



Beyond the Sky and the Earth: A Journey into Bhutan

By Jamie Zeppa

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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.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

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*

From Publishers Weekly

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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From Library Journal

Canadian Zeppa turned away from a secure future "to do something in the real world." When the opportunity came to teach in the remote Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan, Zeppa accepted with alacrity over the protests of her xenophobic grandfather and the lukewarm approval of her fiancé. At 22, Zeppa was unprepared for the rigors of life in the Third World. Upon arrival at her assigned junior high school in the tiny tropical village of Pema Gatsel, she was dismayed by the primitive living quarters and her own inadequacies as a teacher. But her overwhelming culture shock was eased by the charm of the Bhutanese and the beauty of the landscape. Leaving her first assignment with reluctance, Zeppa was transferred to a position at a college in the mountain town of Kanglung, became a Buddhist, and plunged into a relationship with one of her students. Her story reads like a good novel; even her youthful naiveté has charm. Zeppa's deep affection for her adopted home makes this a special book. Highly recommended. AJanet N. Ross, Washoe Cty. Lib. Sys., Sparks, NV

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Cooke:

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