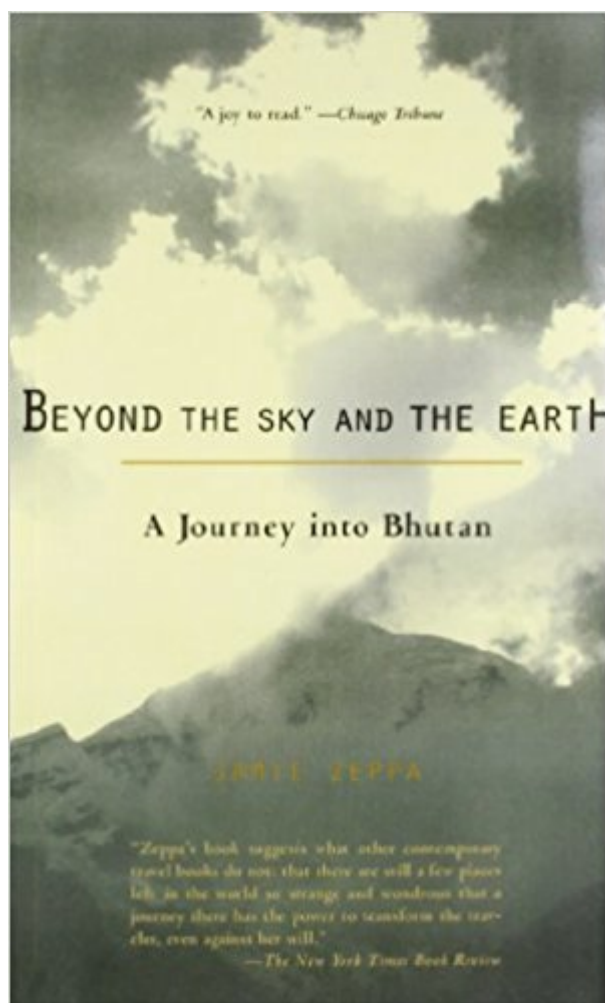


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Beyond The Sky And The Earth: A Journey Into Bhutan



Synopsis

Jamie Zeppa was 24 when she left a stagnant life at home and signed a contract to teach for two years in the Buddhist hermit kingdom of Bhutan. Much more than just a travel memoir, *Beyond the Sky and the Earth* is the story of her time in a Himalayan village, immersed in Bhutanese culture and the wonders of new and lasting love. Whether you're travelling to Bhutan, looking for the best travel writing around, or wishing to be transported to a culture, mindset, and spiritual ethos wonderfully different from your own, *Beyond the Sky and the Earth* is a joyous and lush memoir that will transform the way you think of faith, Western life, and love.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a teacher of English literature, Jamie Zeppa would understand how the story of her journey into Bhutan could be fit into the convenient box of "coming-of-age romance," a romance with a landscape, a people, a religion, and a dark, irresistible student. An innocent, young Catholic woman from a Canadian mining town who had "never been anywhere," Zeppa signed up for a two-year stint teaching in a remote corner of the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. Despite the initial shock of material privation and such minor inconveniences as giardia, boils, and leeches, Zeppa felt herself growing into the vast spaces of simplicity that opened up beyond the clutter of modern life. Alongside her burgeoning enchantment, a parallel realization that all was not right in Shangri-La arose, especially after her transfer to a college campus charged with the politics of ethnic division. Still she maintained her center by devouring the library's Buddhist tracts and persevering in an increasingly fruitful meditation practice. When the time came for her to leave, she had undergone a

personal transformation and found herself caught between two worlds that were incompatible and mutually incomprehensible. Zeppa's candid, witty account is a spiritual memoir, a travel diary, and, more than anything, a romance that retraces the vicissitudes of ineluctable passion. --Brian Bruya
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Zeppa's story is nearly an inversion of the ancient Buddhist tale of Siddhartha (in which a prince ventures from the paradise of his father's palace only to find the suffering and decay that he never knew existed) in that the author, at the age of 22, abruptly leaves a stale life in Canada to become a volunteer teacher in the remote and largely undisturbed Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan. Cloaked in the airy mountains between India and China, Bhutan initially frustrates but eventually captivates Zeppa with its rudimentary lifestyle that forces her to question former values and plans for the future. Though the story line would seem to open itself to cloying romanticization, Zeppa's telling of her clumsy attempts to adapt rings with sincerity and inspires sympathy. She thinks to herself upon visiting a local house: "In one shadowy corner, there is a skinny chicken. I blink several times but it does not vanish. Is it a pet? Is it dinner?" Zeppa's lucid descriptions of the craggy terrain and honest respect for the daily struggles of the natives bring the tiny land to life in a way that is reverent but real. Though she tries to avoid what a friend terms "that Shangri-La-Di-Da business" and grapples with the poverty, sexism and political squabbles in Bhutan that bother her, there is little doubt that she sees the place in a largely positive light and is tempted to remain. In the end, Zeppa's is a lively tale of her earnest efforts to reconcile what she has learned with what she has known. (June)
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This is an amazing book! Jamie Zeppa writes beautifully. Her descriptions of the landscape and the people of Bhutan are fresh, easy to picture, and compelling. None of the usual trees and mountains and awesome views descriptions, nothing hackneyed, all spot on. She takes you with her every step of the way, from, "I've got to go home," to "I've got to stay," to "What do I do now?" Her gradual adjustment to Bhutanese life and her insights into her own reactions are brilliant. This book gave me a broader outlook on my life in the U.S.A. and a new perspective on life in other countries. I highly recommend this book! I rarely read non-fiction, especially personal journey memoirs, but I'm so glad I decided to pick up this very well-written book that pulls you in and lets you experience just what Ms. Zeppa did.

This book has received plenty of praise from other reviewers and now I can add mine. It was a pleasure from start to finish and one of those books that, while hard to put down, you don't want to end either. Through her wonderful descriptions, honesty and humor, you are transported with the author on her both brave and naive venture into a vastly different culture and terrain than anything she has ever known. She starts out with great trepidation, wondering whether she has made a huge mistake and having no idea if she will have the strength of constitution or character to survive without her accustomed level of personal comforts and safety. It is an experience that allows her personal growth and an unexpected opportunity for reevaluating her values and reforming her path for the future. I bought this book initially to learn something of the culture of Bhutan prior to a trip we are planning, but got SO much more from it - certainly one of the best I have read in a while.

I'm interested in travel in Bhutan. This is not a travel book, but I thoroughly enjoyed reading of the author's experiences as a teacher several decades ago, in a remote country that is no longer even as she experienced it. Her engaging writing evoked the way in which she was drawn to the country's natural beauty and cultural connectedness - reflections that conveyed the timelessness of her experience. However, this is not just pure romantic conjecture of this remote culture from a naive foreigner. Her story was balanced with her experience of the conflict that occurred between the southern Nepalese and the northern Bhutanese in the 1990's, revealing that even among the most idealistic of nations, the soft underbelly of human conflict still emerges in destructive and mean-spirited ways. A good read.

From the very first chapter I was transported back to the mountains, valleys and vistas of Bhutan. I could see the rutted roads, the ethnic clothing, the beautiful dzongs, prayer flags fluttering in the breeze. Jamie Zeppa embraces the differences and learns to love the country of Bhutan even as she is torn by the conflict between the Nepali Bhutanese and the original inhabitants. Surprisingly, her journey into Bhutan also becomes an intense love story. Beautifully written, this book introduces a little known culture and country and shares the author's personal growth throughout. For a country known for measuring "gross national happiness," the hidden ethnic and cultural conflicts remind us that there is no such thing as Shangri La.

Jamie goes to great lengths to provide a great story with enough detail that you can see the sights and smell the aromas in your mind. What I do admire about her writing is that she is honest enough to not paint a picture of complete perfection in this tiny Asian country: She shows both the good and

bad and is very open with her feelings. At times, however, I feel she opens a bit too much. Some sections about her personal issues go a bit long for me. But that is just a matter of my taste. Others may find this more to their liking. Also, I feel she is a bit too critical of Christianity. While I understand this is not a theological book, the author does dig into religion quite a bit,,enough to allow review criticism on the topic. I am just wishing she would differentiate between Christianity as she knows it...and real true Christian teaching. Aside from this, I highly recommend her writings and wish the book had not ended so soon.

Enjoyed this book immensely, but was disappointed that the author spent so much of the book building up her relationship with the Bhutanese student, only to leave us hanging as to what happened after she had his son and married him. The descriptions of Bhutan were magnificent, but I am afraid our author could have done a better job respecting and understanding the Bhutanese culture. She insisted, as a teacher, on prodding her students to discuss topics that would have got them into trouble politically, which to me showed a lack of respect, and she rushed headlong into a relationship with a Bhutanese man without completely considering the consequences. Overall, a great read, and my criticisms would not have arisen had I not become completely engaged with the story.

I was surprised that I fell in love with this book so quickly. Zeppa is a strong storyteller who takes you along on her exciting (although unconventional) journey to Butan. Her narrative is strong and her experiences left me wanting to know even more. It was a joy to read from beginning to end.

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