

## **Educational Tour to Bhutan** **31<sup>st</sup> October-6<sup>th</sup> November'19**

A group of 43 students from grades 7 to 11 accompanied by four teachers and representatives from Edterra Edventures went for a week long educational tour to Bhutan. This tour was a unique one as the students not only did a lot of sightseeing, but participated in community service and social initiatives as part of the activities organised under the YAP(Young Authors Programme).

The journey began with a traditional welcome by the tour guides, who gifted Bhutanese scarves to everyone. After staying the night at Phuentsholing, the group left for Paro the next morning.

The first visit was a Buddhist fort. They had an interactive session with the guides who explained details about the history and legends linked to the fort. This was followed by a visit to a local Eco farm house, a 200 year old house structure surrounded by fruit trees and farmlands. They saw a 150 year old pear tree which still bears fruit in abundance and supplies fruit to the neighboring homes. This bungalow is now a heritage site, still inhabited and well looked after by the local heirs. The stone bath which is still functional was aptly demonstrated.

The next morning began with a visit to the museum, where the students saw glimpses of the local culture. They then proceeded to Ghatana village. The CAS activity started with the children removing all the weeds from the field. They then dug the soil to prepare the ground for the sowing of seeds. In doing this community service, the school motto of 'Service before Self' was carried to an international platform. The students had fun making the Bhutanese signature dish 'Ema Datshe,' a delicious preparation of chillies and cheese. The lunch, a typical Bhutanese seven course spread, was sumptuous. Each dish had a unique flavour, and was tastefully prepared by the family who owned the farm. This experience was followed by a long meandering uphill drive to Chelela Pass, where the border between China and Bhutan was clearly visible. The view was breathtakingly beautiful. The piping hot Maggi and momos in the bone-chilling cold were another high point for the students. In the evening, the students shopped for souvenirs for their families and friends.

The next day had more in store. The seven hour long trek to Tiger's Nest and the monastery which required both mental and physical strength was a sight to behold. Amidst panting, moaning, groaning, timely breaks, bated breath and cold sweat, all felt a great sense of satisfaction when they finally reached the pinnacle where they seemed to be masters of all they surveyed. The age-old adage 'slow and steady wins the race' was proven once again when everyone felt that deep sense of accomplishment for making it to the top! Nestled around tiger's nest, were several temples, dedicated to different deities. After a spot of shopping at the souvenir outlets, the team was whisked to the Cultural Center. Sitting around the bonfire, sipping hot

battered tea was relaxing and a tremendous relief from the cold weather. Many students tried their skill at archery, the national sport of Bhutan. An interesting cultural programme was arranged showcasing their dances, culture and traditions. A noteworthy observation worth mentioning here is that not only is the country unspoilt, but so are the people who exude warmth, patience, care... a happy lot, who are motivated to enhance their GNH (Gross National Happiness) and not their income. The Bhutanese not only preach but practise the teachings of Buddha and are living examples of Buddhist values. The students also experienced a great sense of elation on wearing the Bhutanese national dress, the 'Gho' and 'Kira', which was another highlight of the day.

The group went to the capital of the dragon country on the fifth day-Thimpu. They visited a monastery, where the annual puja was being conducted. The chanting by the head preacher was spiritually soothing. Next, they went to the Budha Bodharma, the largest sitting statue of Gautam Buddha- a world renowned site. The magnificence and magnitude of the statue left all speechless. A deep sense of peace and tranquility was felt by all on entering the stupa. The students were then taken to the National Stadium where they witnessed a football match. A picnic lunch of pizza and soft drinks was organised in a nearby park, in the lap of nature's bounty and beauty. The students then visited the Technical Vocational Education Training Institute, where they interacted with students of the same age and were left mesmerized by their skills of painting, sculpture, hand crafted items, weaving, moulding and much more!

Upon reaching the hotel, the students worked on the Young Authors Programme, recording podcasts and writing blogs, along with chapters describing different aspects of their enriching experiences in Bhutan.

The next day, before heading for Phuentscholing, the students were taken to Ghatana village farm to sow seeds in the carefully prepared beds. At Phuentscholing the students reflected upon this unique, unmatched experience of one week....a week that will forever be etched in the minds and memory of all. As night fell the students packed their bags with heavy hearts in readiness to leave for Delhi the next day, carrying with them not only their belongings, but a treasure trove of memories. **BHUTAN....spells for Beauty, Happiness & Humility, Unmatched beauty, Totally mesmerizing, Amazing, Never to be forgotten.....!**

