

FOLLOW THE READER: Bhutan

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Editor's note: Although Follow the Reader's primary focus is independent travel, especially affordable lodgings, occasionally we receive recommendations of unique tours and programs. In these cases, the prices are somewhat higher than what we would normally include, but the experiences are distinctive enough that we thought it appropriate to share them. - Jeanne Cooper, Travel Editor

Bhutan tour offers unique experiences

I have done a lot of solo and family traveling, and have always looked down on those package-tour herds we would see in museums and airports. Still, when I wanted to visit Bhutan, I discovered that I had to join a group in order to receive an entry visa. I was lucky enough to find Quo Vadis, a Boston company that has the most “ungroupy” approach to group travel.

Roxana Von Kraus, the founder and operator, escorts all the small groups and plans all the journey to the most minute detail. She understands that every group has its own dynamic that does not average out the interests but multiplies them.

I spent about two weeks with Quo Vadis traveling Bhutan this past spring in a group of 10. We all met at the Paro Airport, stayed only in small hotels in Thimphu and beyond, took hot stone baths under the moon, had a photo contest and discussed the upcoming elections with representatives of the Bhutan Times.

The balance of architecture and politics, music and art, riding, walking, stretching and resting was masterly, and the attention to details made the experience unforgettable. Our hiking trip in Bhumtang alone had 10 helpers and 20 horses for our small group of 10.

The Bhutan government sets the base costs for tourists at \$130 per day for lodging and meals. Costs for upgrading accommodations, local transportation, guides, festival celebrations, treks, camping equipment, mountain guides and chefs, porters and horsemen, entries to special venues and workshops bring Quo Vadis' price up to \$4,000 to \$8,000 for a two-week tour, depending on the options chosen.

Next year's Quo Vadis trips to Bhutan, timed to see local religious festivals, are offered March 16-31 and Oct. 6-21. Other destinations for 2008 include Romania, Uzbekistan and Turkey.

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