

THE CULTURAL SANCTUARIES FOUNDATION

Protecting the Protectors



Bhutanese festival deer mask by Chris Rainier

Today is the 7th anniversary of the official opening of our first Cultural Center.

It is in Rukha, a beautiful valley in the high Himalayas of Bhutan which is home to the Olep, the country's oldest indigenous community. We worked with the Olep, the Tarayana Foundation and her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck to create the Cultural Center, which is part community gathering place, part living museum, part school room and part homestay. It also houses copies of the first ever dictionary (created as part of our project) of Ole, a language that before the creation of the Center was spoken by just three remaining fluent speakers. Now Ole is being taught to all the local Olep kids in Rukha valley and has a chance of a future.

And the best news of all? Not only were we honored that the Bhutanese Government declared the Center such a success that it decided to replicate the project in 21 other parts of Bhutan but then the original mission was completed in a way we hardly dared hope for. Last June, a new national park was created around the Center. Eco-lodges, a conservation center and walking trails are being built and managed by a Rukha youth group and all this and more are creating viable and much needed jobs for the Olep community.

When we first conceived Cultural Sanctuaries, we dreamt of an organization that would support indigenous communities in protecting their culture, language, land and livelihoods. We are now embarking on our 10th project and there is no better role model for our younger Centers than the Olep Center in Bhutan. We could not be prouder of it or more grateful to the Olep community and our project partners in Bhutan as well as all those who have supported our work.

Thank you
The Cultural Sanctuaries Foundation
October 16th 2026



Rukha valley, the Cultural Center and dancers at the official opening (photos by Chris Rainier) and the unveiling of the Center's plaque by Her Majesty The Queen Mother (photo from Bhutan's national newspaper Kuensel).