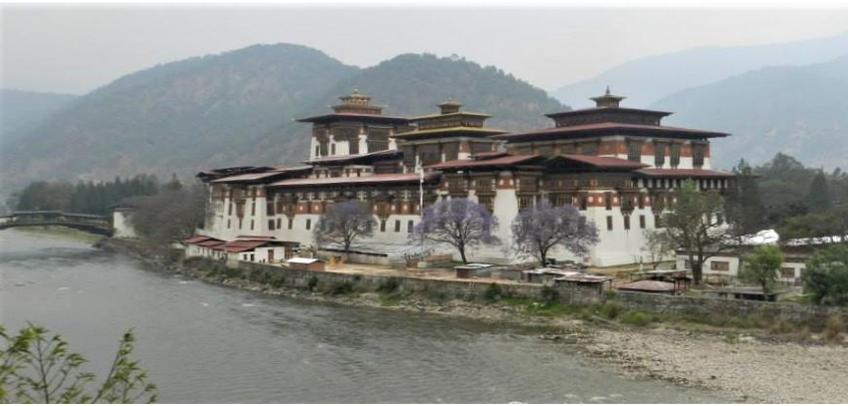


BHUTAN

April 2014



Stuvac's trip to Bhutan was splendid in so many ways. It began with a flight that is an adventure in itself. Our female Captain informed us on take-off that pilots regard this flight between 2 mountain ranges as one of the most challenging in aviation. For those in the back it was a jaw dropping experience.

We landed in Paro, loaded into 2 mini vans and made for the hills. The Dantak Road climbs to 3988 metres as it winds through spectacular scenery; forests with magnificent rhododendron bushes flowering in reds, yellows and pinks, through farmlands with bullocks pulling ploughs (and occasionally the farmer or his wife doing the pulling), along fast flowing rivers with the Himalayas as a backdrop. We stopped at magnificent monasteries with stunning hand carvings painted with brilliant colours, and many, many buddhas of various sizes. We trekked through forests to



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magnificent views, hiked 3 hours to Tigers Nest (Taktsang monastery) where it is believed Guru Padmasambhaya landed on the back of a tigress (many of us quietly wishing that tiger was still taking passengers). We visited the National animal sanctuary in Thimphu, the National Library, many Arts and Crafts emporiums selling handmade paper, gold, silver artifacts. We admired many erect penis paintings adorning the walls of houses. Their function; to ward off evil and malicious gossip. An interesting juxtaposition to the Gross National Happiness philosophy for which Bhutan is famed.

And we conferenced. “Looking back and looking forward: the future of conservative treatments for musculoskeletal pain” was presented over 20 hours by Prof Paul Hodges, the only lecturer I know who can calmly present on the edge of a ravine, without the usual technology, when the seminar room for that particular lodge was double booked. Paul also used some of the group as the sample in an ongoing study of the effect of altitude on respiration.

