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# Bhutan: Happiness is a place

Posted by Editor on Monday, April 4, 2016 · Leave a Comment



**By Tenzin Rondel Wangchuk,** Chargé d'Affaires, Royal Bhutanese Embassy in Brussels.

By many idealists, the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan is often referred to as the '*Last Shangrila'*, which perhaps is an extract from the 1933 fiction *Lost Horizon* by British author James Hilton.

The idea of Bhutan being inhabited by the happiest people on earth is a more current label, which again is a misrepresentation of our development philosophy of *"Gross National Happiness".* For economic reasons, many Bhutanese entrepreneurs in tourism industry has unreservedly promoted Bhutan as thus to make to it more appealing to the many undiscerning tourists. While the entrepreneurial success of marketing Bhutan on such platforms is not known, it cannot be denied that some first-time visitors are attracted to Bhutan for these reasons.

And undertaking a journey into Bhutan in search of a Shangrila inhabited by the happies people on earth would be visiting Bhutan for reasons that may leave you disappointed. Bhutan is like any other country around the world with its own share of natural beauty, uniquely rich culture, tradition and arts and many more as also inconveniences.

Bhutanese like myself have often been asked what is there to see or do in Bhutan. Bhutan's mountains, for spiritual reasons, are banned from being climbed. We host or boast of no natural or man-made wonders. My response, with a shade of hesitation, is if you visit Bhutan, it will be to see Bhutanese people and experience the silence.

My discourse on Bhutanese tourism, almost always ends there and perhaps with one potential tourist discouraged. Visitors in Bhutan spend much of their time on the slow

mountainous road, trying to get from one place to another. I do not hesitate to tell many people with whom I have interacted, the borrowed words of a fellow Bhutanese, that Bhutan is a land of short distances but long drives. For an impatient traveller, driving long hours may not be an ideal way to spend a holiday.

Despite everything Bhutan does not have, visiting Bhutan is about seeing a way of life, culture, and tradition that is so uniquely different. The nerve-wrecking experience of landing onto one of the most difficult airports in the world or for those with strong lungs the arduous trek to the famous Tiger Nest temple and many more are common readings in many of the travelogues and travel guides on Bhutan. Perhaps what is not written about, and scantily if so, is the journey one undertakes within Bhutan. It is on such long drives across the valleys and over the mountains, that visitors truly and intimately discovers the land and the people.

It will neither serve the purpose nor will it be fair to encapsulate here what a visitor will discover on such journeys as a visit to Bhutan can also be abstract. An experience in Bhutan can also lead to a self-discovery of your innate true being, expose the excesses and scarcities in your life. Many visitors' who come to Bhutan for the first time, not-withstanding the *"short-distances – long drives"* become repeat visitors. I sometimes wonder if these visitors have found their Shangrila and happiness in Bhutan or for those who never return, in their own homelands. Tourism in Bhutan is more officially promoted as "happiness is a place", and indeed happiness can be a place.

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