

INDIA/NEPAL/SRI LANKA/BHUTAN

By Rik Fairlie

EASTERN BHUTAN SHOWS OFF CRAFTS, MOUNTAINS TO VISITORS

Bhutan Travel, formerly the national tourist office of the kingdom of Bhutan, has inaugurated a tour to newly opened eastern Bhutan and a 20-day package that includes a trek in the mountains dividing Bhutan and Tibet.

Marie Brown, president of the New York-based wholesaler, explained that the government opened up parts of eastern Bhutan this year in part to offer visitors attractions other than the dzongs (temples), visits to which were banned in 1987.

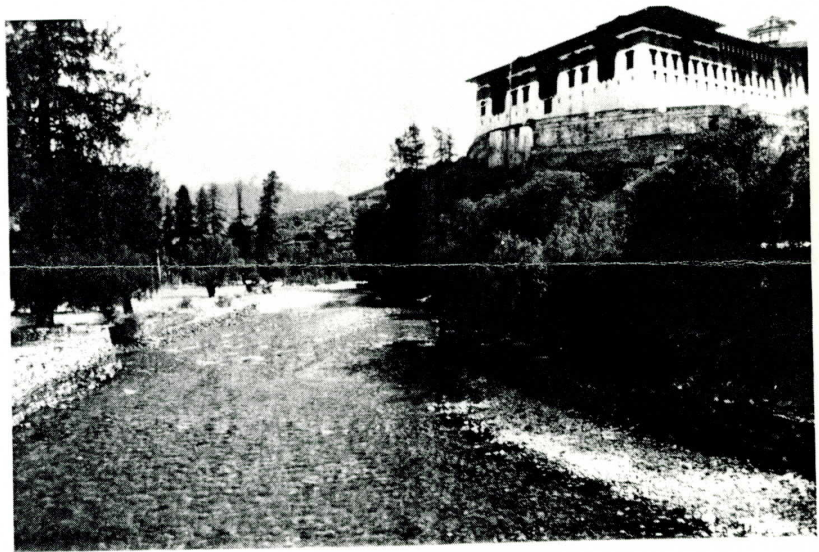
"The government wanted to substitute other attractions and areas, including eastern Bhutan and trekking," Brown said.

CENTER OF WEAVING

The company's 18-day eastern Bhutan package, departing Oct. 18, takes in the center of weaving in Bhutan. The tour will include visits with some of the area's foremost craftspeople and a day excursion on foot to Kurtey, Bhutan's most famous weaving village.

Also included are visits to the newly opened Lhakhang temple in Ura and the Jambe festival in the Bunthang Valley.

The tour is priced at \$2,200 land only and includes all meals, land transportation, a guide and roundtrip air fare from Calcutta. Brown added that Bhutan Travel



Until now, there has been no fishing in the rivers of Bhutan.

also offers air-inclusive packages with optional stays in Bangkok and India.

The new 20-day trip that includes a seven-day walking trek at altitudes of 12,000 feet is "fairly strenuous," Brown said. She added that the support team and pack animals make the going easy by transporting all camping supplies and food. All tour participants carry a day pack.

But the pristine wilderness makes a little roughing it worth the trouble. "It's the most popular trekking area in Bhutan," Brown said of the tour, priced at \$3,755 from Seattle. "You're in absolute wilderness almost immediately, and the terrain changes every day, from rice paddies to forests to areas above timberline with Alpine flowers."

Another tour available this year is a seven-day package that takes in the Wangdiphodrang Tsechu festival, departing Oct. 14. Brown said that in addition to witnessing the annual event, which features costumed dancers in ancient steps designed to scare off evil spirits, participants also will have the opportunity to visit the Gangteng area to see the rare black cranes. The package is priced at \$1,355 land only.

FLY OVER EVEREST

Also in the catalog this year are eight-day trips from Calcutta to the Paro Valley and the capital city of Thimphu. These trips include a spectacular flight near Mount Everest and visits to several historic monasteries. There are also opportunities to visit different artisans. These are priced at \$1,368 and depart Calcutta every Friday.

Bhutan Travel pays agents the standard 10 percent commission for up to 10 bookings, and offers a 50 percent discount on the 11th booking with every 10 paid bookings, and one free trip for every 15 paid bookings.

Contact Bhutan Travel, 120 E. 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10022, telephone 212-838-6382.

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