General Assembly, 2013 (March 23)
Photos by Peter Moser-Kamm

On March 23, 2013, the General Assembly took place at Landguet Ried in Niederwangen, a beautiful seminar centre close to Berne.

Mr. Heinz M. Buhofer, Chairman RIPACouncil and SSB Member, is welcoming us at Landguet Riet

Mr. Rinchen Kuentsyl, Counsellor at the Bhutan Embassy in Geneva, conveyed best wishes from H.E. Ambassador Daw Penjo and gave a statement about recent events taking place in Bhutan.

Ms. Chening Peldon (Counsellor) and Ms. Pema Tshomo, (Second Secretary) from the Bhutan Embassy, with Sabine Liebher

Mr. Pradeep Itty, Head East Asia Division of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is informing about the Programme with Bhutan 2013 – 2016

The highlight of the event was the interesting, lively panel discussion in the afternoon with young Bhutanese in Switzerland moderated by Dr. Hugo Bigi.

Quite a big number of members and guests joined the invitation to take part at the event.

The General Assembly approved the modifications of the bylaws to add the charitable purpose of the society. This change is necessary to support our request for tax exemption for donations which we are asking for at the Tax Office.

The members agreed as well to the extension of our successful school programme in remote areas of Bhutan. To be able to support in 2013 two additional schools in Mongar, the SSB Board is planning a fundraising campaign as soon as our request for tax exemption is approved (see also report Tashibi Primary School p. 6)
International Day of Happiness, March 20th 2013

In 2012, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared March 20 to be observed as the International Day of Happiness.

H. E. Ambassador Daw Penjo invited, among other guests, SSB Board Members to celebrate for the first time the International Day of Happiness during a reception at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on March 20th 2013.

“On this first International Day of Happiness, let us reinforce our commitment to inclusive and sustainable human development and renew our pledge to help others. When we contribute to the common good, we ourselves are enriched. Compassion promotes happiness and will help build the future we want.” (Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon).

Master plan Bumthang Valley

The Department of Urban Development of the city of Zurich (Amt für Städtebau, AFS) provides consulting services for the Bhutanese authorities with regards to urban planning of Bumthang Valley and will develop a master plan for one of the four valleys. The primary objective of the project is the development of new perspectives for the local population and to stop outward migration to other areas. At the same time a tourist infrastructure is to be developed based on the scenic beauty and cultural richness of the valley.
In September 2012, two introductory workshops were organised by the City of Zurich involving a representative of the Bhutanese authorities, Swiss development aid organisations as well as several scientific institutes. Marianne Frei, Ernst Reinhardt and Werner Külling participated on behalf of the Society Switzerland Bhutan. In our next Newsletter in December 2013 you will find more information about this topic.

Activities 2013

Bhutanese group in Lucerne
By Marianne Frei, President

From May 16 to 19, a group of ten Bhutanese visited Switzerland to share their unique culture from remote areas (Mongar, Zhemgang and Samtse) with us. All of them are involved in the Helvetas Swiss Intercoperation / EU project Leveraging and Preserving Bhutan’s Cultural Diversity. Markus Wild who is responsible for the activity Participatory Photo Project within this context, arranged sessions in schools and at the Romerohaus in Lucerne.

Kantonsschule Alpenquai Luzern

Pema Nima from Kagtong Community Primary School

Exhibition in Freiburg i.B.
March 29, 2013 – February 16, 2014
Exhibition «Von Schmetterlingen und Donnerdrachen. Natur und Kultur in Bhutan» at the Naturmuseum in Freiburg im Breisgau.  
http://www.freiburg.de/pb/Lde/423879.html

H.E. Ambassador Sonam Tshong and Aum Nima Zam (Royal Bhutanese Embassy Belgium) as Chief guests at the opening of the exhibition

Ludlows Schwalbenschwanz (Bhutanitis ludlowi)
Upcoming event 2013

SSB Excursion to the Tibet Institute in Rikon  Saturday, 31st August 2013

This year our excursion will take us to the monastic Tibet Institute in Rikon (ZH) and give us the opportunity to follow a teaching by one of the monks.

Detailed information and the registration form have already been sent to all members of SSB. The details can be found on our webpage:


Please register until June 30th, 2013

New SSB Members

By Julia Menk, Member of the Board

The Society Switzerland–Bhutan keeps growing, and we can now already count on far more than 200 members! We are happy to welcome the following new members:

• Ursula Schmid, Zürich
• Christina Elisabeth Mihajlovic-Wachter, Baden
• Isabelle Dumaret, Carouge
• Iris Schärer-Huber, Langnau am Albis
• Jürg H. & Verena Günther Röhm, Weggis
• Ursina Wälchli, Schwerzenbach

It is a big honor for our Society to count on such a support, and we would like to thank you all for your confidence and encouragement to continue the projects in and around Bhutan.

Tashi delek!

Books

Beyond the Silk Route
By Ernst Reinhardt

This must read book is about a voyage of discovery by HRH Prince Namgyal Wangchuk, who on September 17, 2004, embarked on the “mother of all tours” to endure 32'000 kms of road across 17 countries of Asia, the Middle East and Europe, travelling without royal comfort.

It gives us a rare glimpse of an enigmatic prince who has, as a youth, military commander, Cabinet Minister, as a keen social observer and sage, witnessed the transformation of Bhutan since the reign of the 2nd King. The prince has often escaped to be among the materially poor to receive inspiration from their social wealth and selfless simplicity. Which he translated into practise at relevant levels. (excerpt from the forword by Jigme Y. Thinley)

The book is on sale for €20 plus postal fee / packing. Interested buyers are invited to order through Ernst Reinhardt until end of June 2013:

Mail to: ernst.reinhardt@bluewin.ch

Visitors from Bhutan in Switzerland

Dr. Pema Gyamtsho and Mr. Kinzang Namgay, April 3 – 7, 2013

By Werner Külling, Member of the Board

On their way on to the United States (WWF meetings in Washington and New York), the Bhutanese Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Environment, Lyonpo Dr. sc.techn. ETHZ Pema Gyamtsho and the Country Director of the WWF (World Wildlife Fund), Kinzang Namgay, made a stop-over in Switzerland to get in contact with a number of Swiss development project stakeholders and friends from the time when Pema Gyamtsho worked for many years with Helvetas Bhutan and did his Ph.D. studies as an agronomist at the ETH in Zürich under the guidance of Professor Dr. Martin Menzi and Prof. Dr. Josef Nösberger.

He met both of them in personal meetings, while Kinzang Namgay met his former coun-
Delegation of the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs
Dasho Namgay Wangchuk, (Director General Department for Disaster Management), Dasho Dorji Tshering, (Director General Department of Culture) and Dasho Lhap Dorji (Dzongda of Thimphu District) attended the 4th International Conference on Disaster Management in Geneva and came on a brief visit to Zurich at the end of May. Their programme in Zurich included a meeting at the Museum Rietberg, a discussion with the Cantonal Police and a dinner with former consultants in education (PITT programme).

BSS Board invites SSB members for a dinner at Restaurant Edelweiss in Thimphu in August 2012
The members of SSB and BSS are ever mindful of the proud legacy and the need to make efforts to take the level of friendship and cooperation even higher through people to people interaction.
SSB is pleased to formally introduce the following members of the Board of Bhutan-Switzerland Society all of who have been associated with Switzerland and Bhutan-Swiss cooperation for a long time:

**President:** Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji,
former Prime Minister and also
former Minister for Agriculture and
former Minister for Works and
Human Settlement

**Secretary General:** Namgyel Tshering,
HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Bhutan

**Treasurer:** Tshewang Chhenzom,
HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Bhutan

**Board Member:** Ashi Kunzang Roder,
Author, writer and historian

**Board Member:** Dr. Saamdu Chetri,
Director of GNH Center

**Board Member:** Aum Sonam Wangmo,
Private Entrepreneur

**Board Member:** Aum Phuntshok Choden Tshering,
Honorary Counsel, Consulate of the Netherland to Bhutan

**Board Member:** Dasho Jambey Nidup,
former Royal Advisory Councilor
and private entrepreneur

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**Activity by BSS and SSB**

**Up-lift for Tashibi Primary School**

*By Ernst Reinhardtt*

*Photos by Namgyel Tshering*

Tashibi is situated 4 hours steep walk from the road head at Pangtang, lower Kheng, a couple of hours drive south-east from (Tingtibi) (Zhemgang). The school has 84 children enrolled, taught by 6 teachers. The Bhutan – Switzerland Society (BSS), on recommendation of its Secretary General, Namgyel Tshering has agreed to support this school under its programme. Regula Hanimmann, a Senior Human Resource Director working with SwissRe, has agreed to cover the project cost for 3 years, approx. CHF 12 000. She travelled Bhutan and Kheng for the first time, but was well informed by her travel companion Ernst Reinhardt, who, as the first Resident Co-ordinator of Helvetas investigated development programme scopes for this remote and very poor area, together with Dasho Tshering Wangda in 1983, on initiative of HRH Prince Namgyal Wangchuk.

What were the challenges for Regula? Transparency, straight-forward approach and immediate start; local initiative by the Principal of Tashibi Primary School; alleviating draw-backs of a remote and very poor population; one-stop shop for planning, procurement, delivery, accounting and follow-up by Namgyel Tshering & Mrs. Tshewang Chhenzom; no local, let alone foreign overheads. It fits perfectly in the framework activities of HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Bhutan that supports Namgyel to do this job during office hours.

Namgyel and Regula have personally brought and handed over the project material to the school in May 2013. It comprises of school uniforms, shoes, slippers, water filters, vegetable seeds for school garden, 3 laptops with printer and digital camera.

Thus, the children will have a healthier live, better nutrition, equal social status and easy access to the internet. And the school will substantially increase its competitiveness with other schools.

All items were immediately given to the children in presence of the teachers and the parents.
The Principal said:

“The school was officially started in 2001 with one teacher in-charge and 45 students in pre-primary. The school was upgraded annually and today we have classes from PP to VI with one section each.

The Principal Tshering, 33 years, has lived up here at Tashibi for many years.

Till 2004, the school did not receive benefits from the UN World Food Programme (WFP), and the students faced problems in getting proper food as they are brought up by poor families. General living standard of the community is under poverty line and their staple food is maize which hardly feeds their family. Learning is not what we teach and learn inside the classroom, it should encompass the overall knowledge and practical skills that a person needs to make a living.

Besides literary and co-curricular activities, the school also carries out school greening programs which is one of the core competence of Gross National Happiness and different club activities like mask dance for preserving our rich culture.”

Regula, Ernst and Namgyel feel that the project can serve as a prototype of an easy to implement support to poor people, both motivating the donor and the beneficiaries directly.
Activities of SSB Members

The Snow Man Trek Experience

September 29th – October 18th 2012 / 20 days

Text by Patrick Vogel

Pictures by Urs Wirth, Roger Chevallaz and Thomas Eigenheer

Further Sources: « A Trekkers Guide to Bhutan » and for verification Uncle Dendup’s GPS

On the 29th of September 2012, four of us experienced hikers from Switzerland, shouldered our trekking daypack near Drugyel-Dzong, starting off on a 20 days journey, on what we expected to be a once in a lifetime experience. The stakes were high. I personally hoped for a successful outcome to this trip, knowing that not every group makes it to the end.

Our care team

I still remember my previous attempts, the first in 1996, when bad weather and snow stopped me at Laya (at least that’s what I was told) and the second in 2003, when a member of the group suffered from altitude sickness requiring a quick descent back to our starting point. This time, we prepared ourselves, let’s say in a semi-professional way. The medical box alone weighed about 4 kg.

Before sharing some emotional moments, here are some facts and figures for this officially declared „strenuous trek“:

- Total walking distance: approx. 330 km
- Passes to cross: 11 (it wasn’t actually a sporty crossing but rather a creeping due to the high altitude)
- Total altitude gain: 9600 m
- Total altitude loss: 7250 m
- Highest Point: Rinchenchoe-La, 5’315 AMSL
- Longest descent: approx. 3.5 hours (1’215 meters altitude difference)
- Longest ascent: approx. 5.2 hours, (1’126 meters altitude difference)

The trip usually takes 23 to 24 days, including some halts for rest and acclimatisation. We skipped the halts. What was the point? We were there for speedy hiking, escalading passes, pushing through thick and muddy forests, balancing on loose boulders and heavy rocks. In short we were there for a conquest, a real adventure.

I would not recommend such a strategy again. It was more than strenuous. Everyone in the group got pushed to their limits, at one time or the other, and there were days when we fervently wished for a helicopter pick up. Luckily, there was no such opportunity. Otherwise we would have missed all the beauty of this spectacular, rich scenery and the sense of achievement at the end when we finally reached Nikka Chu.

Mount Jumolhari

It is almost impossible to describe all the emotions we went through in a newsletter. Therefore I stick to some photographs. Please enjoy.

The weather at the beginning of October is usually dry and clear. This time we faced some rains and the sky was cloudy for about 9 days. The trekking routes are heavily frequented trade routes as well. You are actually never alone. And when you meet some of the local people, you have to tell where you come from, where you are going, how your family is doing back home etc.
Our five star chef (and I really mean it!) with the tools of his trade. Well, I could have skipped that porridge thing.

Check out the balancing act in ice old water. Better than any wellness in a five star hotel. It was the only bare foot river crossing on the trek.

Aren’t they beautiful? You don’t even have to climb for them.

This aphrodisiac, all-healing worm-gras-doesn’t-know-what-to-be-thing is hard to find. Price per kg in Hong-Kong is about 10'000 to 15'000 USD. A farmer from Laya offered us a piece for 150 Nu. A good deal, isn’t it.

Medical treatment. Suddenly we are doctors, too. Sometimes we faced also some sad events. For example when we met a farmer with his swollen infected hands (without treatment it leads to blood poisoning). Our small medical support would not heal the wound.

Downtown Laya. It has become a wealthy town thanks to „summer-gras-winter-worm“, scientifically known as Cordyceps Sinensis.

And a buzzing party place, too. Goa is out. Laya is hip.

And one day, all of a sudden the skies cleared up. In the background you might hear some voices of

Ahhhhhs and Wwwwooowwws!
Well, the sky wasn’t clear for long and the bad weather came back. Just to remind us „nothing is permanent”. It snowed and rained heavily for more than 24 hours. Out of respect for my friend Roger, we do not publish any photographs of his „snowed in” beach tent.

There is only one thing to say: Kangphu Kang and Table Mountain. Wonderful. Spectacular.

Highway to the south. Lunaps on their very long way to go shopping.
The day before this picture was taken, we lost one horse to a hungry snow leopard.

It doesn’t look like freezing cold, but it is. At 6am it is a chilly -14° (waking up). When the sun is finally up one hour later, it is a comfortable -8°. Breakfast is ready 30 minutes later and the temperature rises to a sweltering -3°. The question is, what you are doing during this time of waiting?

For more detailed information please contact:
Patrick Vogel, vogel@reflecta.ch

The whole hiking team (from left to right): Ap Gyeltshen (Cook, you might not see it, but he wears slip-on shoes), Tshering Tashi (our trekking guide, alias Snowwhite), Urs, Roger, Thomas, Ap Rinchen (assistant guide, who suffered from snow blindness later on the trek) and myself. Missing on this picture are the assistant guide Ap Singye (alias the rocket) and the two horseman Thinlay and Pew Dorjee (alias James Bond).

I would like to thank my friends who came along with me on this journey, the trekking staff who guided us and brought us through to the end, and last but not least my uncle Dendup, with his ever-capable travel agency.

After 20 days back in the civilized world. And ready for a beer and a warm shower. We even got to give autographs ....
Mountains and earthquakes
On a seismology project in Bhutan
By György Hetényi, ETH Zürich

Mountains and earthquakes belong to each other.

Large mountain chains such as the Alps and the Himalayas are the result of a long lasting geological process, plate tectonics. Over millions of years, continents drift on the surface of the Earth. When they slowly but steadily collide with another continent, the large masses of rock involved create a mountain range. The peaks of the Alps reach almost 5, those of the Himalayas almost 9 kilometres altitude. As different layers of rocks in the Earth have different densities these mountains also have a root to balance the peaks, similarly to an iceberg floating in water: the Alpine root reaches ca. 55, the Himalayan ca. 80 km depth.

How do relatively flat continents and large rock masses deform to create such high mountains and such deep roots? By producing earthquakes! Rocks deform by fractures which correspond to small to medium size earthquakes; these happen almost every day. Two tectonic plates that slide on each other produce major destructing events every “once in a while”. This time is relatively long and unpredictable on the scale of human life; nevertheless, it appears relatively regular on the scale of millions of years during which earthquakes release the stress accumulating from plate motions.

Bhutan is a prime example where these processes can be studied. The India plate plunges beneath Eurasia to form the vast Tibetan Plateau and the high Himalayan peaks. Small earthquakes are felt regularly by the population. Almost every Bhutanese will experience a middle size earthquake in his or her life, such as the 2009 magnitude M6.1 Mongar or the 2011 M6.9 North Sikkim earthquake. Large earthquakes, however, remain so rare that we do not even have a sure record of the last big event. The major events of the past 120 years in the area occurred to the South (1897 M8.1 Shillong), West (1934 M8.4 Bihar) and East (1950 M8.6 Assam) of Bhutan, leaving an apparent gap over Bhutan itself. An event in 1713 shook the region but we have no reliable record on where it exactly occurred. Historical records before that time are scarce and do not mention earthquakes, although big events in one region may occur every several hundred or thousand years.

In the past years geophysicists from ETH Zürich and the University of Montpellier in France started a number of projects investigating the past and present geodynamic processes in Bhutan. The main questions are: How many earthquakes of what size occur in which regions of the country nowadays? How does the structure of the Earth look like beneath the surface? Is there any measurable trace of past big earthquakes? What is the current rate of deformation in the mountains? What is the potential magnitude of the largest earthquake that may one day happen in Bhutan?

A series of geophysical measurements have started in 2010 to answer these questions. The ongoing GANSSER project (short for “Geodynamics ANd Seismic Structure of the Eastern-Himalaya Region”) is a tribute to Bhutan’s famous geological discoverer, the late Augusto Gansser. In January 2013 project participants have installed 38 seismometers across the country that will stay in the field for about a year and a half.
Seismometers are extremely sensitive devices that detect the smallest motions of the ground, imperceptible to humans. By recording the signals from local earthquakes, including the very small ones, the network will monitor the seismicity of Bhutan and the surrounding region. Using signals from medium to large earthquakes occurring elsewhere on Earth, researchers will be able to reveal the structure of the Earth’s interior, using principles similar to medical imaging (e.g., ultrasound examination of pregnant women). These information together will provide important elements to understand the current and past evolution of the Bhutanese Himalayas.

The project is of course not a pure and dry scientific work of people sitting behind computers. In the first times it is about organizing an expedition. The field measurements require a long and tedious logistical effort to prepare and safely ship all equipment to Bhutan. With 1600 kg of material to be sent by DrukAir, without established connection to other airlines, it was a path to discover. After three months preparation in the basement and the office, 8 westerners travelled to Bhutan to meet 7 Bhutanese for the station deployment campaign during January 2013. The first days were spent on inventory and organization of our equipment that luckily arrived without problems. We also went “shopping”: wood from different sawmills, metal rods from hidden barracks, sand from the Supreme Court construction site exchanged against empty sandbags, as well as batteries and plastic barrels shipped from India which were continuously promised to arrive “tomorrow”. Getting ready took us as long as getting rid of jet-lag; then two teams departed to cover the Western and Eastern parts of the country in only 3 weeks.

The fieldwork provided us the privilege to see Bhutan in a very different way from how most people see the country. We had no established and fixed plans for the entire duration: these were continuously updated depending on our daily advance. This included estimating the driving times (something rather well known from our first geophysics project in 2010-2012), looking for potential accommodation possibilities (ranging from the university dorms in Gedu to the Royal Guesthouse in Damphu) and allowing time to search a suitable, quiet...
site for our stations within a few kilometres of the plans previously drawn on a map. This site search and the following installation of the stations granted us memorable encounters with the people of Bhutan: always open, ready-to-help people who understand quickly the goals of the installation and the practical needs. They helped in digging holes, repairing electricity, providing a spot in their garden where we could pour a small cement platform, constructing a wooden shed, climbing on the roof to mount solar panels and GPS antenna and many other things. Our Bhutanese colleagues were excellent in negotiating at the right place and in the right manner, and also at helping building sites. At several places we were offered a meal or a tea, and we have usually left with the reassuring feeling that the station is in good hands.

By the end of January both teams have successfully completed the installation of their stations and returned to Thimphu to pack.

Behind Men-Andrin Meier and the local helpers lies the completed station BHE09: all the equipment is buried; only the solar panel (behind the man) is on the ground.

We were lucky to have had a month without major problems or accidents. While flying out from Paro and enjoying the beautiful Himalayan scenery, some already thought of the three station visits to come, the performance of the seismological network and the resulting findings. But most of the thoughts turned around the successful expedition and the important personal experience this month offered us.
Meeting Point

Interview
By Otto Stern (OST)
The following interview presents the three graduates from the Hotel Middle Management Program, who, after finishing their three-month internship at the Hotel Belvedere in Scuol, stayed in Zurich on February 25 - 28, before flying back to Bhutan. The Hotel Middle-Management Program and the three internship-winning toppers were presented by Urs Dürsteler in our last Newsletter 2012, p. 4. Now, it’s their turn to present themselves:

Rinzin Lhamo, 28, from Trongsa, working as a front office manager at the five star Hotel Zhiva Ling in Paro, for the past nine years; I’m married and have a daughter. Before that I had studied at Ugyen Academy in Punakha, in the art stream.

Jigme Nidup (left), 28, from Samdrup Zongkar in the extreme East, working at the Damchen Resort, Punakha, for the past 6 years as a supervisor for Food and Beverage. In between I have done a short term inter-level course in hotel management, and other courses like Business Development Skills from the School Management Board in Thimphu, sponsored by Netherland Foundation. I am married and have two sons of 4 years and of 6 months.

Tenzin Norbu (right), 26, from Bumthang, living there with my parents. My family runs a small Hotel, Rinchenling Lodge, with 29 rooms. I finished my college in 2009; followed by a bachelor in business management in South India, Bangalore; then I was at home, helping my parents for one year, mostly in management.

OST: How did you experience the stay at the Hotel Belvedere in Scuol?
Rinzin: During the first week it was very hard for me: our culture and their culture are so completely different. But slowly I realized that I am in another part of the world: if the Europeans can work like this, we Bhutaneses can do it too – we are all human beings! So, I had to motivate myself to work hard, and then the time passed so fast I didn’t realize it was for 3 months. At the beginning I felt kitchen work was very hard. I had never worked in the kitchen before; especially the cutting of onions that got in the eyes! And the vegetables had to get in shape, all very particular and precise! I only worked in my own kitchen at home, but there I don’t have to follow instructions!
OST: Will your home cooking change?
Rinzin: Yes, my cooking and cutting style will change; there are so many good ideas to be taken home! Working in the kitchen was also dangerous because the floor often was wet and slippery, and we didn’t have good shoes for work. So once I slipped and fell down, and then someone gave me a pair of good shoes – for every problem we ran into there was a solution!
Tenzin: Working in the Belvedere I learnt three important things: quality, care of details and perfection in the job you are doing. An example of ‘care of details’: in Belvedere they welcome not only the elder guests, but very much also the children. There is a special buffet for children, since they are very small and cannot reach the buffet of the adults; and there are special small stools for children, so they can sit and move by themselves. – And also we got a chance to work in all departments of the Hotel, at housekeeping, in service and in kitchen. I never worked like that in a hotel. After schooling I helped my parents in managing the hotel.
But now I know how it feels to work under a superior, and now I think I can be a better manager to my staff, because only when you walk in the shoes of the other you know how it feels.

Jigme: The world is too small, tourism is blooming all over the world, people from Europe, Asia, America, Africa they are all traveling everywhere, so tourism is developing fast. I think, it is high time for us in Bhutan to waking up to new ways. Now, we have tourists who travel, and stay only one night; we don’t have guests who make a holiday in the same hotel, and we don’t have returning guests. In Belgium they have reservations from the same guests up to 2017! So it was very interesting for us, to experience this kind of tourism.

OSt: Do you think there are possibilities in Bhutan to develop this kind of holiday tourism with longer stays?

Jigme: Yes, there is this possibility, but we have to develop programs, and keep in contact with our guests.

Tenzin: Not just that they come and we serve, and then “tschüss!”

OSt: Ok, but a main obstacle is that they cannot book individually.

Tenzin: No, there is now a new rule that the hotel can get the visa for the guest.

Rinzin: It’s online marketing. If Bhutan wants to get more tourists we need to improve our service, a good program, and a good team. People from the hotel have to be sent outside of Bhutan to get exposure to different practices, to bring something new to the team back home, like we had a chance to do.

Tenzin: We really need to change our mentality.

Rinzin: Our top management doesn’t have a hotel management background. If we younger people bring back new ideas, they think that this is not right, and we cannot get our way. This is somehow demotivating. We should be able to try out new things we learnt outside, even if sometimes we make mistakes. Development should not only be top down, but also bottom up.

Tenzin: When my father in the hotel met Swiss visitors and they asked what he had learned in Switzerland, he used to say “dignity of labor”. In Bhutan, someone who is on top, will never look for work that is lower, a blue color job. And here, even if you live in a nice apartment, they don’t mind if they do a manual job, they do it well. In Bhutan we have so many Indian laborers in construction and you can hardly see any Bhutanese there. After leaving school everybody thinks he can work in an office and sit behind a computer. This mentality should change.

OSt: How different was the work you did here, from what you did at home?

Jigme: I liked to be in ‘Service’ because I was working in ‘Service’ in Bhutan too. At home, for example, most guests complain about the buffet-system, breakfast is in buffet, lunch is in buffet and dinner is in buffet or in set menu; whereas here, whether there are 50 or 200 guests, they serve à la carte, they have daily menus. Also, here they offer as much as possible local food from local provider, in Bhutan most food is imported.

Tenzin: I liked ‘Kitchen and Service’: I like cooking, but I never cooked in Bhutan. I always wanted to learn how to cook, and here I learnt so many ways of preparing different vegetables, and how to decorate it nicely on the plate. One good thing in the ‘Service’ is, you go to the table and you serve at the table, so you have individual contact with the guests.

Rinzin: I also like ‘Kitchen’ most. Contact with guests in Service is nice, but down in the kitchen work is very intensive, everything has to be precise, in time, nicely prepared on each plate, if it is not in good shape it’s rejected. It’s always “schnell, schnell”, and you can see that the staff down there is stressed, but they don’t show, they want to be perfect. And there is almost no waste of food. In Bhutan a lot of food is thrown away, maybe because the quality is not so good.

Jigme: The waste of food in Bhutan is mostly due to the buffet-system, there are no proper portions.

OSt: And what was the most difficult place of work?

Tenzin: The biggest difficulty is due to the differences of culture. For example, in Bhutan we have a sense of helping each other; if someone is working and if I am free, then I go and help. Here, if someone is doing something and you want to help them, then they don’t want it! It happened with Rinzin, she wanted to help one of her colleagues, but she said: “no, this is my job!” – And then the Swiss timing! I managed quite well, but one day I was one and half hours late, and that was not good!

Rinzin: “Verschlafen!”

Tenzin: But everybody laughed, and it was no problem.

Jigme: In working there were no real problems, but language and culture posed the main difficulties, and of course, for this our stay of three months was too short. Food was never a
problem, in Belvedere the staff gets the very best food!

**Ost:** If you think of your job at home, is there anything you would like to change when you get home?

**Tenzin:** A lot, a lot!

**Ost:** Please, pick out one thing only.

**Tenzin:** Ok, maybe it's not easy and not the right time to introduce the à la carte system. Normally, we have just the buffet, and to begin with to each buffet I want to put a menu card where it is written what is the food, and what ingredients there are, so the guests know what they are eating. But in the long run I would like to introduce the à la carte system, starting from starters, soup and so on; guests like it when they are being served.

**Rinzin:** Immediately I would like to change the table plan, to have a table plan where the stuff is assigned to a certain group of tables, so called stations; and one staff is responsible for that station, and takes care of his guests. Because in Bhutan we have a lot of staff, and everybody thinks the other will do it, and finally nobody works! For fifty guests we have thirty staff; but with the station system in service, 20 staff can serve 200 guests. For 50 guests 30 staff is too many!

**Jigme:** You cannot reduce the staff too much; Bhutan is a developing country, and there are not enough jobs for everybody who wants to work. And also many jobs in a Hotel are done manually, where here they use machines for.

**Tenzin:** Yes, but at least, we should use the employed staff more efficiently.

**Ost:** Now, let's go back to the Hotel Middle Management Program: it consisted of four times two months of training and classes with different subjects. What was the most useful part of this training for you?

**Rinzin:** For me ‘communication’ is the first, and second is ‘cross-cultural management’. Communication is very important, e.g. in the front office; the front office is responsible for a good communication with the guests. If the front office staff are not good communicators, the whole team is going to fail. And for cross-cultural management: what works in Bhutan, is not necessarily working in Switzerland; for example if you don’t like what somebody is doing you shout: “In Bhutan we don’t do that! If you do that, come on, let’s fight!” The behavior is rude. Those little cultural differences are important to know; we have to understand that behavior is different in different people. Cross-cultural management is very important to understand the behavior and reaction of guests in certain situations. This topic was very beneficial for us.

**Jigme:** For me I’d say ‘cross-cultural management’ and ‘quality management’ in the different departments of a hotel, and how to pay attention to details; this was very much related to my job.

**Tenzin:** The most important thing I have learnt is marketing, how to sell a product, where to sell it, for whom, and at what price, that is the strategies of marketing. I liked it very much, it's still in my head. It was taught by Gert Christen from HWZ, in a very practical and interesting way. We went downtown into different shops to observe how they do it.

**Rinzin:** But we should say that all the topics were very interesting and important, and very helpful for us.

**Ost:** And for a conclusion let's have a look to the private aspects of your training: What was the reaction of your family to what you are doing? Jigme, you said you left when your son was only three months old!

**Jigme:** I think at your work you should not depend on the family; the important thing is that you see to yourself and "fill your stomach", as we say in Bhutan. My wife is also working, she is self-employed and runs a small restaurant; so she is busy with that and she doesn’t say anything when I leave for three months; we have a very good cooperation in that, and she helped me a lot.

**Tenzin:** When I gave the news to my mom, she was really happy that I got another chance to go to Switzerland. And my father was very happy too, so he didn’t say, but I could feel it, because I am following his footsteps now; he also learnt and worked in Switzerland, and now it’s me. I have to learn a lot for to take up one day the responsibility of our Hotel.

**Rinzin:** My husband was very supportive and happy when we got the news of this stay in Switzerland. But my daughter, who will have six years in March, protested: “Mammy you don’t have to go!” But my husband was always very supportive, during the course he even brought me to the school when I felt sick; he didn’t allow me to get sick and miss a class! “These are very important subjects”, he said, “you have to go!” But not only my family in the village, but everybody was happy, also my boss and the general manager, everybody was very supportive to me.

**Rinzin, Tenzin, Jigme:** In conclusion, we want say that this program will benefit a lot; it should keep going! It is like a bridge between Switzerland and Bhutan. It will do very good for the
future in tourism business. Thank you so much!

Tenzin: We are really grateful to Jacob Foundation and Elysium Foundation for the support, and we hope that they will continue to sponsor this program.

Rinzin: And we want to thank especially Kurt Baumgartner, the proprietor of the Hotel Belvedere in Scuol: with this he is giving a great service to Bhutan, it is so touching, he is even charging the tap water for it, and 50% is going to the development of this program. And I wish that in future we can do something in return from Bhutan; the two hands should reach together from both sides!

And don’t forget!

Under the heading “Meeting Point” the SSB Newsletter regularly features interviews with Bhutanese and Swiss people working, studying and visiting in the respective host country. It will give insight in the experiences and activities of Bhutanese and Swiss people in contact.

Contributions to this rubric from members of SSB and BSS, as well as the circle of readers of the Newsletter are most welcome!