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Bridge to Bhutan offers “the best experiences”

to offer a comfortable tour while making a good living. The government keeps the tourist's payment until they have left the country, satisfied. This encourages companies to offer excellent service so they receive payment for their services.

“Guides have a lot of power in Bhutan,” Lotay explained, “If a hotel or restaurant doesn't provide good rooms or food, the guide will just say that the

clients are complaining too much and move them to another business.” For this reason, the guides always receive excellent meals although they often choose to eat the local food, a fiery blend of potatoes, cheese and chilies. “The food served to the chulleppes (foreigners) is too mild for us!” Lotay said with a smile.

“I don't want to take more than eight people at a time,” Lotay



Separating the wheat from the chaff using wind power in Bhutan.

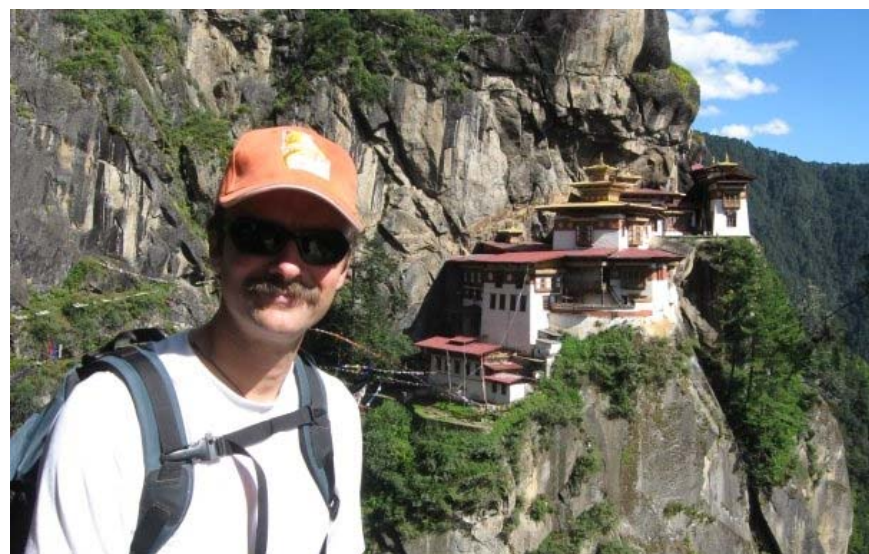
said, “The small number means that each tour gets an intimate look at Bhutan.” After experiencing special moments like a mountainside birthday party (see editorial), I'd say it works. If you'd like to learn more about Bridge to Bhutan, visit www.bridgetobhutan.bt



Carol Patterson of Kalahari Management Inc. talking about tourism trends with a group of senior tourism professionals in Thimpu, Bhutan

Virtual Tour of Bhutan

For a virtual tour of Bhutan, visit Carol's Bhutan videos on YouTube at: www.youtube.com/reinventure



Bhutan Tourism at a Glance

- Bhutan measures Gross National Happiness, not GNP
- Tourists to Bhutan must travel on an escorted trip
- Minimum charge for traveling in Bhutan is \$200 per person/per day
- Most tourists participate in a cultural trip or trekking
- Bhutan does not allow tourists to climb their mountains (locals complained climbers were disturbing the mountain deities so the practice was stopped in the 1980s)
- Slightly more than 20,000 people visit Bhutan each year making it one of the least visited places on earth
- All flights into Bhutan are by VFR (visual flight rules, not instruments) and involve an approach more fitting of a Cessna172 than an Airbus.
- Rumor has it, only eight pilots in the world are qualified to fly commercial planes into Bhutan

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EcoTourism Spotlight on..

The Bridge to Bhutan experience

By Carol Patterson
President
Kalahari Management

“We'll be successful, but we'll never be big,” said Fin, co-owner of Bridge to Bhutan (B|B), when I complimented him on the excellent service his company provided and predicted big growth for the future. “Yes,” chimed Lotay Rinchen, the other owner of Bridge to Bhutan, “we want to keep our groups small so we can



WELCOME



Ecotourism Management is published quarterly by Kalahari Management to provide you with helpful information on the ecotourism industry.

Each issue includes practical advice on running a business, all of it designed to help your business succeed. As well, an ecotourism organization will be featured in each issue to inform you about other businesses in the industry.

Kalahari Management offers research services, business planning, training and accounting. If you have information you would like to share in *Ecotourism Management* or would like more information about our services, please call Carol Patterson at 403/290-0805, fax us at 403/398-1503 or email: carol@kalahari-online.com

have the best experiences.” Having completed a ten day tour in a group of two, I could attest to the attractiveness of small group sizes. My husband and I had been able to change our itinerary on the fly; we didn't have any travel companions to accommodate so we could add attractions when our interest was piqued, or dropped, like when I fractured my ankle and had to limit my uphill endeavors.

My introduction to B|B was a chance encounter with Lotay at The International Ecotourism Society's 2007 conference in Madison, Wisconsin; an unlikely place to start a journey to Bhutan. As I listened to

Lotay's ideas for sustainable tourism and his description of home, I knew that if I succeeded in getting to Bhutan (long on my to-do list), I'd want to go with his company.

There are more than 400 tour companies operating in Bhutan; some are very small, taking only a few tourists a year; but the requirements for starting a tour company are rigorous. Lotay and Fin got a hand-up in their business from their uncle who runs Bhutan Expeditions. The government's policy of charging a minimum fee per person per day (see Bhutan Tourism at a Glance) allows tour companies

In My Opinion..

Experience Better than Service

by Carol Patterson
President,
Kalahari Management Inc.

Joseph Pine and Jim Gilmore pioneered the experiential economy, arguing that people will spend more on experiences than for commodities or services. Tourism providers, like Bridge to Bhutan (B || B) featured in this issue, understand this concept and apply it with gusto.

When my birthday coincided with a trip to Bhutan, B || B didn't just mention the special day or give me a card (although either would have been adequate). They organized a party on the side of a mountain complete with cake, sunset, spectacular views and their own family members. The singing of Happy Birthday never sounded so sweet! Needless to say, this is a birthday I'll never forget, and I'm now a raving fan of B || B.



Contrast this with the recent 'experience' I had on one of Canada's national airlines (rhymes with Air Canada). As we ended our transatlantic flight, two flight attendants came through the cabin

collecting service items. One attendant remarked to the other, "I don't think I've ever seen a lazier crew on a flight. Aside from us, where is everybody? I haven't seen X for the whole flight."

I had found the service excellent on the flight, maybe because I was sitting near the industrious crew members, but those comments startled me. I was left with a totally different, and not positive, impression of the company with a few careless remarks. I was surprised that staff would speak candidly when so many people were sitting nearby.

Perhaps airlines have treated passengers like cattle for so long that they no longer think we are people and capable of hearing their conversations. If that's the case, they need to pick up Pine and Gilmour's book for a refresher!

Carol

Wild North operators come together

More than twenty tourism operators from Greenland, Iceland, Scotland, Norway and the Faroe Islands attended a workshop in early October on the Faroe Islands (National Geographic's #1 Ecotourism Island award in 2007).

The workshop presented by John Hull of John S. Hull, Associates, Inc. and Carol Patterson, of Kalahari Management Inc. was based on their book, **Handle with care: Developing a Nature Tourism Product in the North.**

Businesses learned how to grow their businesses sustainably and

innovative best practices for tough times. Participants agreed the decision to come together was worth their time, "Thank you for two inspiring and informative days," said Olavur at Lakeside Sightseeing.

The workshop was part of a bigger project, Wild North, funded by NORA (Nordic Atlantic Cooperation), NATA (North Atlantic Tourism Association) and others to develop tourism businesses in the north Atlantic.

You can learn more about these northern businesses at www.thewildnorth.org.

What's Next?

Five American airlines have recently introduced a \$10 surcharge for flying on their busiest days, November 29 (the Sunday after American Thanksgiving) and January 2 and 3. They are also adding 10 peak days for 2010. United Airlines is also trying a priority boarding charge that allows you to check in 12 hours earlier than your fellow passengers.

So, when you're calculating your travel budget, you'll need to add one more charge to the checked baggage charge, the fuel surcharge, the food purchase, etc., etc. It is only a matter of time until they find a way to charge for the in-flight restroom!

KM website has new look

Better than a new hairstyle, we have a revamped website.

We've made it easier to read and included quick links to videos and podcasts.

Check it out at www.kalahari-online.com.

As well, our Reinventure website has been updated to include media interviews Carol Patterson did across Canada in 2009.



If you'd like to listen, head to: www.reinventuretravel.com/content/view/14/26/

Agritourism goes to new heights: Sheep watching Takes to the skies

Carol Patterson's recent trip to the Faroe Islands coincided with the annual sheep round-up.

In Canada, a farmer would head to the fields with an ATV or a horse, and a dog to round up the flock. The Faroese make this tradition look like child's-play.

The islands' steep geography means that some sheep live on hillsides not fit for horse nor machine.

With the very real danger of falling into the sea, farmers carefully approach the sheep on the steepest crags, secure them into cargo nets, and hoist them across ravines to flatter ground.

This spectacle was captured recently on Faroese television at <http://tinyurl.com/faroesh sheep>.

Unless you understand Faroese, you can't follow the soundtrack, but the visual spectacle proves that agricultural activities can hold tourists spell-bound!

Upcoming Ecotourism Events

The **Educational Travel Conference 2010** will be held in Providence, Rhode Island on **February 3-6, 2010**. If you would like to make great connections with people interested in learning while traveling, visit www.travellearning.com

Need a Reinventure? (or know someone who does?)

Travel allows us to reinvent ourselves over and over again. If we merely open our eyes and our hearts, change can happen.

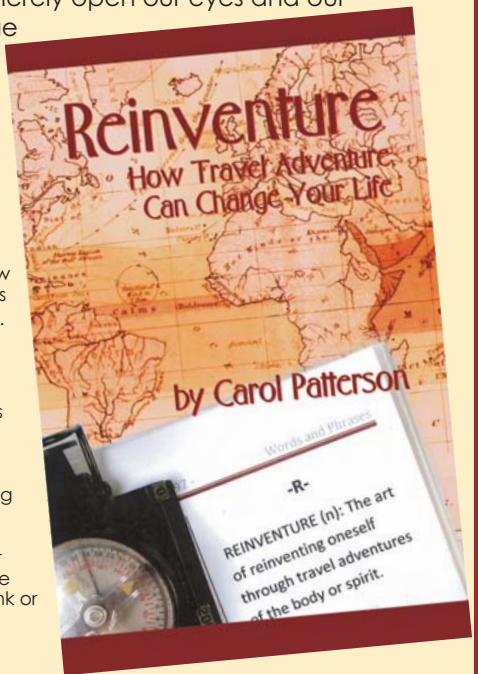
In **Reinventure: How Travel Can Change Your Life** author, lecturer, traveller Carol Patterson has gathered favorite travel stories, hers and others, to show that no one comes home unchanged.

Some of the wonderfully entertaining stories in **Reinventure: How Travel Can Change Your Life** are earth-shattering epiphanies, some are just gentle adjustments. Either way, they will make you laugh, cry, think or just shake your head in wonder.

Reading **Reinventure** means becoming part of the experience.

Learn more, follow the stories, get Reinventure tips, or add your own stories at: www.reinventuretravel.com

Order your copy of **Reinventure: How Travel Can Change Your Life** at www.trafford.com/08-0116 or email orders@trafford.com. It's also available at major online book retailers. isbn: 978-1-4251-6979-4



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