

A fascinating new book about the Bhutan that tourists don't get to see

With 'Dragon Bones - two years beneath the skin of a Himalayan Kingdom', Murray Gunn begins a new life of getting beneath the skin of interesting cultures and sharing his experiences with the world. His lively anecdotal style and the humour of the Bhutanese people will carry you swiftly through the story of his two years in this intriguing country.

After a number of years in a successful IT career in Australia, Japan and Belgium, Murray Gunn quit his job to follow a French woman to Bhutan. The Buddhist country famous for Gross National Happiness is often called The Last Shangri-La because of its beautiful scenery and warm, friendly people. Within days of arriving, Murray and his new wife felt part of a strong local community. They wore traditional attire, worked alongside the locals and socialised with their Bhutanese friends.

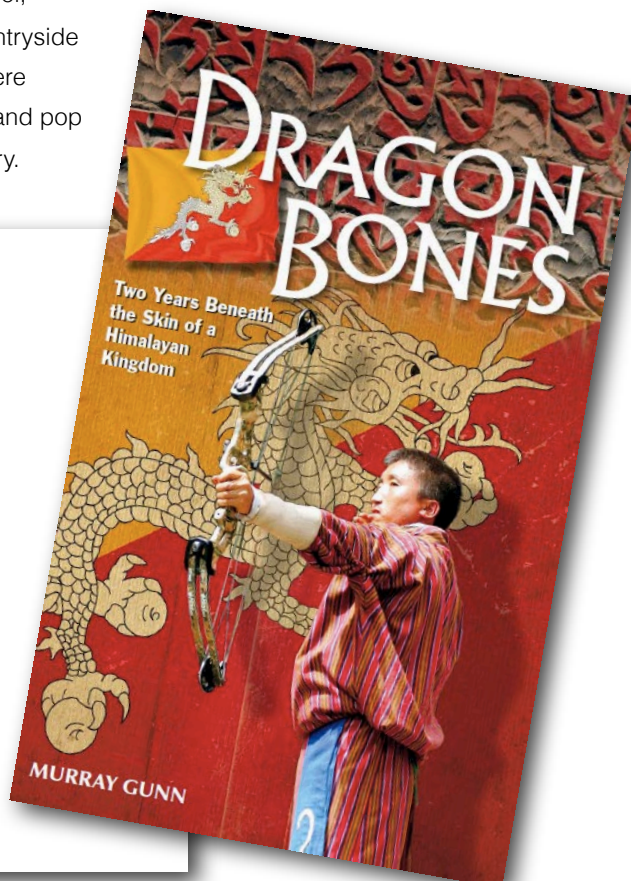
Murray's life began to change in earnest when he realised that there was a lot more to the country than snow-capped mountains, monasteries and smiling faces. His passion for intimately understanding the culture of the places he lives led him to have experiences no tourist will ever have. He felt a rumbling underlying this land of the Thunder Dragon and found a people concerned for the future of their small nation, squashed as it is between China and India.

With the introduction of television and the internet in 1990, Bhutan was moving rapidly into the 21st century. Economic growth was out of control, non-biodegradable rubbish was beginning to litter their beautiful countryside and the king was pushing for change in the political system. People were fighting to maintain their happy lifestyles in the face of the technology and pop culture temptations they were exposed to. Dragon Bones tells their story.



A note from a friend of the author:

The author has a strong belief in the need for Bhutan to determine its own direction as it finds its place in the future. Organisations like RENEW, Tarayana Foundation and VAST were founded by Bhutanese to address various problems as seen by the people themselves. Fifty per cent of the royalties from each book sold will go to support these and similar organisations working for the betterment of Bhutan.



An excerpt from **DRAGON BONES** by Murray Gunn

'Come on, Murray,' said Tshering Wangchuk. 'Wangdi's shouting lunch today.'

Wangdi was the network teacher, quieter and more capable than Tshering, but I had little contact with him. I followed the group out of the room and through the main doors, but instead of turning right to the canteen, we turned left.

'Where are we going?'

'To Wangdi's house, I told you. He's providing lunch.'

The house was a cottage on campus, next to the students' quarters. Wangdi's father was in the front yard, sitting on the low stone wall, painting a cabinet. From the red base and intricate detail in vibrant colours around the joins, I recognised it as an altar for a home. A devout family, then, or too poor to have one made for them.

Wangdi's wife met us at the door and directed us to the living room. In the gloom, dots on the walls looked like mould, but as we entered, they stirred and zoomed around us. Summer was almost in full swing and the rains hadn't come. It was perfect weather for flies.

Slowly the room began to fill up and I met a number of faculty members I'd never seen before I managed to catch our host.

'Wangdi, no one's told me why you're doing this. Is it a celebration?'

'Yes.' Pride filled his voice and his submissive hunch was gone. 'I'm celebrating an increase in my karma.'

Excuse me. I have to greet the other guests.'

How could he be so sure of an increase in his karma? That was like saying that I'd had an improvement in my fate.

Food appeared in quantities disproportionate to the number of guests and to the apparent wealth of the family. Perhaps that was the clue. He must have found some money, got a raise or received a commendation from the king. I cornered Tshering and, not knowing if it was taboo to discuss, brought the conversation around to the cause.

'Do you know what scriptures are?' he asked.

'Yes. Holy documents.'

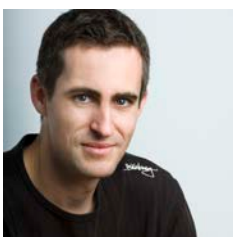
'Right. Well, there are many scriptures in Buddhism and it takes a long time to read them all, but the more you read, the greater your karma.'

'So Wangdi has been reading some of these scriptures then.' That didn't seem to be reason to celebrate on such a grand scale.

'Not just some. All of them. That takes weeks or even months and brings a huge benefit to karma. It might be enough to ensure he's reincarnated in a high position.'

'How long has he been doing this? I haven't seen him take any time off work.'

'He didn't read them himself. He paid a couple of monks to read them for him.'



MURRAY GUNN grew up in Sydney with parents who loved meeting people from different cultures. With an endless stream of international guests invited to stay in his home, each with their own story, it was inevitable that he would develop a passion for travel and experiencing different ways of life. After a decade of living and working overseas, he is currently living in Hornsby, Sydney studying anthropology and planning his next adventure. **Murray is available for book readings and signings, or joint promotional activity.**
Contact him on talktome@murraygunn.id.au