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The Blessings Of Bhutan (A Latitude 20 Book)



Synopsis

"A captivating and splendid account of a complex nation on the cusp of tradition and modernity. Bhutan is distinctive--from its social structures to its development philosophy of Gross National Happiness. The Blessings of Bhutan is based on extensive travel and interviews. Written in an accessible style, the authors blend narrative about the country's history, religion, arts, and governance with lively personal anecdotes. It is an excellent contribution to the study of contemporary Bhutan that will appeal to laymen and scholars alike." --Karma Ura, Director of the Centre for Bhutan Studies "The blessings of Bhutan are many, including the appearance of this lyrical account of the country's many unique and fascinating aspects. Because they are among the Westerners most familiar with Bhutanese life, Blyth and Russ are able to penetrate well beyond the Shangri-la myth and show that, while parts of such an otherworldly myth apply, this Himalayan Kingdom is brimful of surprises, contradictions, and modern dilemmas." --K. E. S. Kirby Dorji, writer/editor, United Nations consultant, longtime resident of Bhutan.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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aspects. Because they are among the Westerners most familiar with Bhutanese life, Blyth and Russ are able to penetrate well beyond the Shangri-la myth and show that, while parts of such an otherworldly myth apply, this Himalayan Kingdom is brimful of surprises, contradictions, and modern dilemmas."The Carpenters openly adore Bhutan. As countries go, it is obviously one of a kind.--
"Taipei Times"

The Carpenters openly adore Bhutan. As countries go, it is obviously one of a kind. (Taipei Times)

Having experienced Bhutan personally a year ago I am continually curious about it. This book is down to earth realism and explains the people and the country in a fun and perceptive way. It is thoroughly educational while being entertaining, and organized and written to give readers a clear understanding of their Buddhist way of life. I felt that I had just been transported back to Bhutan again, and to different areas than I had visited. It was wonderful. Thank you!

as expected

When my husband returned from Bhutan on a hiking excursion, I gave him this book. #1 He is actually reading it! #2 Occasionally he'll point out some parts to me and say "Yes, it was exactly like this."

I found this book boring

The shipping service that was used had a ridiculous amount of trouble finding our house! It took 3 attempts, over a weeks' time and numerous calls to find us. I would suggest that you find another delivery service!

Previous reviews have been brief if enthusiastic; here's mine with more detail. Russ and Blyth Carpenter offer short "sketches" about eight cultural aspects of this Himalayan kingdom. Coming in 1996 to visit and then do community improvement work there, this 1999 book comes quickly given their recent immersion. However, as with Martin Uitz's similarly pitched "Hidden Bhutan" (reviewed by me Dec. 2012) from a decade later in this rapidly modernizing nation, the Carpenters provide a thoughtful Western p-o-v that avoids romanticizing or ethnocentrism. This rural Oregonian couple diminishes the personal touch and entertaining or dramatic anecdote common to others who report

from this realm often seen from afar and close in soft focus. Instead, they accentuate the mindset that Bhutan tries to perpetuate by Gross National Happiness and its nuanced adaptation of global technologies and expectations. They remind readers of wisdom, in balanced, ecological perspectives. They begin with a geographical and historical overview, then move into archery (in more depth than any other book I've read on Bhutan); Tantric Buddhism (more commonsense and demystifying, refreshingly); art and medicine (same applied to a more agnostic, balanced East-West perspective on traditional Tibetan remedies and the attitudes that they instill); reincarnation's impact on environmental policy (subtle: how does "you only live once" clash with "what goes around, comes around"?); Drukpa Kunley (given the rarity of this source material available in English, welcome excerpts from the "Divine Madman"); sexuality and women (an honest appraisal of the cost-benefit of matriarchal inheritance of the land vs. education and careers for girls); and the GNH policy (with comments from its proponent Karma Ura--see Mary Peck's "Bhutan" photo collection with Ura's essay, reviewed by me Dec. 2012). Just a couple of highlights of this unpretentious, casually presented but accessible essay collection: comparing and contrasting Dante's "Inferno" with the Buddhist Wheel of Life to show the differences between a linear and cyclical, ends-based and care-based, eternal vs. reincarnated worldview. Distinguishing the left-right brain with the folk Bon practices and the "intellectual polish" of formal Buddhism to show how Bhutanese beliefs integrate these approaches sensibly. Commonsense is crucial. Ice can break, water can flow; colors in a rainbow or prism show the evanescence of what appears so tangible: this is the teaching transmitted by Khyentse Rinpoche (see reviews Dec. 2012 of the films "Brilliant Moon" and "Words of My Perfect Teacher" for more). The book in earlier sections can feel uneven--probably as it's a joint effort--and tonal shifts and sudden transitions in some portions slow the pace. The Carpenters deepen their appreciation of the circularity of life, as the book progresses. The study of Bhutan's attempts to live in a delicate, harsh, and rugged "Southern Land of Medicinal Herbs" (to use an old Chinese placename) ethically and spiritually, while moving towards more justice and equality, gains traction. The Carpenters show how in a fir forest in Oregon, lessons learned in Bhutan reverberate, and how stewardship within the ecosystem can challenge those in Bhutan as they try to protect their fragile heartland while accepting--in an overly bureaucratic and civil-servant dominated system--the need for progress, however controlled and gradual. "Sacred paint" can show sexual liberation and psychological understanding; they look at a depiction of "yab-yum" male-female union with fresh eyes and find meanings that work for themselves, not what a prominent if over-indulgent scholar or New Age website might peddle. This honesty speaks well for this unassuming, but well-illustrated (snapshots try to express some of the colors that can overload the senses) and welcome

introduction to this too-often idealized, but still appealingly idealistic, realm that few of us will be able to afford to explore outside the pages of such books.

"The Blessings of Bhutan" is a personal and fascinating compilation of very short, and very readable, essays (or "sketches") about authors Russ and Blyth Carpenter's experiences and understanding of Bhutanese life. The book is separated into eight parts covering Bhutanese culture and geography; ancient Bhutanese religion and its relationship to Buddhism and Bhutanese archery; Tantric Buddhism; Bhutanese art and medicine; reincarnation (especially as it applies to the environment); sexuality in Bhutanese culture; women in Bhutan; and the Carpenter's reflections on Bhutan's policy of "Gross National Happiness" and on Bhutan's future. The book also has a very useful glossary of terms that makes reading much easier as well as a recommending reading list. The authors' love and admiration of Bhutan and Bhutanese people is very apparent in their sketches. While many things about Bhutan can easily baffle a tourist (like the almost contradictory sexual attitude of the Bhutanese or the concept of "Gross National Happiness"), they explain these things in terms of the Bhutanese culture. I found the book extremely easy to read and engaging, and appreciated the experiences the Carpenters shared as well as the facts. You can read the book back to front or just skip around and read about which aspects of the culture you're interested in. This is the first book I have read about Bhutan, and I'm glad I got it!

This is a great book, help me understand so much about bhutan. especially like the scope it covered: infrastructure project and economic dependence on India, traditional healing VS western medicine. At the end of the book, it is really insightful for the writer to outline the challenges Bhutan faces, e.g. the Indian rote memorization education style, the threat of TV broadcasting violence that obscured national identity. I'm so excited to read their book about Drukpa Kunley!

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