

Well-being in Bhutan

Connect with Yoga Yangchen

A yoga and meditation teacher, animal rights advocate, and content creator, her passion in life is improving the well-being of all sentient beings, people and animals alike. Based in Thimphu, she works on changing mindsets through her yoga and meditation practice.



What are your roots?

I was born in 1993 in a small village in Trashiyangtse in Eastern Bhutan, the daughter of a homemaker (my mother) and a Dzongkha teacher (my father). Especially my father has had a major influence on my life by always making a conscious effort to help those in need around him. All sentient beings matter in his eyes. It made me a firm believer that next to Gross National Happiness, we should also strive for Gross Animal Happiness.

What does Gross Animal Happiness mean to you?

Having been born and raised in a Buddhist country in a Buddhist family, love, compassion, and empathy are an inextricable part of my nature. I extend that to animals as well. My own dog Courage was a stray dog when I found her roaming the streets of Paro injured. She has found her forever home with me and still brings me daily joy. Some years back I also co-founded Doghouse Bhutan, an initiative to build doghouses for the free roaming dogs in Bhutan. Ever since I can remember I have

been taking care of sick and injured animals. These days I try to spend at least part of my weekends volunteering at the Jangsa Animal Shelter in Thimphu.

How did you get introduced to yoga?

At 18 years old I moved from my little well-known world in the Eastern countryside to the 'big' wondrous city of Thimphu in the West. I started studying Marketing at the first private college of Bhutan, the Royal Thimphu College.

After graduation I had several jobs and although I learned a lot, it did not make my heart beat any faster.

It was then that I got an offer from the Founder of Bhutan Spirit Sanctuary, a well-being all-inclusive 5-star boutique resort in Paro. He needed a person to setup different environmental and social projects as an integral part of the concept of the Sanctuary, not just as a corporate social responsibility gimmick. My time at the Sanctuary turned out to be a turning point, setting me on

the path I am now on. Every aspect of the Sanctuary revolved around well-being, rooted in Bhutanese nature, culture, and spirituality. This is how I got close to the two Bhutanese traditional medicine doctors who worked at the Sanctuary, one of whom was also an experienced yoga and meditation teacher. She introduced me to a whole new world, which I took to like a duck to water. With every lesson, every interaction, I became more curious, more excited, and more in-tune with myself. While I continued my practice with the traditional medicine doctor, I also practiced daily at my own home. I felt myself slowly transforming, not only in my body but also my mind. I decided I wanted to learn and experience more, so in early 2020 I asked for a leave of absence to go to Rishikesh in India, the so-called 'birthplace' of yoga.

When did Yangchen become 'Yoga Yangchen'?

My time in Rishikesh was amazing, the place, the people, and the vibe. Time flew by and before I knew it my 200-hours yoga teacher training

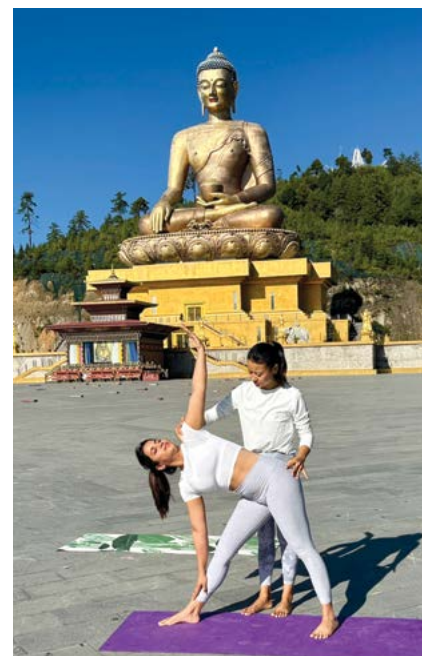
was finished, and I officially was an accredited yoga teacher. I returned to Bhutan thinking I would now be able to start teaching guests at the Sanctuary. Just weeks later, the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world and Bhutan closed its borders (only to re-open about 2.5 years later). Tourists were no longer able to enter Bhutan and the tourism industry came to a complete standstill. Most of those in the tourism industry were out of job, including myself. It was then that I decided to take His Majesty's advice to young Bhutanese to heart, and to take charge of my own destiny. Moving on from adversity to opportunity, from employee to entrepreneur, and from dreams to (a new) reality. With the help of a Dutch friend of mine, I created my own yoga brand, Yoga Yangchen. A logo, website and social media pages were setup, marketing materials were created, and I converted the living room of my apartment on the outskirts of Thimphu to a simple studio in which to teach yoga. Of course, in the beginning, because of COVID and social distancing, I was only able to teach very few people. Yet I already felt that I finally found my path, my destiny in life.



Looking to deepen your connection with Bhutan's spiritual heritage?

Some of Yoga Yangchen's unique services:

- Enjoy a sunrise session at the iconic Buddha Point in Thimphu
- Practice meditation and yoga with the nuns at a nunnery in Thimphu or Punakha
- Experience a sound bath or sound healing session that blends traditional Bhutanese elements with modern healing practices
- Join a group class with Bhutanese students and expats at the studio in Thimphu



How popular is yoga in Bhutan? And where can we find your current studio?

Like everywhere else in the world, the Bhutanese were affected by the COVID-pandemic. In the aftermath, many were looking for ways to deal with some kind of physical or mental health issues. With tourists also returning to Bhutan, slowly but steadily, my practice grew, and in 2023 I moved my home studio to a bigger studio location in Thimphu town.

During those years I went back to Rishikesh several times for further training, and upon my last return in 2024 the universe manifested itself.

I got offered an amazing and even bigger studio space at Giku-na (meaning: around the corner). It is a new so-called 'Creative Space' near the Memorial Chorten in Thimphu, serving as a base for several Bhutanese entrepreneurs, and with a cozy café it is a great meeting spot for locals and foreign visitors alike.

Who can come to your studio and what do you offer them?

I believe that the gift of yoga should be accessible to all. My studio welcomes practitioners from all walks of life, creating a vibrant tapestry of diversity: men and women, energetic youth to wise elders, those with full and limited

physical abilities, and beginners to experienced practitioners.

As a Bhutanese yoga teacher, I have the privilege of sharing the transformative power of yoga with both our local community and international visitors, weaving together Eastern and Western approaches to mindfulness and well-being.

My studio stands as a testament to Bhutan's embrace of both tradition and modernity, offering a space where all can find peace, healing, and community through the practice of yoga with the incorporation of

meditation, breath work and sound baths in my daily classes.

What is next for you?

There is still so much to explore and discover. I keep finding and reading new and amazing books, on yoga, meditation, and healing. I keep meeting new people, Bhutanese and foreigners, that inspire me and share their experiences and wisdom with me. It makes me want to learn more and do better.

If I had to pick one thing to focus on in the next few years, it would be to pursue a 875-hour yoga therapy course. As an accredited yoga

therapist I would be able to help people address their mental and physical health issues even better.

I feel my journey into the world of well-being has only just begun...

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- Instagram: [yogayangchenbhutan](https://www.instagram.com/yogayangchenbhutan)
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