



Sky Mind Retreats

**Sacred Bhutan:
Walking and Meditation in the Land of the Thunder Dragon
with Susie Harrington**

November 19 - December 3, 2017

Trip Itinerary

We will begin our trip by gathering in Bangkok. From there we fly to Paro, and our adventure in Bhutan begins. We will integrate our dharma practice into our travel by practicing sitting and/or walking meditation on most days, and by practicing in action with the people and situations we encounter. Keep in mind that we are entering a more relaxed and spontaneous culture, and some elements of this itinerary may change. Part of our practice will be in allowing things to unfold as they do, rather than as they are planned!

TRAVEL DAY- Sunday, November 19

Travel day. Most flights from the US to Bangkok fly east, crossing the date line and arriving on the following day. You may want to travel a day or two earlier, so that you have time to recover from jet lag in Bangkok. Whatever day you travel, we'll arrange transportation for you from the airport to a guesthouse near the airport

DAY ONE- Monday, November 20

We'll gather at a small hotel in Bangkok, meeting at approximately 3pm. After some time getting to know each other and going over some travel details, we'll have dinner . . . Thai food, of course!

DAY TWO- Tuesday, November 21

A morning flight from Bangkok takes us along the Himalayas to Paro, a small town at 7,000' that hosts Bhutan's primary airstrip. Paro is located in a beautiful valley, lined with apple orchards and green terraced fields. We will take a leisurely walk through the villages and have a relaxed picnic lunch at Dzongdrakha. After lunch we will have our first opportunity to visit, and quietly sit, in a traditional Bhutanese temple, then hike back through fields and apple orchards arriving in Bondey village.

This day will include orienting us to our journey and hearing a talk on the local Buddhism. We will stay at the Gangtey Palace Hotel, which has a beautiful shrine room on the top floor where we will practice in the evening.



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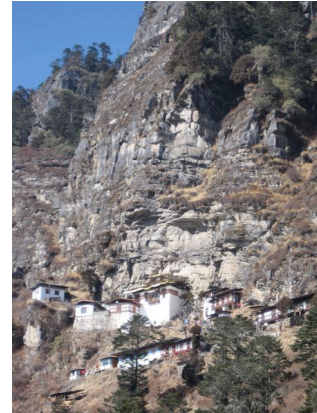
DAY THREE-Wednesday, November 22

We will drive to the beautiful Chele La, a high pass with spectacular views of the high Himalayan Peaks and walk among the abundant prayer flags. Our group will then enjoy a picnic lunch before visiting the Kila Nunnery, a remote hillside nunnery, that seldom sees visitors. Trip funds will contribute to a gift for the nuns and their monastery. We will have the opportunity to offer the gift as part of our time at the monastery.

DAY FOUR-Thursday, November 23

Today we will drive to Punakha, with several stops along the way. We will pass through Thimpu, the capital of Bhutan, which is likely the only capital in the world without a traffic light. Here we'll stretch our legs and view the Buddha Dordenma, made of bronze and gilded gold. This magnificent statue is the largest Buddha statue in the world and is located amidst the ruins of Kuensel Phodrang.

The high point of the day's journey is Dochula Pass, at 10,000', where weather permitting, we will have magnificent views of the gigantic, snow covered peaks of the Eastern Himalayas. From the pass we drop down to the lowlands of the Punakha Valley at just 4,000', passing forests of rhododendron and magnolia.

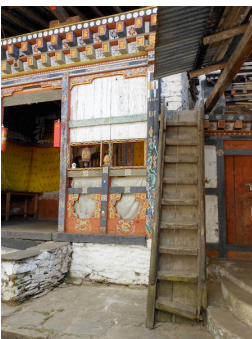


DAY FIVE-Friday, November 24

In the morning, we visit the Nalanda Buddhist College, a monastic school perched high on a remote hillside. The day will include a hike through villages, farm land and orange orchards. We will arrive at the Chorten Nebu Monastery, built in the eighteenth century, is a little known treasure, with its magnificent statue of Maitreya (the future Buddha). The monastery is a school for young monks, where these children can study both traditional Buddhist texts and Western subjects. In the afternoon we visit the Punakha Dzong, built on a river island at the confluence of the Phochu and Mochu rivers, and possibly the most beautiful Dzong in Bhutan.



DAY SIX-Saturday, November 25



Today we drive (3 hours) to the little visited Phobjikha Valley, nestled at 9,500' on the western slopes of the Black Mountains. En route we'll stop for a half hour walk across rice paddies and past a local village to Chimi Lhakhang, the temple of the 'Divine Mad Man', where Bhutanese come for fertility blessings.

In the afternoon we'll explore the Phobjikha Valley on foot- following the Khewa Chu stream through open meadows to a small, seldom visited monastery built in the 13th century, and recently brought back to life as an active monastery for about 30 young monks. We will stay to listen to evening chants, and visit with Tulku Tshultim Dorji Rinpoche, the reincarnate of the 13th century founder of the monastery. Tonight we stay at the remote Dewachen Inn, a luxurious wood-heated hotel.

DAY SEVEN-Sunday, November 26

Today we head to Bumthang province, known as the spiritual heart of Bhutan. A dramatic drive takes us through the town of Trongsa, where we will stop to visit the Trongsa Dzong, considered the most impressive masterpiece of Bhutanese architecture. We will settle in for three nights in the Chumey Valley at the Chumey Nature Resort. The Chumey Valley is the home of Bhutan's famous yathra weaving- a geometrically complex weaving of hand-spun wool.



DAY EIGHT-Monday, November 27



Today we settle into deep practice in the beautiful small temple on the grounds of the Chumey Nature Resort. A day of quiet contemplation and integration, with time for an afternoon walk in the peaceful wooded valley.

DAY NINE-Tuesday, November 28

On the second day of our practice intensive, we will spend the day at Tharpaling Monastery, perched high above the Chumey Valley. This goemba houses over 100 monks and several temples, including the high hermitage of Choedrak Goemba, above Tharpaling at 12,400'. Choedrak Goemba has a chapel that is said to hold the footprint of Guru Rinpoche. We will spend the morning practicing in the main temple on the wooden planked floors worn smooth from centuries of monks' feet. In the afternoon we will practice walking meditation on a hike to KiKiLa Pass, a remote high pass that is the home to a glass-encased golden Buddha. Here we will raise prayer flags in a ceremony of peace and loving kindness.



DAY TEN-Wednesday, November 29

This morning we take a short drive to Jakar, the small town at the center of the district of Bumthang, considered the spiritual heart of Bhutan. Our focus for the day is a visit to Pema Choling Nunnery, where over 100 nuns, mostly teenagers and young women, study and practice. Our guide's sister lives at Pema Choling monastery, and will introduce us to her dharma sisters. We will spend the morning with them, sitting as they practice their daily chants and talking with them in the stone courtyard in the center of their dormitories and classrooms. Trip funds will contribute to a gift for the nuns or their monastery, which we will present to them as part of the morning.



In the afternoon we will stop to visit some of Bumthang's most treasured temples- Kurjey Lhakhang, Jambey Lhakhang, and Tamshing Goemba. Jambey Lhakhang, the first Buddhist temple dedicated to the future Buddha, was built here in 7th Century by the Tibetan King Songtsen Goempo, even before the arrival of Guru Rinpoche. A little walk to the north is Kurjey Lhakhang, built around the cave where Guru Rinpoche meditated and left the imprint of his body on a rock. Kurjey is considered one of the holiest places in Bhutan.

DAY ELEVEN-Thursday, November 30

Returning to Paro we will spend the day settling in and visiting the National Museum. We will meet with Director Khenpo Phuntsho Tashi (if in residence), who will introduce us to the natural history and Buddhist art of Bhutan. This will give us understanding of the incredible artwork that we have seen throughout our journey. In the afternoon we will visit a traditionally crafted local farm house. Our dinner will be on the grounds of a medieval noble's house.



DAY TWELVE-Friday, December 1

Leaving Paro, we will give our gear to the horses and start our overnight trek to Bumdra monastery. A five-hour hike takes us to our camp at 13,500', near the monastery, with beautiful views of the Himalayas. We will practice in the afternoon in either a cave used by meditation practitioners for centuries, or in the monastery itself. Our 'luxury camp' will include standup tents with cots, a dining tent with space heaters, and delicious meals prepared by our crew.

DAY THIRTEEN-Saturday, December 2

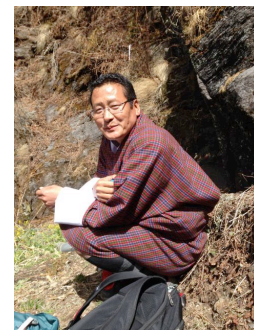


We hike approximately five hours, all downhill, visiting several remote monasteries on the way. The highlight of the day is one of Bhutan's most sacred places- Taksang (also known as Tiger's Nest) Monastery. This monastery, perched on the side of a sheer cliff, was built atop the cave where Guru Rinpoche, the father of Mahayana Buddhism, meditated for three months after arriving in the Paro Valley on the back of a legendary flying tigress. We will practice in one of several shrine rooms of this incredible monastery before continuing for another hours' walk back to Paro, where we will stay again at the Gangtey Palace Hotel.

DAY FOURTEEN-Sunday, December 3

We will conclude our time in Bhutan with sitting, reflection, and goodbyes to our local guides, and catch an afternoon flight back to Bangkok.

Our trip will end in Bangkok, upon our arrival in the airport in the afternoon. If you need to wait until the next morning for a flight back to the U.S., we can arrange lodging for you if needed. Note that because of the dateline, if you leave on the morning of Monday, December 4, you will most likely arrive home on the same day, Monday, December 4.



Namgay - our guide throughout the journey