

# GEOEX

## *Ultima Thule*

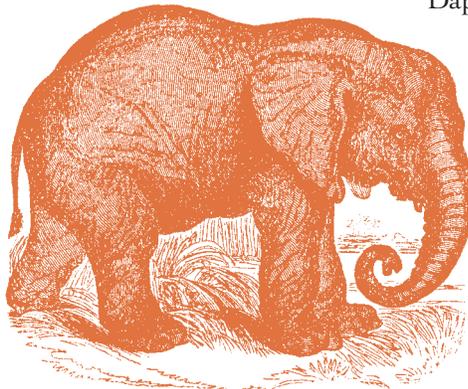
JOURNAL OF THE FARTHEST PLACES

### *A Happy Side Effect of Travel*

When we set out on our worldwide adventures, there's no telling how they'll affect us. Many GeoEx travelers and staff have discovered firsthand that their experiences abroad ignite a fiery passion to make a difference in the lives of the people and places they encounter. We're endlessly impressed and inspired by their efforts to give back—which is not always easy to do. These engaged global citizens exemplify travel's remarkable power to transform people and the planet for the better.

We remember the GeoEx traveler who ventured into Upper Mustang, Nepal (overnighting, he recalls, "at the last outpost of humanity" and then helicoptering "over a vast treeless, shrubless landscape for what seemed like forever"), only to come across an ancient temple ravaged by time. The American Himalayan Foundation reported: "The wall paintings, exquisitely detailed, were covered by soot and grime; earthquakes over the ages had damaged the *gompa* structures and roofs were caving in. . . . The Lobas wouldn't worship the sacred images any longer; they'd been defiled by centuries of deterioration." Our traveler was so moved that, working with the AHF, he assisted with funding the repairs. He explains, "We were so happy to be able to help the people restore and preserve these wonderful temples for future generations."

Another guest, while exploring the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, opted to spend a few days teaching art at a school in the Bumthang region. She brought the supplies and showed the students how to paint wooden bowls. The children did a wonderful job and were able to sell the bowls to raise money. Then there was the couple who, while on safari, visited the



Daphne Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage in Nairobi and fell so in love with a baby pachyderm they sponsored him. The stories of generosity go on and on.

When travel gives us so much, it's only natural to want to give back. But finding the right channel to make that happen can be surprisingly difficult. Some of the organizations

*(continued on page 2)*



#### ◆ IN THIS ISSUE

- A Happy Side Effect of Travel* [page 1]
- Celebrating Don George and "The Way of Wanderlust"* [page 3]
- New Trips News: Sudan and More* [page 3]
- Top Travel Specialists and Other Accolades* [page 3]
- Notes* [pages 4–8]
- Giving Back* [pages 2–7]

# 60

MARCH  
2016

**GIVING BACK**  
*We asked staff to tell us about worthy NGOs, community and conservation organizations, and giving-back efforts they've encountered—and even been a part of—during their travels. We'd love to hear about yours as well.*

◆ **GIVING BACK ONE**  
*Natalie Crow: In 2012 I traveled to Patagonia for the first time and fell in love with the future Patagonia National Park. Located in the Aysén region of Chile, the park is a project of Kris Tompkins and her late husband, Doug, who have worked tirelessly to protect land in Chile and Argentina, buying it with their own money, converting it into parks, and then donating it to the national park systems. The park I visited was so beautiful, pristine, and wild—like no other place I had been. I vowed to return and make a donation of my own: my time. I am so excited to be returning as a volunteer this March, working for three weeks in the organic garden, which will soon be supplying the lodge with fresh produce. Kris has often said that if you love a place, you have a duty to protect it. Hopefully I will have contributed to the protection of this extraordinary place.*



*For more literary travel musings, visit our blog at [GeoEx.com/Blog](http://GeoEx.com/Blog)*

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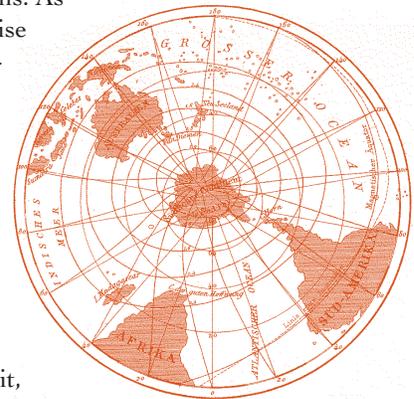
that do the best work are not household names precisely because their resources are focused more on the work and less on communicating what they do to the public at large. To add to the challenge, a global NGO that is effective in one area may not make as much of an impact in another.

Because GeoEx is passionate about the destinations we're privileged to visit, we have made it our job to carefully evaluate organizations for inclusion in our Giving Back program. We're lucky to have a team of savvy folks on hand—including our CEO, Jean-Paul Tennant, and Shana Chrystie, our Vice President of Operations—to find on-the-ball, locally clued-in nonprofits that make a real difference. They've volunteered countless hours to personally get to know these groups and craft an intelligent and sensitive philanthropy program, executed through the GeoEx Foundation.

We're ever enthusiastic about Giving Back and see it as a group effort—and by group, we mean you and us; many of our Giving Back initiatives are the result of our travelers and colleagues in the field alerting us to opportunities to lend a hand. For example, a longtime GeoEx guide and friend in Myanmar, who also works to assess needs in villages, encountered a partially built school in the remote Shan State. An international nonprofit had started it, pouring the foundation and creating the structure, but it sat empty for want of furniture, school supplies, and a teacher. With funds from our Giving Back program, she filled these gaps. The Magwe Primary School opened in June 2012, making it possible for local kids to learn to read and write in their own village. Since then, with the continued support of GeoEx, direct traveler donations, and other local backing, the school has added three more teachers, bathroom facilities, and a "mini library," and students have been helped with entry fees and uniform costs.

For those of us at Geographic Expeditions, our work is bigger than travel. We're grateful that we can provide opportunities for our travelers to bring home not only memories of great places but also a heightened, palpable sense of the local challenges and a chance to participate in the solutions. As one GeoEx trekker who'd helped raise money to build a dormitory for students in rural Nepal said, "The people of the area made a huge impact on me. They greet each other with the word *namaste*. It's a Sanskrit term. The way it was defined to me was, 'The divine spirit in me honors the divine spirit in you.'" And as author Lillian Smith wrote, "No journey carries one far unless, as it extends into the world around it, it goes an equal distance into the world within."

Eight of the worthy organizations we've carefully chosen to support are the American Himalayan Foundation, Conservación Patagónica, Wildlife Conservation Society, Global Fund for Women, Bhutan Foundation, Room to Read, Galápagos Traveler Conservation Fund, and WildAid. We invite you to learn more about them at [GeoEx.com/ResponsibleTravel](http://GeoEx.com/ResponsibleTravel) (donations are always welcome) and to continue sharing with us your own experiences of giving back around the world.



## Celebrating Don George and “The Way of Wanderlust”

In a very welcome turnabout, our October in-conversation event featured our Editor in Chief Don George not as the interviewer but as the guest of honor. He was joined onstage by Kimberley Lovato and Lavinia Spalding, fellow travel writers who skillfully drew out inspiring and touching stories from Don about his life, career, and new book, *The Way of Wanderlust*, the



first collection of his own articles and tales. When asked to reflect on the evening, Don shared these kind words: “GeoEx’s celebration of my book was one of the most meaningful events of 2015 for me. *The Way of Wanderlust* is not just an anthology; it’s also a kind of memoir, the story of my life for the past 40 world-wandering years. I truly could not imagine a better way to launch that anthology and that memoir than the wonderfully festive evening of storytelling and celebration that GeoEx orchestrated.” A video of the lively conversation can be viewed at [GeoEx.com/Events](http://GeoEx.com/Events)—and, naturally, his book can be found in bookstores and online.

### *New Trips News: Sudan and More*

Adding to the new trips you’ve seen listed in our latest dream-fueled catalog, our adventure travel mavens have recently unveiled these exciting, customizable journeys: *Ancient Riches of Sudan’s Nubian Desert* follows the Nile through welcoming northern Sudan, exploring ruins of great significance, including little-visited pyramids and Jebel Barkal, the sacred sandstone mountain of the Black Pharaohs. *Conservation’s Cutting Edge in the Congo* moves gently through UNESCO-listed Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, encountering endangered mountain gorillas and the world’s largest lava lake atop Nyiragongo volcano. *Trans-Caucasia: Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia* shares ancient monuments, spectacular landscapes, and fascinating cultures shaped by Persians, Romans, Arabs, Ottomans, Russians, and Soviets. And our action-packed British Columbia adventure reaches remote wilderness areas by helicopter and sea plane, granting rare access to breathtaking mountains, luxurious wilderness lodges, and opportunities to spot bears, whales, and eagles. Please go to [GeoEx.com](http://GeoEx.com) to learn more.

### *Top Travel Specialists and Other Accolades*

*Condé Nast Traveler* recently announced their 2015 Top Travel Specialists list, and we are proud to note that three of our destination gurus were once again recognized for their expertise. Congratulations to Kate Doty (Private Jet Trips), Vassi Koutsaftis (Tibet), and Brent Olson (Bhutan).

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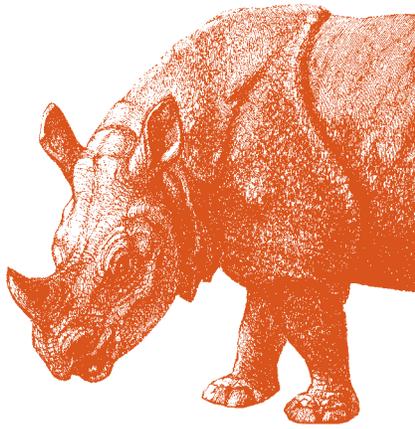
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[GeoEx.com/Catalog](http://GeoEx.com/Catalog)



#### ◆ GIVING BACK TWO

Tina Liadis: *While traveling in Cambodia, I was fortunate enough to spend a night in Chi Phat village, headquarters for a sustainable tourism project in the Cardamom Mountains. Villagers who at one time resorted to poaching to feed their families are now employed as guides for village visits, jungle trekking, bird-watching, and other activities. It was amazing to explore with them and discover the protected area’s rain forests, waterfalls, rivers, mangroves, and wildlife, as well as cultural artifacts.*

◆ **GIVING BACK THREE**  
 Jennine Cohen: *I've been really impressed with the work of Project Morrinbo, an NGO located in the Pereira da Silva favela (shantytown) of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The project, a unique art installation showing a scale model of a favela cityscape, supports cultural and educational programs for local youth. I love sharing the project with GeoEx travelers.*



◆ **GIVING BACK FOUR**  
 Jean-Paul Tennant: *Solio Ranch in Kenya's Great Rift Valley was an eye-opener: 45,000 acres of fenced-in, heavily guarded savannah with a high concentration of black and white rhinos, Mount Kenya looming majestically in the background, and unusually large and graceful acacias (thanks to the forced exclusion of elephants). Unfortunately, my young sons and I quickly learned that even three layers of armed security (Kenyan army, Kenya Wildlife Service, and Solio's private security force) were no match for the economic forces at play. During our visit, two rhinos were poached over three days. In a place not far from slums where people are living on two dollars a day, a single rhino horn can sell for \$500,000 upon shipment to Vietnam or China.*

(continued from page 5)

Visit [GeoEx.com/Staff](http://GeoEx.com/Staff) to read more about them and our other crackerjack trip planners.

We're also happy to announce that our staff reviews landed GeoEx 26th on *Outside* magazine's 100 Best Places to Work list for the fifth consecutive year. GeoEx also ranked high on The Best Adventure and Travel Jobs from *Outside*, which quoted our CEO Jean-Paul Tennant saying, "Our [research and development] consists of sending our people out into the field. It's probably not shocking at all that they love that." And we most certainly do!



## Notes

### BY POPULAR DEMAND: NEW GROUP TRIP IN BORNEO

We've answered your call for a Group Trip in Malaysian Borneo, scheduling *Rivers and Jungles of Borneo* to run June 10–22. While we do kick off the journey in Kuching, a city known for its Chinese, Malay, and Indian mix, this adventure is more about communing with plant and animal life than with humankind. Trip creator Tina Liadis, who returned to the island for a scouting trip this past fall, is capping the group size at 12 travelers for more intimate observation in the wild.

Here's what's in store as we explore five wonderfully biodiverse areas. First, in Bako National Park, we track whimsical proboscis monkeys, endemic to the island, as they climb through the mangroves in the early morning. Then we fly to Gunung Mulu National Park to witness the dramatic exodus of the wrinkle-lipped bats from cave depths to feed on insects. "They expand and contract in the distance like a swarm of bees," exclaims Tina. Next we cruise the Kinabatangan River basin on the lookout for spectacular avian creatures like the crested serpent eagle. A whopping 15 pygmy elephants were spotted here not long ago. Moving on to the undisturbed Danum Valley Conservation Area, we may spy an orangutan in the cloud forest or a Malay civet on nighttime safari. We finish in Mount Kinabalu National Park to discover its exceptional array of flora and keep watch for the lesser-known oriental small-clawed otter. Reserve your spot with Tina soon.

### A CERTAIN PASSION FOR PAKISTAN

Sara Barbieri, Asia aficionada and leader for our *Pakistan's Hunza Valley* trip (June 18–July 6), speaks ardently about her experiences in this little-visited corner in the country's northeast. She recalls the thrill of catching a freestyle polo match in Shigar next to locals, "savoring the satisfying thwack of mallet on ball and cheering on their team." She notes the beauty of shockingly turquoise Attabad Lake, created in 2010 by a landslide so massive that it inundated a 12-mile stretch of the world-famous Karakoram Highway. This summer, we'll cross the lake and go through the newly carved tunnels above it, now a part of the highway.

"While the vistas are a highlight of any visit to Hunza," Sara explains,

“our explorations reveal smaller-scale treasures as well, such as the impressive forts of Baltit, Altit, Shigar, and Khapulu, all lovingly restored by the inspiring Aga Khan Trust for Culture. Wandering through these poignant palaces, you feel transported through time. When I was last there, I found myself imagining life as the Mir of Hunza.”

Exciting adjustments to our adventure this year include an overnight in Rama, giving early risers the chance to watch the sun rise over the eastern ridge of Nanga Parbat. We'll also meet with a fascinating librarian and history buff at Gilgit's Colonial Library. Sara is standing by for questions.

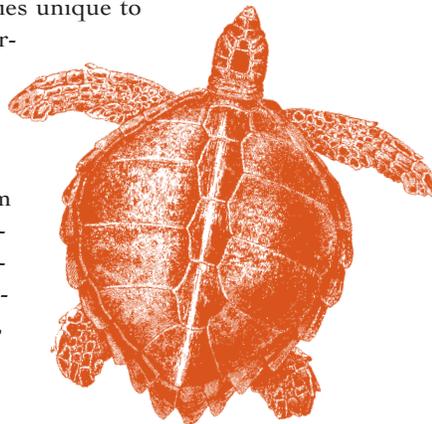


#### THE BEST WAY TO SEE THE GALÁPAGOS

Of all the thrilling ways to experience the Enchanted Islands, *Galápagos Land and Sea* tops the list for our South America team. Linda de la Torre tells us why: “It’s the best of both worlds! You’re based from a luxurious catamaran for five nights, and then spend two at a special safari camp in the Santa Cruz Island cloud forest. This combination shows the widest range of islands and landscapes, and gives you a little more flexibility in activities and time to relax.”

The boat, which holds 16 guests, is downright luxurious, and the camp—modeled after Africa’s superlative tented camps—features spacious suites on raised platforms and gracious hospitality. During both segments of the trip, charming and knowledgeable naturalist guides lead you close to species unique to the archipelago. Imagine giant tortoises, colorful marine iguanas, flightless cormorants, lava lizards, fabulous frigate birds, and Sally Lightfoot crabs.

The sea portion of this Custom Trip can also be made aboard a deluxe 48-passenger vessel. Whichever combination you choose, departures are offered year-round, and groups of eight or more save \$400 per person. Linda looks forward to telling you more.



#### THE WILDS OF THE WHITE CONTINENT

It’s known as the White Continent. Ninety-eight percent covered in ice, it’s the coldest, driest, and windiest place on earth. Why visit such a forbidding place? First, it is one of the last unexplored frontiers. Second—probably because humans find it inhospitable—it is a haven for wondrous wildlife.

*An Explorer’s Antarctica* takes you there by comfortable ice-strengthened ship. The team of naturalists, historians, and geologists aboard helps identify the abundant critters and explain the history of *Homo sapiens* exploration and exploitation here. Twice daily (depending on weather and ice

*(continued on page 6)*



To reach the travel wizards noted here, please call 888-733-9019

#### ◆ GIVING BACK FIVE

Hannah Gaff: *I had the opportunity to teach theater, English, and acrobatics to children in the village of Les in northern Bali. Many of the villagers were salt farmers and fishermen, and when it wasn't farming season, they were forced to live on very little. My experience with their community was so rewarding that my theater company, UpLift Physical Theatre, arranged a benefit performance in Ubud to raise awareness for the salt business and money for the Les farmers. I left Bali feeling more connected to the local people and inspired to continue volunteering as a teacher and performer as a means of intercultural exchange and raising awareness.*



◆ **GIVING BACK SIX**  
Jessica Silber: *The poor conditions in Johannesburg's Alexandra township are dismaying, so it was great to be surprised by the happy energy of the kids in the Friends of Alexandra crèche. A nonprofit, the crèche cares for about 40 children daily with a schoolroom, kitchen, and playground. From the moment I walked in, I was rendered pretty much immobile by the kids, who fiercely hugged my legs and swarmed me for high fives and singalongs.*

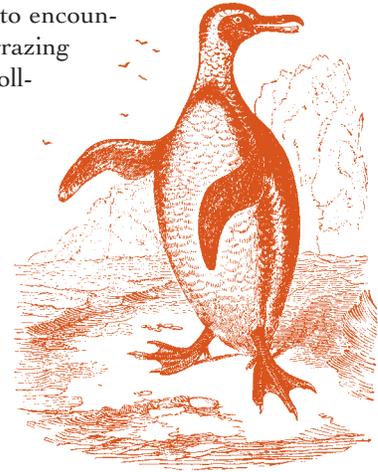


◆ **GIVING BACK SEVEN**  
Sara Barbieri: *In the Punjab state of northern India, the langar (community kitchen) at the Golden Temple offers meals to any and all, serving as many as 40,000 people on any given day. Anyone can volunteer, and though there are no sign-up sheets, no particular times you are supposed to appear; there is simply a constant flow of volunteers that makes this kitchen function. My niece Sam and I each took a turn stirring an enormous pot of dal lentils and feeling, just for a moment, part of the inspiring effort.*

(continued from page 5)

conditions), you adventure onto land to encounter huge king penguin rookeries, grazing geese, black-browed albatross, and lolling seals, as well as breath-stopping snow-sculptured landscapes. Whale-watching opportunities are aplenty. (In *The Way of Wanderlust*, Don George describes coming eye to eye with a whale: "In that instant she communicated something that I can only convey as peace and understanding.")

Cruises depart regularly from November to February and last 11–24 days, depending on a variety of choices. Shorter journeys focus on the Antarctic Peninsula, while longer ones include the Falklands and South Georgia Island. And if you have less time or no stomach for the Drake Passage crossing, ask about our *Fly and Cruise Antarctica* option. Call Urs Hofmann for details.



#### PHENOMENAL GUIDE TO REVEAL THE WONDERS OF TANZANIA

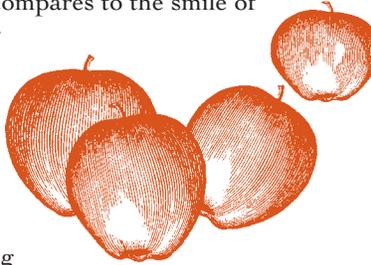
Tanzania native Arnold Swai is living proof that the right guide makes all the difference when we travel. Thanks to his upbringing near Mount Meru and Kilimanjaro, plus his decade of exploring the diverse habitats of East Africa, he knows just how to clear our otherwise foggy specs and draw us into more intimate experiences in his homeland, a country that possesses one of the planet's most remarkable concentrations of fauna. We're delighted that he'll be leading our August 22–September 2 and September 11–22 *Wildlife Wonders of Tanzania*, which take place during Africa's winter, the dry season, when grasses are low and animals are easier to spot.

Attentive and observant, Arnold builds on each moment, ensuring that nothing is repeated, nothing missed. During our stay at a well-equipped mobile camp, he'll knit connections between our bush walks, morning safaris, and moonlit game drives. His broad understanding of African culture will facilitate our introduction to the seminomadic Maasai people. In Tarangire National Park, he'll share insights about the ancient baobab forest and surrounding habitats, teeming with elephants, buffalos, impalas, and elands. As we drive over a large portion of the Serengeti, Arnold will narrate the change in ecosystems, enthusiastically pointing out all things flying, crawling, and flowering, and he'll know when to pull out the tea and biscuits or gin and tonics. Starla Estrada is happy to make the arrangements.

#### A MOUNTAIN CULTURE THAT DEFIES DESCRIPTION

Standing amid splendid Andean peaks in Peru's Lares Valley, it's nearly impossible to put the beauty into words. Maybe it's because we feel the need to explain what's there when, in essence, what's *not* there is what takes our breath away. The simplicity and quietude contrast so starkly with our modern lives.

On our new *Panoramas of Peru* journey (September 3–11), we soak up that gorgeous mountain scenery and meet local community members, experiencing a lifestyle refreshingly spartan compared to our own. Interacting with the people was a highlight for GeoEx traveler Noni Allwood: “We’d load up in the markets every day and give to those we found along the magically remote roads. Nothing compares to the smile of a kid eating a fresh mango, apple, or tangerine. The people in the mountains eat only potatoes, yucca, quinoa, and corn, so bread and fruit are real gifts.”



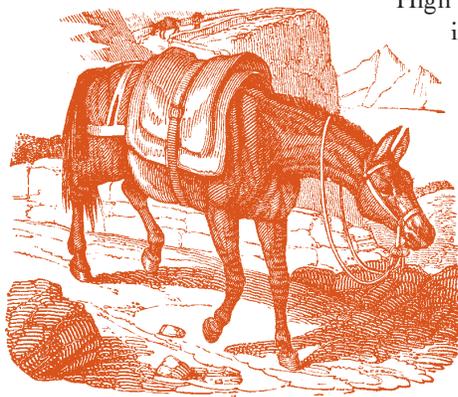
As we venture through the Sacred and Lares Valleys, we revel in high-altitude hiking (with options for varying energy levels) and stay in comfortable, beautifully situated lodges. Along the way are lively weaving villages, pristine peaks, misty waterfalls, and remarkable ruins, including the archaeological site of Ancasmарca and the well-preserved Incan site at Purmamarca. The trip’s grand finale: Machu Picchu. Jennine Cohen is the one to call.

#### LETTER FROM MOROCCO

“If Morocco were to write me a letter,” imagines poet and artist Anna Elkins in her evocative blog on Wanderlust, “it would smell like the tanneries, taste like date milk with orange blossom, feel like the cool *zellij* tile around a fountain, sound like the evening call to prayer, and look like a donkey.”

Considering what Fès might say, she conveys what is both gorgeous and uncomfortable about the place: “Expect to start craving lamb-and-prune tagine cooked for hours over coals, . . . expect moments of despair when cheated of dirham in the idiosyncratic business of bartering for them, . . . expect to feel a sense of timelessness when you stand on a *riad* rooftop, looking out over a city that has hardly changed in a millennium, except for the satellite dishes.”

We’re glad to have Casablanca native Khalid Mouzaki to pave the way through Fès and the rest of our 16-day *Morocco: From Casablanca to Marrakech* adventure (September 17–October 2). We lose ourselves in



souks, explore seaside Essaouira and the High Atlas Mountains, and sleep in a Berber camp in the Sahara. And when we’re craving those aromatic tagines, we sit down to wonderful meals, one of which we help to make in a cooking class. Contact Jess Silber for more information, and go to [GeoEx.com/Blog](http://GeoEx.com/Blog) to read Anna’s full story, “From Morocco, with Love.”



#### ◆ GIVING

##### BACK: SHARE YOUR STORIES

*We’d love to hear about the community efforts that GeoEx travelers have encountered or been involved with while adventuring abroad. If you’d like to share—and possibly be mentioned online—please e-mail your stories and photos to [info@geoex.com](mailto:info@geoex.com).*



*Share this Ultima Thule with friends: a PDF version is available at [GeoEx.com/Newsletter](http://GeoEx.com/Newsletter)*

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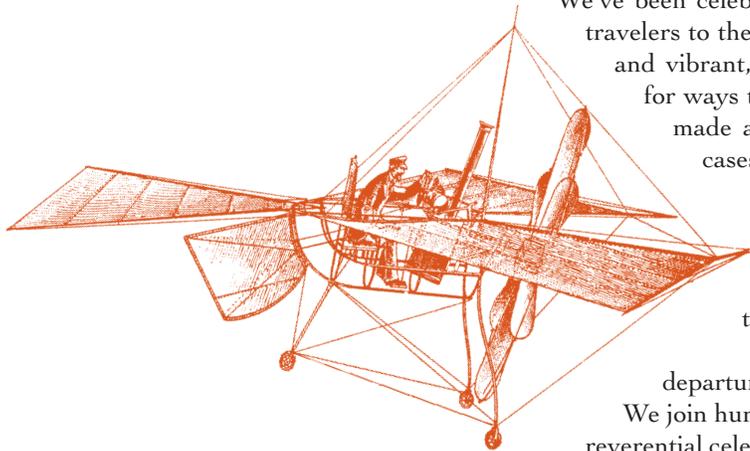
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**NEW TWISTS IN BHUTAN**

We've been celebrating Bhutan for more than 30 years, introducing travelers to the Land of the Thunder Dragon's magnificent scenery and vibrant, proud Buddhist culture. Always keeping eyes out for ways to improve the experience, our Bhutan experts have made attentive updates to *Essence of Bhutan*, which showcases the country's highest lights.



To decrease driving time, we now fly between Paro and the beautiful Bumthang region. We're also incorporating recently opened, unassumingly luxurious hotels that are designed in traditional Bhutanese style.

Another change we're excited about: each 12-day departure is timed with one of Bhutan's exuberant festivals. We join hundreds of locals to watch masked dances and soak up reverential celebrations. On our June 7-18 trip, we'll see the Kurje *tshechu*, which honors Guru Rimpoche, who came from Nepal hundreds of years ago to subdue evil spirits. During this shoulder season, we'll have a more intimate view of the kingdom. For the October 5-16 journey, we'll attend the Thimphu festival, the country's largest. The November 8-19 trip will include the Jambay *tshechu*, which features a nude dance said to purify sins and pray for a good harvest. Edwin d'Haens is ready to assist you.



If you'd like more information on any of the trips mentioned in this newsletter, please visit us at [GeoEx.com/UT](http://GeoEx.com/UT) or call us at 888-733-9019. And if you haven't received our beautiful catalog and would like to, please write or call, and we'll have one winging your way immediately.