



Wanderlust & Lipstick  
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## Bhutan Women-only Yoga Tour – April 2011

Itinerary dates: April 19 – April 30, 2011

Tour leader: Susan L. Weis

This 12-day **yoga and cultural adventure** to Bhutan has been specially **created for women** and is **appropriate for yoginis of all levels**. Experience the **breathtaking Himalayas**, learn about the Kingdom's policy of **Gross National Happiness** and take an inner journey through **yoga, meditation and Ayurvedic workshops**.

The tour combines the best of Bhutan's **cultural** highlights along with light **trekking** in the pristine Himalayas. During this adventure you'll have the opportunity to meditate with a monk, visit **The National Institute of Traditional Medicine** in Thimphu, **hike to Tiger's Nest** and **enjoy the Ura Valley tsechu (festival)**.

The group meets in Bangkok prior to departure to Bhutan. Flights depart Bangkok very early in the morning. Plan to arrive at least one day in advance of departure to Bhutan in case of flight delays.

### April 19, 2011

#### Day 1 – arrive from Bangkok – Paro

The flight into Paro on Bhutan's national carrier, Druk Air, is a befitting introduction to the spectacular beauty of the country. In clear weather, magnificent views of the world's highest peaks give way to the lush green Paro Valley as you land. Your first experience will be that of breathing in the cool, clean, fresh air. After clearing customs and visa control you will be met by your in-country guide and driven to your hotel.

After lunch, you will visit **Rinpung Dzong** and then spend time walking along Paro's main street and shopping district. In the late afternoon, if there is time, you will visit **Ta Dzong** which was converted into the **National Museum** in 1967. See antique thangkas, textiles, weapons, armor, household objects and other historic artifacts. Dinner and overnight at hotel.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** This first evening will include an introductory session on **Ayurvedic practices**, including a dosha diagnosis, as well as an introduction to yoga.

### April 20, 2011

#### Day 2 – Paro – Thimphu

After your first early morning yoga session and breakfast, the group will depart for Thimphu, Bhutan's capital (population 86,000; 7,520') about an hour away.

After lunch, the group will visit sites around Thimphu that may include a **nunnery**, the **National Memorial Chorten**, the **National Zoo** (more like a preserve, the only animal present is the national animal, the unique Takin), the **handicraft emporium**, **handmade paper factory** and **Trashi Chhoe Dzong** (monastery). Dinner and overnight at hotel.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Thimphu is the largest and only real “city” in Bhutan. Though it is bustling, it remains the world’s only capital city without a traffic light! It’s also an excellent place to learn about the **country’s arts and crafts**.

**April 21, 2011**

**Day 3 – Thimphu – Punakha**

After breakfast, the group will depart for the drive to **Dochu La Pass** (10,000’), climbing steeply through a forest of pine and cedar, festooned with hanging lichen. You’ll then have a chance for a **light downhill hike** through the forest, meeting up with the road where you’ll board the van and drive into the **Punakha Valley**. Lunch will be served at the hotel. In the afternoon, you’ll drive a short distance to the **Punakha Dzong**.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** **Punakha Dzong** is considered the most beautiful of all dzongs in Bhutan. You’ll have time to explore this complex of buildings that houses hundreds of monks during the winter. You will visit the spectacular main temple which houses large Buddhas at the alter and thousands more around the walls.

Overnight at hotel which is perched high on a ridge overlooking the Punakha Valley and river.

**April 22, 2011**

**Day 4 – Punakha – Trongsa**

You’ll begin the day early with another yoga class which will help prepare you for the long drive (about 5 hours) to **Trongsa**. During this drive you’ll make your way through the **Black Mountains** along the “Central Road” which was completed only 30 years ago and opened central Bhutan to the outside world.

The first stop is **Wangdue**, a small but important town and the district headquarters of Western Bhutan. If time permits, you’ll visit **Wangdue Phodrang Dzong**, dramatically located on a ridge above the confluence of two raging rivers. Continuing on, the road climbs through semi-tropical vegetation to **Pele La Pass** (10,900’) with an alpine environment of towering rhododendron and dwarf bamboo. **Yak** can often be found grazing here and, if clear, **Mt. Jhomulhari** (24,140’) is visible to the west. Descending, you’ll pass through a spectacular gorge and on to **Trongsa**, where you’ll visit the impressive **Trongsa Dzong**.

Overnight at the hotel and enjoy the spectacular views of the area.

**April 23, 2011**

**Day 5 – Trongsa – Bumthang Valley**

After breakfast, the group will continue driving east to **Bumthang Valley**, where you’ll have ample time to sightsee with possible visits to: the **Tamshing Gompa** (monastery), **Kurjey Lhakhang**, and **Jambay** (or Jampa, Buddha of the Future) **Lhakhang**, the **Jakar Dzong** and the **Swiss Farm** (for cheese, honey, beer and local fruit spirits).

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Buddhism in Bhutan is believed to have started in **Bumthang**. This area is ideal for settling in for a few days and enjoying the rich culture and spiritual surroundings.

**April 24, 2011**

**Day 6 – Bumthang – Hike to Tang Valley**

After another yoga session, the group will depart for the **Tang Valley** along the 15 miles of dirt road which gives access to this region. You’ll stop for an hour-long hike up to **Ogyen Choling Museum** which provides a fascinating look into **traditional life in Bhutan**. After the hike back down to the road, you’ll stop for a picnic lunch.

Afterward, you will visit the **Pema Choling Nunnery** and learn about the lives of the women who live there. This is a special opportunity to see how the nuns live in and operate the nunnery, which is so very different from the monasteries where the monks live.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Though the road to the Tang Valley is rough, the **views and hike** through this area are spectacular and a tour through the museum is a unique chance to see how people continue to live their traditional life in Bhutan.

**April 25, 2011**

**Day 7 – Bumthang – Ura – Bumthang**

Following another yoga session and breakfast, you will take an excursion to the **Ura Valley** about 25 miles away. You'll attend the **Ura Yakchoe Tsechu** and will have the chance to witness Bhutanese traditional singing and dancing. This festival is an important way for the locals to hold on to their culture and lifestyle.

Dinner and overnight at same hotel in Bumthang.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Families dressed in their finest clothes will come from around the valley to partake in and witness this **tsechu**.

**April 26, 2011**

**Day 8 – Bumthang – Gangtey**

After breakfast, you'll begin by driving west back toward Paro. The group will stop at **Yotong La Pass** and then continue on through Trongsa, to Pele La Pass, and then turn south to the **Phoblika Valley** (10'000 feet), considered the most beautiful valley in the Himalayas. Lunch will be provided along the way. Dinner and overnight at hotel.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** This valley is the winter home to the endangered **black-necked cranes** that migrate from the high Tibetan Plateau. Though they are generally only here from November through March, on occasion there are stragglers that can still be seen in April.

**April 27, 2011**

**Day 9 – Gangtey – Wangdue**

An early morning yoga class will be taught as you view the amazing valley below the hotel. After breakfast, the group will visit **Gangtey Gompa**, which dates back to the 17th century and was recently renovated. You'll then walk back along a path through a beautiful forest and then along the valley floor back to the hotel where you will have lunch. You'll then drive about 2 hours to a riverside hotel near **Wangdue** (4,000 feet). Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** The morning's walk through the **Phoblika Valley** is one of easiest and loveliest on this tour. The area will take your breath away as watch horse and cows mingling along the valley floor that's ringed by low mountains.

**April 28, 2011**

**Day 10 – Wangdue – Thimphu – Paro**


From Wangdue, you will drive to **Thimphu** for lunch and a last chance for **shopping and sightseeing**. You'll then proceed to Paro where you'll have dinner and overnight at hotel.

**April 29, 2011**

**Day 11 – Paro**

You'll get an early start on this last full day in Bhutan to hike 2+ hours up to **Taktsang** (Tiger's Nest), Bhutan's most photographed and iconic monastery. You'll spend some time enjoying the views and visiting the temples here. You'll then hike down, stopping at the tea shop, located at the halfway point, and where there are lovely views of Tiger's Nest. You'll continue down and then enjoy a picnic lunch.

You'll then return to Paro. There will be time for resting or visiting the town for last-minute shopping. Final overnight and dinner at hotel.

 **HIGHLIGHT!** Quite possibly the highlight of your entire trip will be hiking to and visiting **Tiger's Nest!**

**April 30, 2011**

**Day 12 – Paro – Bangkok**

After an early breakfast, you'll depart for the airport for a bittersweet goodbye to the Kingdom of Bhutan and fly back to Bangkok. Though it's possible to connect with your flight home on the same day, consider overnighting in Bangkok in case flights out of Paro are delayed (not uncommon).