

Bhutan | Small Group Cultural Tour

Reading List

A Splendid Isolation: Lessons on Happiness from the Kingdom of Bhutan

by Madeline Drexler

What does Bhutan understand about happiness that the rest of the world does not? Award-winning journalist and author Madeline Drexler recently travelled to this Himalayan nation to discover how the audacious policy known as Gross National Happiness plays out in a fast-changing society where Buddhism is deeply rooted—but where the temptations and collateral damage of materialism are rising. Her reported essay blends lyrical travelogue, cultural history, personal insights, and provocative conversations with top policymakers, activists, bloggers, writers, artists, scholars, religious leaders, students, and ordinary citizens in many walks of life. This book is sure to fascinate readers interested in travel, Buddhism, progressive politics, and especially the study and practice of happiness.

Journey in Bhutan: Himalayan Trek in the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon

by Trish Nicholson

Explore deep in the Himalayas, in the tiny Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan, by walking beside the author along a 100 mile trek through surreal landscapes and knee-wrenching passes at 5,000 metres. Meet herders in high summer pastures making cheese from yak's milk, and hear tinkling prayer wheels spun by waterfalls in remote gorges. Climb to Taktsang, the spectacular Tiger's Nest of temples atop a 1,000 metre cliff. Visit ancient Kyichu Lhakhang to absorb the sanctity of centuries in the haze of incense, glowing butter-lamps and chanting monks. Then hold tight along precipitous hairpin bends to Thimphu and Punakha to witness monastery rituals, and meander through shops offering the world's most exquisite weaving and carving.

This vivid and lyrical travelogue leads you into Bhutanese culture and history, and with infectious humour, draws the characters of her American and Australian travelling companions. For discerning readers, Appendices include a glossary of Dzongka words, a historical timeline and a 'Survival Guide to Bhutanese Buddhism'.

A Field Guide to Happiness: What I Learned in Bhutan about Living, Loving, and Waking Up

by Linda Leaming

"In the West, we have everything we could possibly need or want—except for peace of mind".

So writes Linda Leaming, a harried American who traveled from Nashville, Tennessee, to the rugged Himalayan nation of Bhutan—sometimes called the happiest place on Earth—to teach English and unlearn her politicized and polarized, energetic and impatient way of life.

"In Bhutan if I have three things to do in a week, it's considered busy. In the U.S., I have at least three things to do between breakfast and lunch".

After losing her luggage immediately upon arrival, Leaming realized that she also had emotional baggage—a tendency toward inaction, a touch of self-absorption, and a hundred other trite, stupid, embarrassing, and inconsequential things—that needed to get lost as well. Pack up ideas and feelings that tie you down and send you lead-footed down the wrong path. Put them in a metaphorical suitcase and sling it over a metaphorical bridge in your mind. Let the river take them away.

Forced by circumstance and her rustic surroundings to embrace a simplified life, Leaming made room for more useful beliefs. The thin air and hard climbs of her mountainous commute put her deeply in touch with her breath, helping her find focus and appreciation. The archaic, glacially paced bureaucracy of a Bhutanese bank taught her to go with the flow—and take up knitting. The ancient ritual of drinking tea brought tranquility, friendship, and, eventually, a husband. Each day, and each adventure, in her adopted home brought new insights and understandings to take back to frantic America, where she now practices the art of “simulating Bhutan.” This collection of stories, impressions, and suggestions is a little nudge, a push, a leg up into the rarefied air of paradise—of bright sunlight and beautiful views.

The History of Bhutan

by Karma Phuntsho

In recent years, the remote kingdom of Bhutan has increasingly attracted the attention of the world. In 2008, it emerged as the world's youngest democracy and in the same year crowned the world's youngest monarch. This was followed by the new King's colourful wedding in 2011. Today, it continues to enchant the rest of the world with its policy of Gross National Happiness and has become a very popular destination for travel. But, despite its growing popularity and the rising scholarly interest in the country, Bhutan remains one of the most poorly studied places on earth.

Karma Phuntsho's *The History of Bhutan* is the first-ever attempt to cover the entire history of Bhutan in some detail in English, combining both traditional perspectives and modern academic analysis. Written by a leading expert on the country, the book tells the story of Bhutan in a narrative style interspersed with some analytical and topical discussion, and numerous citations and translations

from earlier writings. It is primarily a historical account, but it also includes substantive discussions of Bhutan's geography, culture and society to give the readers an incisive introduction to the country.

Samu - Shamu: The Sonam Stories: Narratives of Childhood in Bhutan

by Suzie Sims-Fletcher

On a remote campus in the Black Mountains of the Himalayas, students at the Institute of Language and Culture Studies, Royal University of Bhutan, were asked to recall stories of their childhoods. Suzie Sims-Fletcher, their English lopen, taught them how to move from the oral tradition in Dzongkha to written composition in English. These selected tales are at once uniquely provincial yet poignantly universal. The collection offers striking memories of family and community, learning and growth, illness and death, tradition and celebration. An adaptable lesson guide to the story project (ESL, listening skills, writing), glossary of Dzongkha words and phrases, as well as vibrant full color photos of Druk Yul, Land of the Thunder Dragon, round out the 156 pages. Whether you are a tourist, teacher, or culture collector, Samu-Shamu: The Sonam Stories, captures the mist and earth of this magical kingdom in the sky.

The Dragon's Voice: How Modern Media Found Bhutan

by Bunty Avieson

This is a fascinating account of ancient culture colliding with modern media. Tucked between Tibet and India in the Himalayas, the kingdom of Bhutan is one of the most isolated and beautiful countries in the world. In The Dragon's Voice, Australian journalist Bunty Avieson provides a glimpse of life beyond the country's exotic exterior. As a consultant to local newspaper Bhutan Observer, she admires the paper's strong social conscience, but finds her expectations challenged in a country where spirituality and personal happiness are prioritized over work. Avieson also witnesses the tensions that arise as a Buddhist kingdom makes the transition to democracy. The courtship ritual of "night-hunting" and the nation's first public demonstration become controversial news items, while journalists must overcome traditional social hierarchies to keep politicians accountable. With a unique blend of memoir and reportage, The Dragon's Voice is both a deeply personal story and a vivid portrait of a nation on the cusp of revolutionary change.

Joanna Lumley in the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon

by Joanna Lumley

In 1931 Joanna Lumley's grandparents travelled to the remote Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan to invest King Jigme Wangchuk as a Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire. They journeyed for three-and-a-half months through dense jungles and across mountain passes and uncharted plains, taking with them a film camera. In this book, their granddaughter records her thoughts and impressions of Bhutan as she follows in their footsteps, trekking across the country from west to east, on foot and on ponies. The book includes photographs from her trip, archive pictures from her grandparents' album, drawings by Lumley herself, and extracts from her own journal and her grandmother's diary. It is peppered with recipes, remedies, customs and, all through, a vein of personal family history and the author's own thoughts and observations.
