

TOURS IN REVIEW

Candid appraisals of group and customized tours

The following are candid appraisals of some of the guided tours ITN readers have taken in the last year or so. When writing to ITN about a tour, please keep it as brief as possible (750 words maximum) and include the ADDRESS and/or phone number of the tour company plus the PRICE, length and DATES of your tour. (Write-ups may not be used without the price included, and, remember, ITN does not cover destinations in North America or the Caribbean.)

Write to *Tours in Review*, c/o ITN, 2120 28th St., Sacramento, CA 95818, or e-mail editor@intltravelnews.com (please include your surface-mail address).



BHUTAN As my husband, Manley, and I are somewhat limited physically, we wanted to see as much of Bhutan as possible but without a lot of physical demands. For a 15-day tour that we took with a friend, April 21-May 6, 2007, we used the superb services of **Blue Poppy Tours & Treks** (24 Lonsdale Sq., London N1 1EN, U.K.; phone 020 7700 3084 or fax 7609 2029... and Box 1296, Thimphu, Bhutan; phone 00 975 2 333540, fax 333541, www.bluepoppybhutan.com).

Blue Poppy is co-owned by Mr. Choki Dorji, who lives most of the year in London, and Mr. Karma Wangdi, a resident of Bhutan. Choki, who is available to meet travelers in London, worked with us very efficiently via phone and e-mail.

Each tour is tailor-made for travelers according to their interests: trekking, biking, culture, temples, monasteries, dzongs, schools, archery, textile manufacturing and so on. (Set itineraries are also available.)

Manley, a physician, requested that we visit a hospital, and this was arranged in Paro and Thimphu. We also met with doctors and visited Thimphu's National Traditional Medicine Hospital.

The three of us plus guide and driver were very comfortable in a 9-seat bus. We traveled far enough during our tour to see two amazing festivals.

Our guide was amazing, attentive, courteous and very considerate. He was exceptionally knowledgeable and always willing to teach us about the history, customs and religious practices of his people plus anything else we asked about.

The driver was equally helpful. Whenever we had to climb up or down, which was necessary when visiting the magnificent dzongs, either the driver or the guide was at our side to provide an arm and encouragement.

We paid \$3,000 per person for our tour plus \$700 each for round-trip flights from Delhi to Bhutan on Druk Air. The visa fee was \$30.

Everyone who enters Bhutan as part of a group pays around \$200 per person per day. This amount is set by the government, and individual tourists pay an additional \$40 per

day while couples pay an additional \$30 per person per day. We were considered a group of three so paid \$200 each. Blue Poppy charges a 10% administrative fee on top of the set charge.

So all tours cost essentially the same. It is the service that makes this company stand out.

— BARBARA COHEN, Long Beach, CA

CHINA & TIBET

My husband, Marty, and I took a delightful trip with **China Plus, Inc.** (320 Decker Dr., Ste. 100, Irving, TX 75062; 888/868-8811, www.chinaplustour.com). Our 14-day tour, Sept. 18-Oct. 3, 2007, included Beijing, Xi'an, Shanghai and Lhasa and cost us \$7,400 for two, not including international airfare.

We were part of a small group of 19 people. Our tour leader was terrific, we had competent local guides and drivers and we experienced excellent timing going through the airports. We had wonderful deluxe accommodations everywhere we stayed.

Best of all was the flexibility offered to add to or change our plans when the group decided to veer off in another direction.

— DAWN DIMMERMAN, Philadelphia, PA

TURKEY We really enjoyed the 29-day "Bora's Grand Tour of Turkey" from **Cultural Folk Tours International** (5631 Lincoln Ave., Ste. B, Cypress, CA 90630; 800/935-8875, www.boraokkok.com).

The tour, May 11-June 8, 2008, was led by Cultural Folk Tours' owner, Bora Özkök, and covered many varied and beautiful areas of Turkey.

This tour was ideal for those of us who love adventure and who enjoy amazing historical and archaeological sites in an unspoiled and nontouristy

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