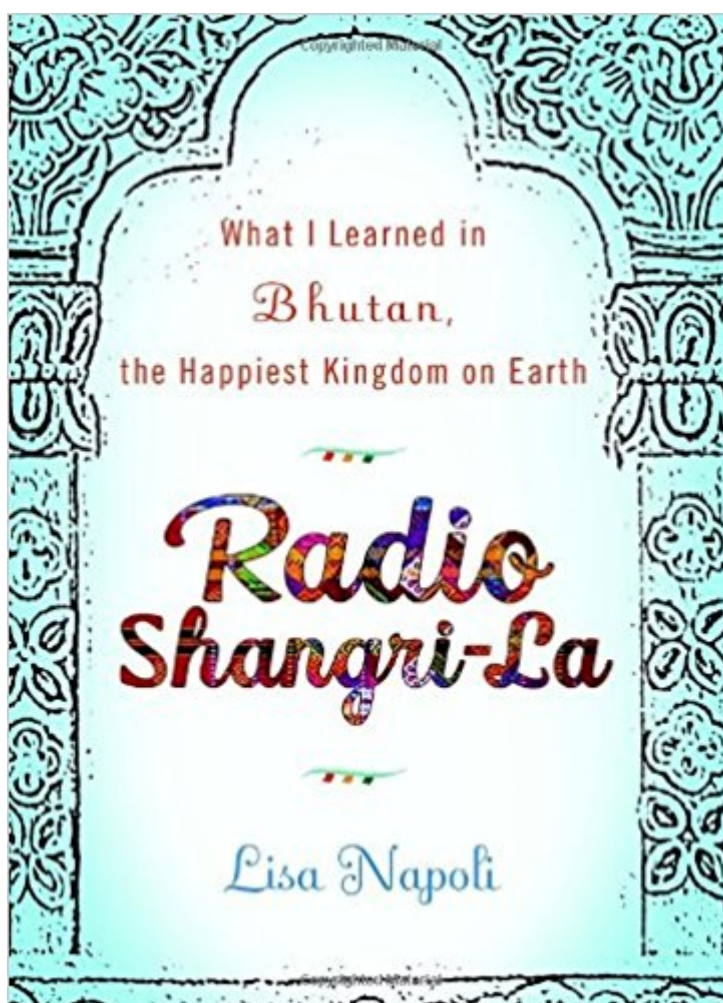


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Radio Shangri-la: What I Learned In Bhutan, The Happiest Kingdom On Earth



Synopsis

Lisa Napoli was in the grip of a crisis, dissatisfied with her life and her work as a radio journalist. When a chance encounter with a handsome stranger presented her with an opportunity to move halfway around the world, Lisa left behind cosmopolitan Los Angeles for a new adventure in the ancient Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan—said to be one of the happiest places on earth. Long isolated from industrialization and just beginning to open its doors to the modern world, Bhutan is a deeply spiritual place, devoted to environmental conservation and committed to the happiness of its people—in fact, Bhutan measures its success in Gross National Happiness rather than in GNP. In a country without a single traffic light, its citizens are believed to be among the most content in the world. To Lisa, it seemed to be a place that offered the opposite of her fast-paced life in the United States, where the noisy din of sound-bite news and cell phones dominate our days, and meaningful conversation is a rare commodity; where everyone is plugged in digitally, yet rarely connects with the people around them. Thousands of miles away from everything and everyone she knows, Lisa creates a new community for herself. As she helps to start Bhutan's first youth-oriented radio station, Kuzoo FM, she must come to terms with her conflicting feelings about the impact of the medium on a country that had been shielded from its effects. Immersing herself in Bhutan's rapidly changing culture, Lisa realizes that her own perspective on life is changing as well—and that she is discovering the sense of purpose and joy that she has been yearning for. In this smart, heartfelt, and beautifully written book, sure to please fans of transporting travel narratives and personal memoirs alike, Lisa Napoli discovers that the world is a beautiful and complicated place—and comes to appreciate her life for the adventure it is.

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Customer Reviews

When Napoli met the handsome Sebastian at a cookbook party in New York City, she was intrigued by this man who traveled to Bhutan regularly. And when the accomplished L.A.-based journalist (MSNBC, CNN, public radio's Marketplace) researched the country about which he spoke so enthusiastically, she became entranced with Bhutan, a tiny Himalayan kingdom that sits between India and China. This country--dubbed "the happiest on earth" because of its focus on environmental and social progress--is hard to get to, with its remote location and governmental deterrents to tourism, like a per-person, per-day tourist tax. But a friend of Sebastian's needs help with startup radio station Kuzoo FM, so Napoli leaves L.A. and goes to Bhutan for six weeks. She writes, "After more than two decades of reducing even the most complex issues to 1,000 words or less, I was tired of observing life from a distance." While the author turns an eye on her own motivations (nothing further developed with Sebastian), she refrains from tortured navel-gazing and instead shares and reflects on Bhutan's people, history, and customs (from painting phalluses on houses to repel evil spirits to Buddhism's role in daily life). Napoli's adventures at home and abroad, in nature and career and spirit, will delight readers. (Feb.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

A successful journalist working for public radio in Los Angeles, Napoli hit a wall. Burned out and overwhelmed by regret, she wondered how to recharge her life. Enter a friend of a friend with connections to the tiny Himalayan country of Bhutan. In 2006, this Buddhist kingdom, long cocooned against the outside world, launched a new youth radio station, Kuzoo FM (kuzoo zampo means hello). Would Napoli like to volunteer as a consultant? So begins a love affair with a land unlike any other, a bond that lifts Napoli out of her blues and enriches the lives of the young people with whom she works. The stories of the wildly popular station are charming and gracefully revealing as Napoli shares her experiences of Bhutan's magnificent landscape, fiery cuisine, and openhanded daily life in a society that measures its achievements not with a Gross National Product but, rather, with Gross National Happiness. Napoli's engaging, keenly observed, and informative chronicle captures Bhutan midmetamorphosis as it transforms itself into a democracy and as media and the Internet redefine the Bhutanese concept of contentment. --Donna Seaman

This book had the ability to be great but in the end it felt like a travel log instead of a novel. At first I could not tell if she had actually traveled to Bhutan or if it was a work of fiction. Her interaction with those she met there was fascinating but went nowhere. As a person who loves to travel I enjoyed her descriptions of the area and the people but it left me confused and in the end let down. I still don't know if she really went there or was trying to write a novel. A little weird.

I'm a very well-read person who is very interested in topics such as travelling and experiences, and while I thought this book would be promising, the manner in which the information about Bhutan was delivered was just too awkward, as if read from an encyclopedia. I agree with other reviews that the style is more reminiscent of a blog than a memoir or novel. Although I don't know much about Bhutan, I'd like to think that I know enough cultural translation and travel fiction, and this just read as if for Ms Napoli the Bhutanese were borderline childlike only because they abide by a different set of cultural rules and norms. Not only was she unaware of her surroundings, but she also idealized (read Orientalized, provincialized) Bhutan and, what is very ironic is that she never questions what she is really doing there or what is it that make the Bhutanese "happy". Too self-centered to be about others.

This is not a book about Bhutan...this is a book about the author. Wikipedia will give you more information about the country and its people. Napoli is incredibly patronizing in what reads like a series of Facebook posts. Wish I could get a refund for this time waster.

After visiting Bhutan myself I have become 'obsessed' with the place, reading anything and everything I can get my hands on. By far, Napoli's story has been the most honest and open in terms of sharing not only all the magic of Bhutan that seems to captivate everyone that has a connection but refreshingly, the less than magical elements. She shares in a very honest and non-judgemental way. As a long term expat in Asia, her experience brought me back to reality yet didn't leave me feel like I had been disillusioned. Even if you don't have a connection with Bhutan, Napoli's story is interesting and inspiring. She shares her experience in a humble manner despite the admirable personal journey she has been on. If you too are captivated by Bhutan you'll love Radio Shangri-La and even if you're not but love a great personal story you'll enjoy it. Napoli's style of writing makes you feel like you are sitting down with her as she shares her unique experience with you over glass of wine.

I always enjoy reading about different adventures and cultures but this book went on too long. I struggled to finish the book and found myself wondering what the author actually did most of the time in Bhutan?

There's not enough real content to make a book. Maybe if this had been edited a bit more? It just kept going on and on with epilogues upon epilogues...I started wondering when it was going to end. Again, needs to have been better organized for a more satisfying ending rather than just whimpering to a conclusion. This is NOT the quality of Eat Pray Love, but it could have been closer..

I was fortunate to have had this book recommended to me by a friend Lisa Napoli has written an excellent story about herself, and her trips as a volunteer/consultant in the Kingdom of Bhutan. Ms. Napoli's narrative paints a vivid picture of Bhutan, a small Himalayan Kingdom whose natives have just recently been exposed (more like bombarded) by western culture. Just as importantly her development of the characters (if that can be said of actual persons) in the book, as well as her revelations about herself left me, at the end of each chapter, wondering what will happen next. To me, that is the sign of a good story told well.

This was a personal account of one woman's experience in Bhutan. Some people have criticised her for her bias. But in any person's account, in her interaction with different people the story will always be filtered through the experience of the storyteller's lens. Having said that this is a good read through the eyes of a 40 something volunteer who fell in love with this country.

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