

Sacred Bhutan: Walking and Meditation in the Land of the Thunder Dragon

**with Susie Harrington
Feb. 21- March 5, 2015**

More Information

This trip is a rare opportunity to travel behind the scenes in a country steeped in centuries of Buddhist life and practice. Our focus will be on the active monasteries and temples that are nestled everywhere, into cliffsides, ridgetops, and wide open spaces. Wherever possible we will practice in these monasteries, listen to the chanting monks, and meet with the local Rinpoches and Khenpos who guide monastic life, and Tulkus who embody the reincarnation of previous Rinpoches. Some of the temples that we will visit are remote, inaccessible by road, and infrequently visited by tourists.

On most days we will walk- visiting remote temples, exploring villages, or, on one day, hiking from town to town. See below for a description of physical activity. We will stay in comfortable and interesting Bhutanese lodges, plus one night of 'luxury' camping with views of the Himalaya range. See below for a description of the overnight trek that will take us past many remote temples and hermitages.

We will support our journey and enrich our experience through meditation practice, reflection and group sharing. On most days we will practice sitting and/or walking meditation, and throughout the trip we will process our experiences through dharma talks from Susie, and reflection and discussion within the group. Midway through the trip, we will spend two days in deep practice in the Chumey Valley, with one day of practice at Tharpaling Monastery, an active monastery with 100 resident monks. The trip will culminate in an overnight trek to Bumdra monastery and the famous Taksang (Tiger's Nest) Monastery built directly into a vertical cliff.

Our shared intention will be to be present to our experience, to be open and available to the people we meet and the places we visit, and use all that we experience to soften our hearts and open our minds. At times, or for partial days, we will walk, sit, or explore in silence, but this will not be a traditional silent retreat. While an established meditation practice is not required, openness and willingness to participate with the group, and a desire for spiritual exploration as a part of travel is necessary.

Bhutan

The Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan is the only country in the world that makes political and economic decisions that take into account a measurement of Gross National Happiness, and one of the few countries in the world that has successfully resisted the

wave of globalization. The country was quite isolated from the rest of the world until the 1960's, televisions were not allowed in the country until 1999, and cigarettes and plastic bags are still banned. The capital city of Thimpu has no traffic lights, the national sport is archery, and residents enjoy a culturally intact lifestyle, complete with well-preserved festivals, traditional food and dress, and traditional architecture.

Padma Sambhava (also known as Guru Rinpoche) brought Buddhism to Bhutan in 747AD, and it has flourished ever since, creating a country where wisdom, compassion, and mindfulness are a part of daily life and culture. Temples and stupas arise from the landscape everywhere, and monastic life is active and strong.

Travel in Bhutan

The Bhutanese government has imposed strict travel regulations in an effort to minimize the impact of tourism on their people, and to ensure that tourism is generating adequate revenue for the country. A substantial daily rate is charged for each traveler, which is what makes this trip more expensive than most True Nature Journeys trips in developing countries. We are required to arrange a custom trip with a travel and trekking outfitter, which means that we will have our own private transportation, a customized itinerary with a focus on Buddhist sites, history and current practices, very comfortable hotels, and our own local guide for the entire trip. Our guide, Namgay Tshering, is outstanding in his knowledge and hospitality. Namgay previously served in the Bhutan Parliament, and has personal connections to teachers at many of the monasteries we will visit. His sister is a nun in residence at a nunnery that we will visit and support with gifts.

About Susie and Laura

Susie will guide practice sessions and integrate dharma teachings into the trip, and Laura will take care of logistics and provide personal support. We both carry the intention of supporting you in your outer and inner journeys, and we will provide as many options as possible to accommodate the group's interests and individual needs. We both have many years experience as outdoor guides, and are certified as Wilderness First Responders.

Susie Harrington has been practicing Buddhist meditation for more than 20 years, focusing on Insight Meditation since 1995. Susie began teaching the Dharma in 2005 under the direction of her teachers Guy Armstrong, Jack Kornfield, and Tory Capron. She has also been influenced by Eric Kolvig, Adyashanti and a number of Tibetan teachers. Believing nature to be a natural gateway to our true selves, Susie frequently offers retreats in the natural world. Her teaching is deeply grounded in the body, emphasizing embodiment of our practice in speech and daily life. She is a graduate of Hakomi Therapy (a somatic psychotherapy modality) She has been an outdoor professional for over 30 years, including years as a river guide, mountaineering guide, and backcountry ranger. She teaches residential and wilderness retreats throughout the Four Corners area and in California.

Laura Tyson has been leading wilderness courses, international trips, and personal retreats for 30 years. She holds a Master's degree in Contemplative

Psychotherapy, and has been practicing meditation for over 20 years, under teachers in the Tibetan, Theravedin, and Zen traditions. She has traveled in over 35 countries in Asia, North Africa, South America, Central America, Europe, and the south Pacific, including a solo bike trip across Tibet in 1985. She is the founder of The Women's Wilderness Institute, where she served as Executive Director for eleven years. Laura is the founder and director of True Nature Journeys, which combines her passions for helping people create vibrant lives, empowering women and men to move beyond their self-perceptions, and exploring the landscapes and cultures of our beautiful planet.

The Trek, Physical Activity, Fitness, and Altitude

This is an active, walking trip, and to enjoy the physical activity you should be in good health with a reasonable degree of fitness. There is no need for speed- we will walk at a slow and comfortable pace- but you should be able to walk for 2-3 hours at a time, including uphill sections.

The most challenging day will be the first day of our overnight trek, which comes at the end of the trip, after we have acclimatized to the altitude. All gear will be carried by horses on the trek, except for your small daypack with extra clothing and water. The first day of the trek is approximately 5 hours of hiking, with 3,000' of elevation gain. We will camp at 13,400'. The second day will be 4-5 hours of mostly downhill walking, including several steep sections. It is possible to rent a horse to ride for the first day, or as a backup in case you get too tired, at a cost of \$10. Riding horses are not available for the second day of the trek.

If you don't already get some basic walking exercise, we suggest that in the months leading up to the trip you begin to walk several times a week, including some aerobic, uphill walking. Let us know if you would like some guidelines for increasing your fitness, or if you have any questions about the physical activity involved in this trip.

Except for the trek, we will be staying at altitudes ranging from 4,000' to 7,400', with one night at 9,500'. Most of the hiking will be at elevations less than 8,000'.

Food

Bhutanese food is usually locally grown, unprocessed and healthy, with lots of vegetable dishes. Rice, potatoes, and chilies as the primary staples. Meat, poultry and seafood are usually options, and vegetarians can be easily accommodated. We will most likely see Tibetan, Indian, and Chinese influences in the food, including Tibetan momos and thukpa noodles. The national dish is ema datshi, a spicy concoction of chilies and yak cheese. If you have special food requirements these can probably be accommodated, especially common ones like gluten-free and no-dairy. Be sure to let us know about special food requirements well in advance.

Weather

We will be visiting Bhutan at the very end of winter and the beginning of spring, when crowds are small, the landscape is green, and the weather is sunny and cool. The weather

is typically pleasant, although a bit of clouds or rain here and there is a possibility. Once the sun goes down temperatures drop sharply and can reach freezing overnight. You will want warm, toasty clothes for this trip. We will send a What to Bring list as the trip gets closer.

Logistical Details

Cost

\$5200, plus \$900 airfare for RT Bangkok to Paro, Bhutan. Plus dana (donation) for Susie. Single supplement \$700.

What's Included: (basically everything!)

- Lodging, including the first night in Bangkok
- Three meals a day, starting with dinner on February 21
- All activities on the itinerary
- Transportation
- Bottled drinking water
- Domestic airfare (Jakar to Paro)
- Carbon offsets for the carbon impact of flying from the U.S. to Bhutan

What's Not Included:

- Dana for Susie. In the spirit of offering dharma teachings without charge, Susie has chosen to not be paid for this trip. You may make an offering of dana to her before or after the trip, and donations are tax deductible.
- RT airfare to Bangkok. (You will arrange this on your own.)
- RT airfare from Bangkok to Paro, Bhutan (This flight will be arranged for you, and you will pay the outfitter \$900, through True Nature Journeys.)
- Final night stay and meals in Bangkok, if your flight leaves the following day
- Alcohol
- Any extra activities not on the itinerary.
- Bhutan Visa- \$40 (we will arrange this for you)
- Optional tips for local guides
- Medical insurance, as required by Bhutan. (See below.)

Payments

We will be making reservations on Druk Air, for our flight from Bangkok to Paro, as soon as the minimum number of ten people have registered. Once the reservations have been made, this amount (\$900) is non-refundable, unless someone else registers to take your place. (Reservations on Druk Air must be made far in advance, as this is the only airline serving Bhutan and they only have two airplanes!) A \$500 non-refundable trip deposit is also due with your registration.

Due with Registration	\$500 -non-refundable deposit
June 1	\$2400 - \$1500 plus \$900 for Bangkok-Paro flight
September 1	\$1600

December 1

\$1640 - includes \$40 visa fee

Cancellation Policy

Because we must make non-refundable deposits in Bhutan, we have the following cancellation policy. The deposit of \$500 is non-refundable, and once air reservations are made, the \$900 for the flight from Bangkok to Paro is non-refundable, unless someone else registers to take your place. If you need to cancel, the following cancellation fees apply.

> 120 days before trip start	\$500 deposit
60-120 days before trip start	\$1300
30-59 days before trip start	\$2600
Less than 30 days before trip start	no refunds

We strongly encourage purchasing trip insurance, which will reimburse your trip cost if you cannot travel due to injury or illness. The Bhutanese government requires all travelers to purchase medical travel insurance, and most of these policies include trip cancellation. Be aware that you usually are required to purchase the policy shortly after your first payment in order for the trip cancellation insurance to be effective. A policy with World Nomads (www.worldnomads.com) costs \$90 for \$5000 trip-reimbursement coverage, plus medical. More information about trip insurance will be sent after you register.

Getting There

We will begin our trip in Bangkok, the afternoon before we depart for Bhutan. Most flights from the United States arrive late at night, so you will probably arrive in Bangkok the night before. We suggest coming an extra day or two early, if you have the time, so that you can adjust to the different time zone. We can help arrange lodging if needed. More details on arranging your flights will be sent once you register. As of January, 2014, the round-trip cost from Denver to Bangkok starts at \$1200. Please wait to make your flight arrangements to Bangkok until we let you know that we have the minimum number of participants (ten) to make the trip go.

*****Remember that you will need a current passport!*****

After you register, we will send more logistical details about travel, vaccinations, and what to bring. Please feel free to contact either of us by phone or email if you have any questions!

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