of butterflies that accompany us along our route. Our drive will eventually descend into the valley floor at Langthel, where we begin to wind our way up through the terraced rice farms towards Kuenga Rapten. These picturesque rice fields were carved out of the steep slopes during the time of the third King (1926-1952).

From Kuenga Rapten, we continue on to Trongsa. Time permitting, for those interested we may be able to arrange a tour to the dzong. Because of its strategic location in the center of the country the governor of Trongsa controlled the movement between east and the west and collected taxes from the people passing through, which made the rulers of Trongsa always the most powerful in Bhutan. It was from this dzong that the current royal family rose to prominence. The original dzong dates back to 16th century. Because the Trongsa Dzong is built on a very narrow ridge, its courtyards are much less spacious than those of the other dzongs, and one is more conscious of the buildings' thick and battered walls, and their sculptural forms. It is every bit as impressive from inside as from outside.

Overnight in hotel, Trongsa (2,000 m/6,560 ft)

Day 10, March 25: Trongsa to Gayzamchu

Today, we leave for Gayzamchu, one of our higher elevation camps. Above Trongsa the road climbs through many switchbacks as it passes through a misty forest of rhododendrons, silver fir, and bamboo on the way to Yotong La Pass (3,425 m/11,234 ft). Soon after the pass, the forest changes to the blue pines characteristic of Bumthang. En route we'll look for Great Parrotbill and Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler, and with luck we may encounter several species of pheasant.

After about 30 minutes of driving through the pine forest, we will arrive at Gyetsa, at the upper end of the Chhume Valley, the first of Bumthang's four major valleys. After driving the length of Gyetsa, we'll arrive at Zungney in the Chhume valley where we'll visit a small shop where locals weave yathra, Bumthang's famous handspun, hand-woven, and boldly patterned woolen cloth. A little further from here we will arrive at the junction of the newly constructed by-pass road to Ura, which is another of the four major valleys of the Bumthang district. We'll continue on from the village of Ura to our lovely camp at Gayzamchu. Flocks of Snow

Pigeons are frequently sighted in the valley foraging in the farmlands. If the skies are clear we should be able to get fantastic views Gangkar Puensum, the highest unclimbed peak in the world.

Overnight in tent camp, Gayzamchu (3,400 m/11,500 ft)

Day 11, March 26: Gayzamchu to Yogkhola

Today's drive is often hailed as one of the most spectacular in the world. It will take us through magnificent forests, prayer flags waving in the breeze, countless waterfalls, and villages that seem to be frozen in time. Eastern Bhutan is more remote than the western regions and many of the villages we pass through appear as if they've remained unchanged for centuries. Thrumsing La pass (3,700 m/12,435 ft) marks the official entrance to Eastern Bhutan. The possibilities of birds in this area include the gorgeous Fire-tailed Sunbird, Blood Pheasant, Himalayan Monal, Satyr Tragopan, Red-headed Bullfinch, Collared and White-winged Grosbeak, and Rusty-flanked and Eurasian Treecreeper. From the pass we'll travel through a wonderland of moss-draped trees and into the village of Sengor. As we descend through these spectacular temperate forests, the bird and plant diversity only increases. Within a matter of hours we will have descended over 5000 feet of elevation.

Overnight at Trogon Villa, Yongkhola (1,700 m/5,576 ft)

Day 12-13, March 27 and 28: Yongkhola

We'll spend two full days birding Yongkhola, one of the richest birding sites in all of Asia. With an early start we hope to catch a view of the stunning Satyr Tragopan. Other specialties in the Yongkhola region include: Ward's and Red-headed Trogon, Rufous-necked Hornbill, Fire-tailed Myzornis, Hill Partidge, Speckled Wood Pigeon, Sultan and Yellow-cheeked tit, and Chestnut-headed, Slaty-bellied and Gray-bellied Tesia.

Overnight at Trogon Villa, Yongkola (1,700 m/5,576 ft)

Day 14, March 29: Yongkola to Bumthang

Today we back-track to the valley of Chhume, Bumthang, with the occasional stop for birds, mammals, and scenery. If we haven't yet found a Ward's Trogon, we'll make a final attempt before leaving the Yongkhola region. Since today is roughly the reverse of Day 11, we'll have another chance for clear skies and magnificent views in Thrumsingla Pass.

Overnight at a hotel in Chhume, Bumthang (2,575 m/8,448 ft)

Day 15, March 30: Chhume to Pele La Pass

We'll leave our hotel before dawn to drive to a site at about 12,000 feet with the hope of seeing the majestic Himalayan Monal. Other high elevation species possible this morning are Dark-rumped, White-browed, and Beautiful Rosefinch, White-collared Grosbeak, Snow Pigeon and Dark-throated Thrush.

After our morning foray we'll return to the hotel to check out and begin the long drive to Pele la pass. We will back-track until Trongsa and from Trongsa the road will be new for the trip. After about half an hour on this road we come to a viewpoint offering excellent views of the Trongsa valley with its massive Dzong across the depths of the Mangde Chhu gorge. After another hour we will be driving parallel to the eastern slope of the Black Mountains, with wonderful views of the trackless old-growth forests. While today's drive is long, we'll make a few stops to stretch our legs and hopefully add a few species to our trip.

The mountain and forest scenery along the way is simply stunning. The sweeping pastures of dwarf bamboo just before the Pele La pass (11,218 ft) are a favorite winter habitat for yaks and their nomadic herders. From the pass, we drive a few minutes further along the old highway to camp for the night. In this remote high elevation area tiger, leopard, and Himalayan black bear have been seen.

Overnight at camp at Pele La (3,400 m/11,340 ft)

Day 16, March 31: Pele La to Dochu La

We'll spend much of the morning birding around the Pele La and enjoying the incredible scenery and magnificent blooms of rhododendrons. Be on the lookout for the Great and Brown Parrotbill, Satyr Tragopan, Himalayan Monal, Collared Grosbeak, and Darjeeling Woodpeckers.

After breakfast we descend until the bridge below the Wangdue Dzong to arrive at the point where we turned south on Day 2. From here we'll be in familiar territory once again. We'll stop at the Dochu La pass for the night.

Overnight at the Dochu La Hotel (3,100 m/10,000 ft)

Day 17, April 1: Dochu La to Paro, with a visit to the Tiger's Nest Monastery

We'll rise early to watch the sunrise over the Himalayas and bird around the hotel. After an early breakfast, we descend towards Thimphu, continue on to Paro, and drive straight to the trailhead for our afternoon hike up to the Taktsang, the famous Tiger's Nest Monastery. Tiger's Nest is Bhutan's most famous monument, and one of the most venerated pilgrimage sites in the Himalayas. It is perched on the side of a cliff 900 m/2,950 ft above the floor of the Paro valley. The steep hike climbs to a tea house just across a cleft in the cliff from the Tiger's Nest. We will continue on from the teahouse, down and up about 4,000 steps past a waterfall and into the monastery. Taktsang, which means "Tiger's Lair", is so called because Guru Rinpoche, who introduced Buddhism to Bhutan, is said to have arrived at the site (where he meditated in a cave for three months) in a miraculous manner—flying on the back of a tigress. In 1998, a fire of unknown origin destroyed the main structure of Taktsang, but it has since been rebuilt, with traditional materials and techniques, to its previous splendor. Birding along the trail is often slower than at other sites, but we should encounter species such as Black-faced Laughingthrush, Chestnut-tailed Minla, and Yellow-billed Blue Magpie.

Overnight at a hotel, Paro (2,300 m/7,544 ft)

Day 18, April 2: Paro with an excursion to Chelela Pass

Today we drive to Chelela pass (3,810 m/12,573 ft), the highest road point in Bhutan. We should leave the hotel by at least 4:30 AM to arrive at the pass around 6 AM. We hope to see Himalayan Monal and Blood Pheasants along the road, before what little traffic that uses the road has a chance to disturb the birds. The sunrise illuminating Jomolhari and other high peaks is a sight to behold. After a picnic breakfast at the pass, we'll hike along the ridge through prayer flags and alpine vegetation of dwarf rhododendrons, juniper, gentians and edelweiss, with inspiring views of the sacred mountain Jhomolhari toward the north end of the Paro valley. On the western side of the pass we will also see Mt. Kanchenjunga, the third highest peak in the world, in the distance. In addition to the pheasants, we'll look for White-throated Redstart, White-winged and Collared Grosbeaks, Altai and Alpine Accentors and perhaps even the majestic Lammergeier, if we are very lucky. After this morning outing, we'll return to our hotel with a little time to rest before we head off to the family farm of our local host to experience life in rural Bhutan during our farewell party.

Overnight at a hotel, Paro (2,300 m/7,544 ft)

Day 19, April 3, Departure

Today we must get up, say goodbye to our guides, and board our Druk Air flight. We depart Paro late morning and arrive in Bangkok mid to late afternoon. The plane will probably make a stop en route. The tour ends in Bangkok.

TOUR DETAILS

LEADERS: Aaron Lang and a local Bhutanese guide

GROUP SIZE: 11 participants

TOUR COST: \$6,950 from Bangkok, Single Supplement \$450

THE PRICE INCLUDES: Guides, flights between Bhutan and Bangkok, all in-Bhutan expenses (ground transportation, meals, lodging, entrance fees to museums, daily tariff, visa fee, departure tax and tourism tax.)

The tour price includes the flight between Bangkok, Thailand and Paro, Bhutan. If the flight schedule allows and you wish to arrive from India or Bangladesh, let us know and we will adjust the price accordingly.

NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE: Airfare to and from your home and Bangkok, personal expenditures in Bhutan (e.g., shopping, laundry, internet use, alcoholic beverages, gratuities to our Bhutanese guides), and Bangkok expenses. No discounts offered by WBA can be applied to this trip.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE: A deposit of \$1,000 is required upon registration. A second payment of \$2,000 is required by September 15, 2014. The remaining balance is due December 15, 2014.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Before September 15, 2014 your deposit and any payments will be refunded minus a \$100 cancellation fee. If you cancel between September 15 and December 15, 2014 all but your deposit will be refunded. For cancellations on or after December 15th no refund is available.

TRIP CANCELLATION/TRAVEL INSURANCE: Trip cancellation insurance covers you if you have to cancel. Travel insurance provides coverages for medical, theft, etc. during your travels. To shop for either, check out www.insuremytrip.com.

TOUR PACE AND STYLE: While this trip definitely has a birding focus it would be a shame to visit such a fascinating country without taking in some of its rich culture and heritage. We will visit dzongs (secular and religious regional headquarters), the Tiger's Nest monastery, museums, Thimphu city cultural sites, markets and spend an evening with our guide's family in their traditional farmhouse in Paro. Much of the rest of our activity will have a birding focus, which often results in delightful impromptu encounters with the local residents. We recommend that you have an interest in birding, but it's not necessary to be a serious birder to enjoy the trip.

This is a road-based tour. While we attempt to balance the time on the road with time out in the field birding, several of our days require very long drives. The road system is the only way to travel through Bhutan, other than trekking (which greatly restricts the amount of country, habitats and species that we could see). The roads are narrow and curvy as they traverse the steep countryside. Because the forests of Bhutan are intact, many of them in pristine condition, the roadsides offer fantastic birding and in many areas are the only paths through the dense forest.

The exact details of this itinerary (route, lodging, camping locations) may change slightly prior to the trip or during the trip as necessary depending on birding, road conditions, weather, etc.

ACCOMMODATIONS: We will be camping as well as staying in guesthouses, hotels and resorts. During spring in the Himalayas, the skies may be cloudy and drizzly some of the time, and we may encounter a few rainy days. Temperatures at high elevations will be cool, possibly below freezing at night, and could be quite hot on the days we spend in the lowlands. Camping may be a bit chilly. For that matter, the hotels can be quite chilly too, lacking central heat.

REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date is required for United States citizens to enter Bhutan. For your Bhutan visa you'll need to send to WBA a full-color scan of the pages of your passport containing the passport details, photo and signature. Our Bhutan visas are arranged by our Bhutanese guides and your WBA guide will have them. A VISA is not necessary for Thailand for stays of less than 30 days.

VACCINATIONS AND HEALTH: No vaccinations are required for travel in Bhutan; however, cholera and yellow fever inoculations are required if you arrive within five days of departing from an infected area. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and B. We recommend participants contact their doctor for advice prior to departure. All participants should bring a good quantity of all their prescription and over the counter drugs and medical supplies, as these will be very difficult to obtain in Bhutan.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636). You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel.

FOOD: Breakfasts may include eggs, toast, oatmeal or muesli, juice, and fruit. Lunches and dinners are similar to each other: several cooked dishes typically including rice, potatoes in a sauce, chiles and cheese (the national dish), stewed meats with sauces, and/or cooked greens. Even when we are picnicking out in the country, we usually have hot, cooked lunches. Desserts are occasional. When we get up early to bird before breakfast, we usually will have tea and crackers before heading out. If you have dietary restrictions, please let us know on the guest information form and our guides will try to accommodate you. This form can be filled out on-line at www.wildernessbirding.com/guest

SPENDING MONEY: You will need cash for gifts/souvenirs, alcoholic beverages, hotel laundry, internet use, and an optional tip for our Bhutanese guides. If you go out on the town on your own, you're responsible for meals, etc. A stone bath (outdoors in a wooden trough heated by hot stones from a campfire) in Paro runs about \$30. Souvenirs in Bhutan, including jewelry, beautiful textiles, carvings, handmade paper products, etc. and tend to be on the expensive side.

CURRENCY: Upon arrival in Bhutan you can exchange currency at the airport in Paro. ATMs are very hard to come by in Bhutan so make sure to have enough cash on hand. If necessary we may be able to make a stop at a bank later in the trip as well. Very few of the shops we'll visit accept credit cards.

TIPPING: Although tipping is officially discouraged in Bhutan, it is unofficially expected. Near the end of our tours we commonly pool funds for a modest tip to our local guides, driver and road crew. We can pay this in US cash or Bhutanese currency or a combination. If you are interested in contributing to a tip at the end of our trip, we suggest having \$100-150 for this purpose in either US dollars or Bhutanese currency. You are also welcome to tip independently rather than as part of the group, or not at all, as you wish.

SMOKING: Smoking is banned in public places and tobacco sales are illegal throughout the country.

RECOMMENDED READING:

Bird Books

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and T. Inskipp. Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Christopher Helm Identification Guide Series, 1998. This is a great book for studying for the trip, but its bulk makes it impractical to carry in the field. We'll have one copy along with us.

Inskipp, C., T. Inskipp and R. Grimmett. Birds of Bhutan. A&C Black, 2004. This book was condensed from the larger Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. While the text lacks some detail, its small size makes it THE book to carry in the field. We recommend that all participants carry a copy.

Rasmussen, P. C. & J. C. Anderton. 2012. Birds of South Asia. The Ripley Guide. Vols. 1 and 2. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Washington D.C. and Barcelona. A more detailed, up-to-date and comprehensive work on the birds of the region. It's also bulky to travel with, but we'll have a copy along with us.

General Travel Guides

Mayhew, B., Brown, L. and Mahapatra, A. 2014. Bhutan. Lonely Planet Publications. Singapore.

Pommaret, F. 2009. Bhutan: Himalayan Mountain Kingdom. Airphoto International Ltd. London.

Both of these are good overall guides with quite a bit of travel and cultural information.

Additional Reading

Zeppa, J. 2000. Beyond the Sky and the Earth: Journey into Bhutan. Riverhead Trail Publishers. A memoir of a 25 year old Canadian woman's experience as a teacher in eastern Bhutan.

Crossett, B. 1996. So Close to Heaven: The Vanishing Buddhist Kingdoms of the Himalayas. Vintage Publishers. A considerably more journalistic perspective on Bhutan's culture, politics and economy.

Film:

Travellers and Magicians: Bhutan's first feature film.

The Other Final: One of the best small films we've ever seen, but it has not been distributed in the US. Here's a choppy clip from it: <http://www.ccebanff.ca/portfoliodetail/tv/115>

EQUIPMENT: Because of the wide elevation range, the weather and temperatures on the trip can vary considerably. To help prepare, once you've registered we'll send you a detailed clothing and equipment list.

IN BANGKOK: If your departure city is Bangkok, we recommend staying at K.T. Guesthouse (www.ktguesthouse.com). We've stayed here prior to all of our Bhutan trips and have enjoyed the friendly staff, good food, and comfortable rooms. Aaron will be staying here prior to the trip and **we'll hold our pre-trip meeting here on March 15.**

The rooms are about \$20 per night for an air-conditioned double. They do not take credit cards or traveler's checks, however, so you will need to have enough Thai baht to pay your bill. They have a pool, a restaurant and they can store gear for you while you're in Bhutan. It's simple, clean, safe and comfortable. KT Guesthouse is not in the typical tourist district; it's near a neighborhood wat (temple) and a huge night market area used by locals which is fascinating to walk around. The KT Guesthouse website has lots of useful information about staying there and getting around Bangkok.

You can make your reservation via their website for nights before and after the trip. Be sure to print the Thai map from their website before you leave home so that you can give it to your taxi driver upon arrival in Bangkok. The cost of a taxi ride from the airport to KT Guesthouse should run about 300 bhat.

THAILAND TRAVEL DOCUMENTS: You do not need a VISA to visit Thailand if you are staying for less than 30 days.

THAI CURRENCY: You can exchange major world currencies for Thai bhat at the Airport in Bangkok.

REGISTERING FOR THIS TOUR: To sign up for this tour, complete the on-line registration form at <http://www.wildernessbirding.com/guest/> and pay a deposit of \$1,000 payable by check or credit card to WBA. Call (907) 299-3937 to pay by credit card. Checks can be mailed to:

Wilderness Birding Adventures
40208 Alpenglow Circle
Homer, AK 99603

We hope you'll be able to join us for this remarkable birding adventure!

Photos and past bird lists can be found at our website: www.wildernessbirding.com

For more information or clarification of any details please drop us a line at: info@wildernessbirding.com



The Punakha Dzong at the confluence of the Mo Chhu and Po Chhu Rivers, is a culturally and historically important site in Bhutan and home to one of the world's rarest birds, the White-bellied Heron. Photo Aaron Lang.