Hidden Lands, Hidden Yogis:
An insider’s pilgrimage to Bhutan

with Willa B. Miller,
Liz Monson
and Jetsun Deleplanque

May 19 to June 2/June 6, 2017
Bhutan, the last Mahayana Buddhist Kingdom in the world, is strongly invested in the preservation of its age-old religious traditions. Home to the Nyingma and Kagyu schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the land of the Dragon has acted throughout its history as a haven for the flourishing of the Buddhadharma. Today, with the demise of the Tibetan state, the Kingdom remains the last Himalayan Buddhist enclave to officially embrace the Vajrayana or Tantric path first brought by its patron saint, Guru Rinpoche, in the 7th century. In the tradition of the Vajrayana, there is a notion of “hidden lands” that await pilgrims to be discovered at the right moment for their spiritual ripening. On this unique tour, led by guides who are intimately familiar with Bhutan’s undiscovered pilgrimage destinations, we will seek out both hidden lands and some of the country’s most revered meditation masters (hidden yogis) for transformative and unforgettable encounters.

Option 1: 15 Days General Pilgrimage
Option 2: 15 Days General Pilgrimage and 4 days Trekking extension
(a minimum of 10 participants necessary for option 2 to run)

Price:
Option 1: US$ 5,000/-
Option 2: US$ 6,000/-
Pilgrimage is a deep and ancient spiritual practice, embraced by all religious traditions. It is a way to encounter oneself and a forum to deepen in teachings of wisdom and compassion. As we journey to places that extend far beyond our familiar world, we are invited to discover new ways of seeing and being, and may find ourselves reaching into the recesses of the mind and heart. Sacred sites carry a profound energy of blessing, garnered by visits by saints and thousands of practitioners, which has a way of inviting us directly into relationship with these ancient transmissions of wisdom. While the outer pilgrimage is a journey to sacred places, the inner pilgrimage may well be a journey to the heart of our deepest being.

Guiding Presences:

**Willa B. Miller, PhD**
Willa B. Miller is an author, translator, scholar, and authorized teacher (Lama) in the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. She is the founder of Natural Dharma Fellowship in Boston, Massachusetts, USA, and Wonderwell Mountain Refuge, a retreat center in Springfield, New Hampshire, USA.

**Liz Monson, PhD**
Liz Monson is an author, translator, scholar and authorized teacher (Lopon) in the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. She is the Associate Spiritual Director of Natural Dharma Fellowship in Boston, Massachusetts, USA, and Managing Teacher at Wonderwell Mountain Refuge, a retreat center in Springfield, New Hampshire, USA. She lived in Bhutan from 2012 to 2014.

**Jetsun Deleplanque, MTS**
Jetsun Deleplanque is a doctoral candidate in the History of Religions at the University of Chicago whose research focuses on the founding of the Bhutanese state in the seventeenth century. He has spent years living in Bhutan and the Himalayas, and is the co-founder and director of Namkha Journeys, a travel company dedicated to fostering a meaningful encounter between the peoples of the Himalayas and their visitors.
Because the key to a land often lies in the hands of its people, our journey will be blessed by privileged encounters with various representatives of the living Buddhist traditions of Bhutan. From revered Rinpoches to young practitioners, our meetings and discussions, where emphasis will be made on the principle of Hidden Lands and sacred space, will serve to guide us in both our outer and inner pilgrimages.

Itinerary at a glance:
May 19-21: Arrival and visit of the Thimphu valley
May 21-23: Punakha
May 23-25: Phobjikha
May 25-28: Bumthang
May 28-29: Trongsa
May 29-30: Thimphu
May 30-June 2: Paro - exit
June 2-6: Bumdra (trekking extension) – exit

Price includes:
All accommodation in Government approved A-class hotels
All Trekking equipment and arrangements
All meals
All transport
Royalty Fee
All permit/entrance fees
Drukair flights (from Bangkok or Delhi)

Price excludes:
Insurance (medical/travel)
Any expenses of a personal nature Individual donations at temples
International Airfare
Punakha valley is the ancient capital of the Kingdom and remains to this day the winter residence of the state monastic body (Dzong). Placed strategically at the junction of the Pho and Mo Chu rivers, the imposing Punakha Dzong was built in 1637 by Bhutan’s unifier, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, to serve as the religious and administrative center of the region. The Dzong houses many sacred and historic priceless artifacts as well as the embalmed body of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal himself.

Pilgrimage Highlights

Paro
Considered to be one of the most beautiful of Bhutan, the picturesque valley of Paro is also most significant in its cultural and religious heritage. Lying at the center of two trade routes to Tibet, Paro has always held a place of great strategic and cultural importance. Its Dzong (fortress), towering above the valley, houses the National Museum, where very rare tangkhas are displayed.

Taktshang
Perhaps the most important temple complex of the Kingdom, Taktshang or ‘Tiger’s Nest’ is a true architectural marvel. The magnificent cliff-hanging temple is built around a cave where Guru Padmasambhava allegedly landed on the back of a Tigress in the 8th Century and meditated for three months. The monastery was built in its present form in 1684 and has recently been renovated following strict traditional methods. Taktshang is famous for having been visited by such illustrious yogis and yoginīs as Jetsun Milarepa and Machig Labdronma.

Thimphu
The only capital in Asia with no traffic lights, Thimphu is a small and vibrant town where ancient traditions meet the modern world. Our stay in the capital will involve visiting some of the important religious and cultural landmarks of the valley as well as meetings with distinguished members of Bhutanese society.

Tango/Cheri
Considered to be the holiest sites of the Thimphu valley, the monastic university of Tango and the retreat center of Cheri are intimately associated with the first implantation of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage in Bhutan. Situated on two mountaintops, the sites offer breathtaking views of the Thimphu valley.
**Bumdra Trek**

The Bumdra trek is a true hidden gem of Bhutan. Although little known to the outside world, the Bumdra temple, situated high above the cliff-hanging Taktshang temple in the Paro valley, is extremely revered by Bhutanese practitioners. The trek itself involves one day of steep ascent to the temple and one full day to come back down to the Paro valley bed via numerous little temples located just above Taktshang. Our four day journey on the mountain will include two days of day hikes to breathtaking views of the Himalayas and meditation practice at the Bumdra temple. Because the first day of ascent to the temple will be demanding, only fit and experienced hikers are encouraged to sign up for this trekking extension. A minimum of ten participants is necessary for this trekking option to be confirmed. Once this number has been reached, all interested participants will be notified.

**Phobjikha**

A special place to all Bhutanese, the scenic Phobjikha valley is also known as Gangtey after its Gompa that sits on the ridge above the valley. Gangtey Gompa was founded in 1613 by Gyaltsen Pema Thinley, the grandson and incarnation of the great 15th century Nyingmapa saint and treasure-revealer Pema Lingpa. The Gompa is looked after by approximately 100 lay monks, known as Gomchens, and has recently been renovated by the current ‘mind incarnation’ (Trulku) of Pema Lingpa. Gangtey is also a habitat for the rare species of Black Necked Cranes, who flock there during the winter and fly back to Tibet during the summer.

**Bumthang**

With countless ancient temples and monasteries adorning the landscape, the magical Bumthang valley is considered by all Bhutanese to be the cultural heartland of the Kingdom. There, we will have the chance to visit some rare temples associated to Guru Rinpoche, Longchenpa and Pema Lingpa.
A Pilgrimage operated by Natural Dharma Fellowship and Namkha Journeys
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