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Upper Mustang 'on the brink of great change' / Thakurbaba / A Nepali Christmas / The history of hospitality

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Upper Mustang 'on the brink of great change'

Mustang is changing and fast, soon might be the only time to see it like it is, was.

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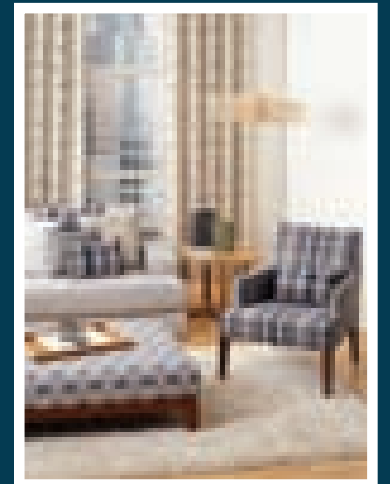
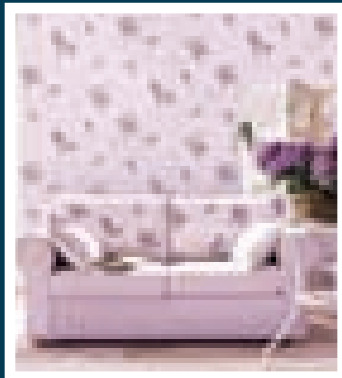
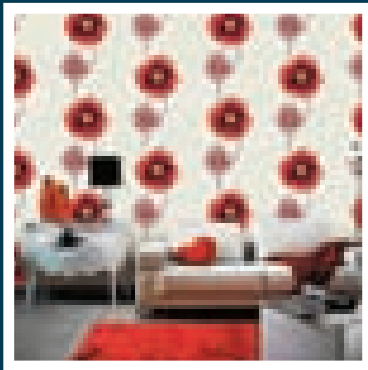
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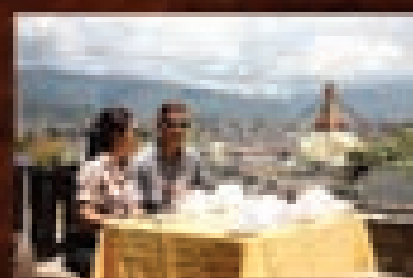
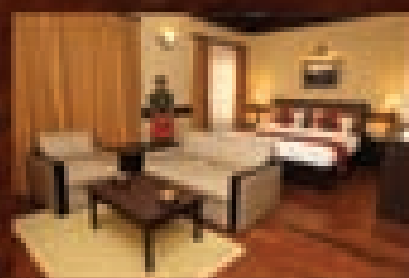
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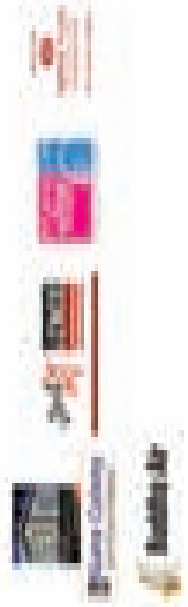
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By Don Messerschmidt

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The cover photo is of old chortens near Ghami.

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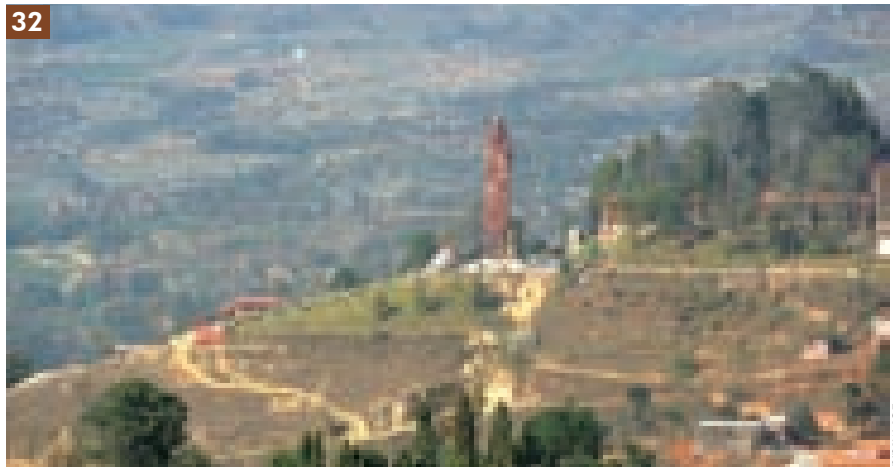
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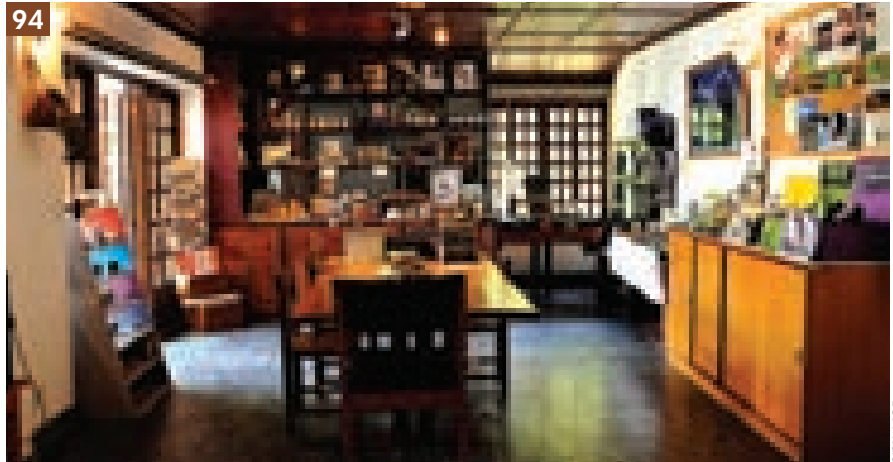
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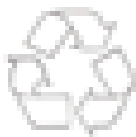


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Photo by Suroj Rana Shakya



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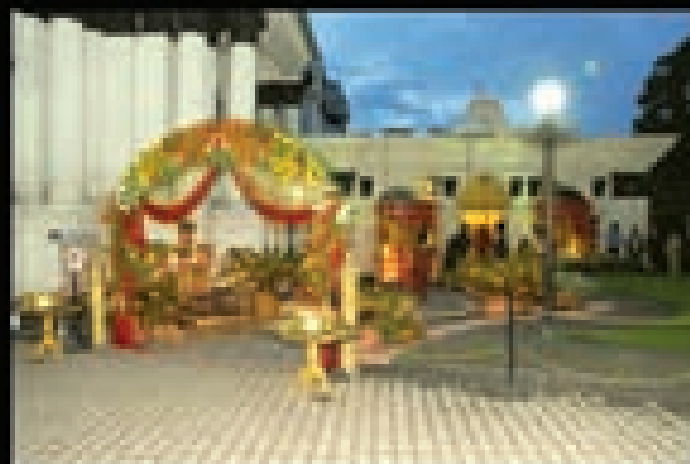
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INCLUSION

There is a growing consensus that a lasting peace in Nepal must ensure that all sides of this diverse country must be included in all aspects of change (for the better). There has been a general tendency to generalize, and this often leads to thoughts, deeds and statements that have hurt the sentiments of one section of society or the other. Along these lines, there is a tendency to think and believe that Nepal consists only of the hills and the plains. The part of Nepal that is beyond the Himalaya is often forgotten. In this issue of ECS we take a really close look at this amazing geography, the people, culture and food. For those who have travelled to the region over the past three decades, some things may come as a shock. For those who have been here all the time, change may simply not be fast enough.

Like all else in Nepal, and the world for that matter, Mustang is also changing. Recently a road that goes from Beni to the Tibet border has helped speed up the rate of this change. While some react to change with fear, others constantly remind us of the opportunities that come with change. To highlight these issues of change here and elsewhere in Nepal, there was an exhibition of photos put together by twelve Nepali photojournalists who told the stories of change through the lives of twelve unique Nepalis. A book was also launched and was timely titled "The Constant Change." It is now available in the market. The effort is really commendable.

The whole of Nepal and definitely some remote valleys have always felt helpless in the face of the perceived notion of being "landlocked". Somehow having access to the sea was a pre-requisite to development. Today roads, airports and more importantly the cell phone have helped break these "mental barriers" down. People are increasingly connected and this increasing connectivity is being

leveraged for trade and other economic activities that is not just helping improve the quality of life, but also putting a lot of new wealth in the hands of people in remote areas of Nepal. This is change. In the "good old days" while people in areas like Mustang only talked of agriculture, livestock and trade, there is a new conversation as the dealership and show room for a motorbike brand has been opened here. Change must be accepted. Change is constant.

In the coming months, the conversation around issues of climate change is going to pick up again here and globally. New York gets snow for Halloween and the Thai capital Bangkok still looks like a water theme park. Mustang has seen hail stones recently - something local people did not even recognize. There is a village in Mustang that has also moved permanently because their fresh water supply dried up. In our previous issue of ECS, we reported on the Great Himalayan Trail (GHT). There is now preparation underway to organize a celebrity trek along the GHT. The idea is to put this trail on the world map. The campaign will also look at how the communities that lie on the trail and near to it can become "climate change smart".

Once again we are confident you will enjoy this issue of ECS; and in the month ahead, whatever you do, please take time out for **the Nepali way**.

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EVENT

Ama Ghar Inauguration



On the foothills of Godavari, the laughter of happy children echoed against the valley walls. Ama Ghar was affluent with people. Kids and guest gathered around the front of the house, watching a variety of performance from the kids. Future dancers, bands, and singers all took to the stage and entertained the guests while others were scattered over the grounds, at tents with art supplies, swings, and various other treats. At the announcement of a comical musical number, the children came running towards the stage and lodged themselves on the ground. The joy was apparent in the smiles on their painted faces.

Although the children have been living here since 2010, this was the

Ghar's official house warming. The kids of Ama Ghar actually pitched in the construction of the house; they helped paint the walls and decorate the rooms, and in landscaping. And a great achievement, their new home is spacious, accommodating and well-equipped.

At the end of the performances, Shrawan Nepali, founder of the orphanage, talked about the building and its eco-efficient amenities. From solar water heaters to composting and sustainable cooking, the school fits in perfectly among the green hills. Finally, guests were welcomed inside the house, for a chance to look around and have lunch. (Nischal Oli)

Australian Big Day Out

Wine stalls, a stall from Cookie Man offering freshly baked varieties of cookies and muffins, booths offering information on Australian colleges and traveling in Australia, barbecue stations and a stage occupied by musicians, a little abseiling sport going on in one corner - the Australian Big Day Out was an eventful affair.

Supported by the Australian Embassy, Australian Big Day Out 2011 aimed to give exposure to various aspects of Australia. Jacob's Creek and Mark Davidson wines were two of the wine stalls exhibiting at the venue. "Australian wine is popular worldwide for its quality and reasonable price. The government of Australia has a strict quality control policy," shared Arjun Bhandari, marketing director for Mark Davidson Wines at the event.



Think Group Education, Australian Catholic University and William Blue College of Hospitality were some colleges present at the event. There were also short videos shown about these colleges to give the visiting students more information.

Jimi Hocking's Blue Machine from Melbourne and an Aussie rock tribute band of local artists presented musical acts that had the crowd going with good Australian music.

Driving around the world

Prashansa International Pvt. Ltd. in Putalisadak provides International Driver's License to native driving license holders. The International Driver's License (IDL) is a translation of a national driver's license which helps the license holder to drive in different countries without any difficulty.

The IDL is essentially a plastic card that resembles the format of a driver's license, along with a booklet carrying English data numbered with a foreign language translation adjacent to it for easier comparison and understanding. To avoid forgery, a Security Shield Hologram is stamped on each card. The IDL is printed in 8 different languages including English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Chinese, German and Japanese.

No official test is required to issue an IDL. The organization requires one's passport, national driving license, two passport size pictures and a witness to issue this driver's license. However, the original valid driver's license should always be carried along with one's IDL while traveling abroad since the IDL is simply a translation of the original license. (Nimma Adhikari)

Peak interests

The 9th installment of the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) kicks off this December with a selection of movies in both the competitive and non-competitive sections. More than 200 entries were received from a number of countries, of which 38 will be screened, 17 vying for the awards and 21 in the non-competitive category. Six movies by Nepali directors have been chosen for the Nepali Panorama category. All these movies will be open for the Audience Award. Two special selections have been added this year, one featuring six Finnish short films from the Tampere Film Festival, the other commemorating Nepal Tourism Year 2011. The organizers have added eight movies that highlight Nepal in the international arena.

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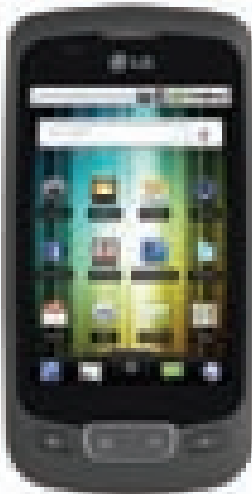
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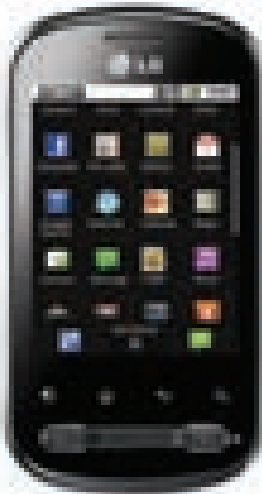
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Beetle Rally to Peshawar takes off



Kanak Mani Dixit's effort to raise funds for the treatment and rehabilitation of victims of spinal injuries kick started today with his Spinal Beetle Rally. With the sky blue Volkswagen Beetle, Dixit and his family took off on an 1100-mile journey to Peshawar in Pakistan from Sheetal Niwas, Kathmandu. The route will take the Dixits through Lucknow, Delhi, Lahore, Amristar and Rawalpindi.

President Dr. Ram Baran Yadav saw off the Beetle rally. The effort hopes to raise USD 100 for every mile it travels in an effort to raise funds for Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Center Nepal. Accompanying Dixit on the long and arduous rally are his wife Shanta Dixit and son Eelum Dixit. The rally also hopes to raise awareness about the prevention of spinal injuries as well as rescue, care and rehabilitation of the victims.

The Constant Change

Nepal is changing. What this means for Nepalis cannot be expressed in statistics or words on paper. To appropriately measure this change, 12 photographers made equal feats bringing their struggle to the visual dimension. Anil Chitrakar, who contributed the introduction to the book "The Constant Change", spoke about the three words that were important to the Nepali future. "Change, inclusion and diversity," he said will define Nepal in the coming years. Doing the honors, Danish Ambassador to Nepal, Morten Jaspersen, launched the book and opened the exhibition to the eager audience.

Mentored by award-winning photographer Mads Nissen from the Danish School of Media and Journalism, the exhibition comprised of the work of a large number of storytellers. Each series of photographs had a particular subject matter. Transportation, construction, LGBT rights, and women rights were among the 12 subject matters presented. Some of the stories focused on a protagonist, whose life and challenges in modern Nepal were explored; others were a medley of images marking the advent of change and rapid development that's gripping the country. Along with the photographers, some of their subjects were also present at the event.

Cake mixing at the Radisson

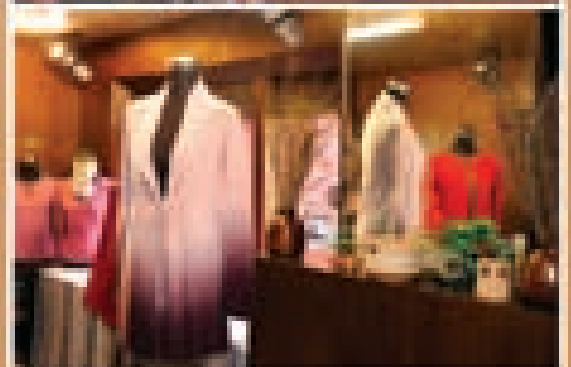
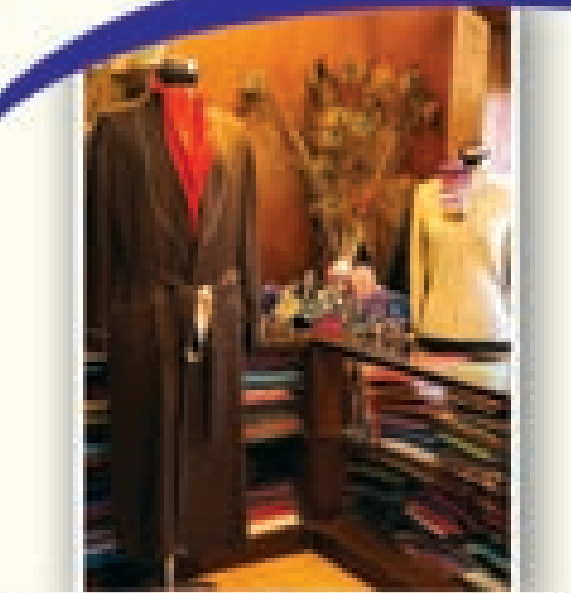
Sixth grade students from the British school took part in a cake-mixing event accompanied by the staff of Radisson inside the Waterfall Garden at Hotel Radisson.

According to Executive Chef Sreejith Kartha, fruits and nuts are mixed and soaked in alcohol for 40 days. Kartha also announced that 14 November marks Children's Day in his homeland, India. He interacted with the children by asking them various questions about the preparation of Christmas cakes.

Aprons and hats were distributed to the children after which they were divided into groups to mix fruits and nuts. After



the mixing, each student was given a muffin to decorate with various edible colors out of which two were chosen as the best. Winners Khushi Pandey and Yash Agrawal were awarded with a fruitcake each. The event is an annual one at the Radisson.



Celebrating 25 years of infusing wisdom

A seminar was held on November 11 at the Goodwill Hotel, Lalitpur to mark the Silver Jubilee of the International Bhikkhu Training Foundation (IBTF). The seminar also focused on the building of the proposed International Monastic Buddhist College within the premises of Sri Sumangal Vihara, Lukusi Tole-6, Lalitpur.

IBTF was established in 1985 by Venerable Bhikkhu Pannaloka of Nepal in Colombo, Sri Lanka. One of its many objectives was to promote strong bonds of friendship and brotherhood among Buddhist countries. Likewise, the college to be established in

Nepal is designed to help promote the Dharma mission in spreading Buddha's teachings for peace, harmony and happiness in the world.

Though Nepal is the center of diffusion of Buddhism, the monastic education and trainings for monks and nuns in Nepal are not well organized. Hence, the college shall aim at stimulating Buddhism in Nepal since Nepal lacks such kind of facility. Further, as discussed in the seminar, the design of the proposed building shall reflect the traditional art and culture of Nepal. (Nimma Adhikari)

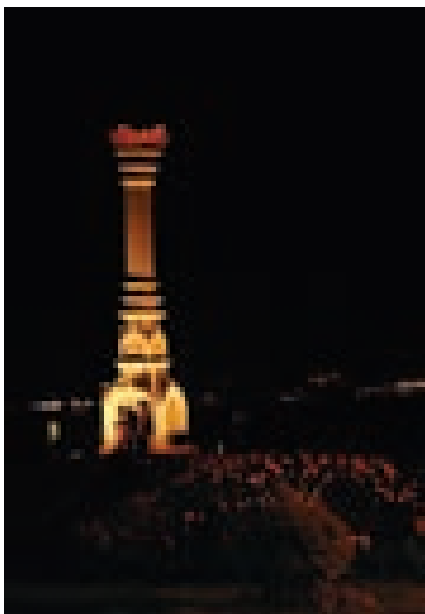
Nepal Sambat 1132

Organized by the Patan Durbar Square community on the occasion of New Nepal Sambat 1132, the candle walk was a peace rally that went through the ancient alleyways of Patan. Aiming at reflecting the rich culture and history of the valley, the rally was initiated by the Rotaract Club of Lalitpur with support from Nepal Bhasa Manka Khala Yala.

This year's candle walk was the sixth since Nepal Sambat 1125 and promoted the theme of "Youth for Culture:

Preservation and Promotion". The event showcased the talents of the local youth and featured special guests like Rohan Bajracharya, President of Rotaract Club of Lalitpur, Kiran Shakya, President of Nepal Bhasa Manka Khala Yala, and Kiran Shakya and Mangal Maharjan, among others. The rally went through main Patan areas like Ha: Kha, Sundhara, Okubahal, Chakrabahil, Tichu Gali, Khwalku, Kumbeshwor, Swontha, ending at Patan Durbar Square.

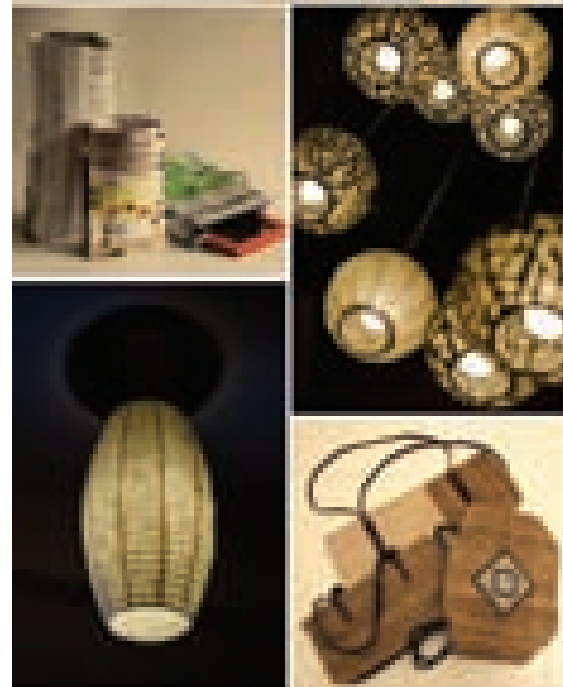
Children's Memorial Peace Park



Russian Ambassador Dr. Sergey V. Velichkin and Hanaa Singer of UNICEF remembered the deceased children of the Maoist movement at the opening of the Children's Memorial Peace Park in Sinamangal. World Peace Propagation

Forum, in association with Siddhartha Art Gallery, opened the Children's Memorial Park. Next to billboards and busy streets of the cold evening, the speakers talked over the loud generator and the chilly winds. In most conflicts engendered by adults, children find themselves stuck in the crossfire; this sentiment was brought home by the moving speeches delivered by the speakers.

Lead by traditional Nepali music, guest of honor Velichkin and Singer unveiled the inscription of more than 300 names of children who were killed during the decade-long conflict. WPPF, that struggled to acquire the land for purpose of building the park, also launched a national monthly Pratham Paila on the occasion. The first issue of the magazine documents the effort of the forum in creating the wonderful space. Speakers also offered their gratitude to musicians in attendance, many of whom had helped compile an album, gratis, to help the cause.



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what's on

things to do this month

Walking the Red Carpet

Date: 2 December (Friday)
Time: 6 pm onwards
Venue: The Tantra, Chhetrapati
4218565, facebook.com/mstellaevents

MStella Events is rolling out the red carpet at The Tantra to make you feel special like a celebrity whose wants and needs are tended to by a host of people. The event will seem like your personal PR event; you dress to impress and the photographers won't stop clicking away. Organizers are also offering prizes for the best dressed amongst the crowd, and have disclosed possible surprises for the night. Second runner-up of the War of DJ's 2011, DJ Pujan and the young DJ Pranez will be spinning tracks at the event. Ticket: Rs. 300 for advance purchase, Rs. 500 at the door including a drink

MUSIC AND PARTIES

Keep Calm and Party On

Date: 26 November (Saturday)
Time: 3 pm onwards

Venue: Cube, Kamaladi
4438017, info@cubeclub.com

When winter starts, things get gloomy. Cold weather often suppresses the party mentality. To turn things around, Cube the club thinks you should party and not worry. The club is warming up the dance floor, so you never feel the winter chill. Great music, models and celebrities will be there, with TV channels covering the event. Get cozy with your drinks and break a sweat on the floor. Ticket: Rs. 399

MISCELLANEOUS

Etegami

Date: 25 November (Friday)
Time: 10 am to 3 pm

Venue: Cosmopolitan Training Center, Jhamsikhel
016217752, ctcnepal@gmail.com

Etegami in Japanese means picture-letter; a drawing with a short message. Subjects of the drawing are usually everyday things, embellished with a

short message that can be anything from a word to a short poem. Cosmopolitan Training Center will carry out a workshop on making Etegamis, using the changing weather as the thematic inspiration. Participants will be taught about Japanese brush-stroke methods, and how to personalize an Etegami. Etegamis are usually made on post-cards, so it will be a rewarding lesson ahead of the holiday season, when you send out greeting cards to families and friends. Fee: Rs. 800

Celebration Night

Date: 9 December (Friday)
Time: 7 pm onwards

Venue: Topsy Lounge, Durbar Marg
4243225a

It's nice to plan things in advance, especially the end of the weeks. Friday is on its own league, for that purpose of celebrating the conclusion of another week, looking forward to the impending weekend. Join the party at Dubar Marg, and head to the dance floor to keep warm with the grooving bodies. Ticket: Rs. 500

Party at Iclub

Date: 31 December (Saturday)
Time: 12 pm

Venue: Iclub, Durbar Marg
9803926173, 9803926173

As we come closer to the end of 2011, parties start piling up. Planet Nepal knows it's all about celebration, bidding farewell to another year of experience and memories. Dance away the dates. Best couples and singles will be awarded with special gift hampers while Dj Nazy raises the decibel value to lift your senses.

Ticket: Rs. 800 including a beer,
Rs. 500 excluding the drink

FAIR AND EXPO

Family Fair

Date: 10 December (Saturday)

Time: 12 pm onwards

Venue: Hotel Malla, Thamel
4418385, 4410320, 4410966

The Family Fair is a family event packed with activities, a first for the accommodating Hotel Malla. There will be competitions, magic shows, and face painting; to top that cuteness, Shirley Bredal Kathmandu will showcase their collection. Parents looking to spend some time with their kids will definitely admire the setting and the event.

Wedding and Gift Expo

Opening Date: 12 January (Thursday)
Closing Date: 15 January (Saturday)
Time: 11 am - 6 pm

Venue: Bhrikuti Mandap Hall, Exhibition road
4117104

If you or someone you know is planning to tie the knot in 2012, this should be their first stop for everything wedding. For six years, the Wedding and Gift Expo has been catering to the increasing need for one-stop wedding solutions. With more than 60 exhibitors of wedding services and products, the event attracts a huge number of visitors each year.

Nepali Folk Music Film Festival

Opening Date: 25 November (Friday)
Closing Date: 27 November (Sunday)

Venue: To be announced
4242741

The first of its kind, the festival is a nonprofit venture which will donate all proceeds to preserving and documenting Nepali musical heritage. Organized by the Music Museum of Nepal, the selection for screening has been made by an international jury of filmmakers, musicians and academics and approved by the Nepal Board of Film Censors. Both English and Nepali movies will be shown, of which the best entries will be awarded. There is a special category for entries submitted by students. In addition, traditional instruments will be exhibited.

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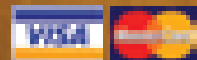
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Kailashnath Mahadev

The ever-radiant and tallest statue of the imperishable Lord Shiva.

Text & Photo By PRIANKA RAUNIAR

A backdrop of lush green and high up on a hill top, stands the tallest Shiva sculpture in the world. The setting seems perfect to suggest that the grand master of the universe was looking upon the valley from his humble abode in Mount Kailash. Oft known as the Land of Pashupatinath and thronged by devotees throughout the year, Nepal has been a pilgrimage for Shaivites from all around

the world. This colossal 143 ft figure, 25 kms east of Kathmandu in Sanga, adds to the list of “places to visit” for most followers.

Terraced paddy fields along the neighboring yet distant hills and the wind gushing in your face makes for a pleasant and smooth drive. A hill away from the actual statue, it looks like a shiny iconic image in the middle of nowhere. As you walk up the stairs, you can feel the statue grow on you.

The giant *trishul* seems to pierce the sky and the self-manifested three-eyed lord adorned with a *ardha-chandra* (half moon) on his “*jatta*” (long knotted hair), wrapped with a huge snake around his neck holding his *damaru* and *kamandal* speaks volumes about the power Shiva commands. However, one look at the profound loving eyes calmed me and I realized it isn't without reason that Shiva is known as the preceptor and protector of all. Alongside this massive sculpture are smaller pieces of Parvati, Ganesha and Kartik perched on a pedestal on one side and Shiva's gate keeper, Nandi - the bull on the other, captured in all its splendor by artists brought down from India by Mr. Kamal Jain.

The owner of Hilltake in Nepal, Mr. Jain was inspired to establish this statue by looking at a similar one on the Delhi-Jaipur highway in India. The day he visited and paid his respects there, he dwelled on it all night and saw himself building it in his dream as well. Planning and finding a suitable land that would overlook the city and be a picturesque location, he decided on Kailashpuri motivated purely by his religious inclination as a staunch devotee of Lord Shiva. In more recent times, to promote and maintain the property, without marring the sanctity of this enclosure, he's built a nature care treatment center behind the structure which serves as a get-away offering yoga, spa, colon-cleansing and various other therapies to relax your senses. It's got something for everyone says Mr. Kamal - a children's park, swimming pool for the young and doctors for complete check-up along with a meditation center for the old. It's a weekend getaway and helps build tourism for the area to benefit he claims.

Caught amid critics, to charge a fee for entrance or not, Mr. Jain's decided to scrap the fee but entrance to the park still stands at Rs. 100. However, the seating around the statue is open to all. It's no wonder then that it attracts a footfall of 8000 to 10,000 visitors on weekends and public holidays which runs into lakhs on *Shivaratri* and other religious festivals. Last new year, there were a whopping 1.5 lakh visitors and this number is only increasing! Enamored by the sheer size of Lord Shiva or for religious reasons or just to enjoy the view from up here, a trip to Kailashnath Mahadev is becoming the next hot-spot in Kathmandu's varied landscape. ■



The Timboor Trail

Rediscovering Timboor in its truest form

Text By PANU LUCKSOM

The half an hour flight to Lukla seemed like ages, as I tried to hold on to dear life. I was on the verge of surrendering myself to the Almighty when the short ‘ting’ calmed me down a bit; the red ‘fasten seat belt’ sound always seem to have that calming effect on me. We were about to land at one of the world’s most dangerous airports - Lukla Airport in Solukhumbu. As I looked down from the window, I could see the tiny landing strip below and the plane seemed rather unbalanced and shaky as it tossed and turned aggressively. Were we going to make it to Lukla, or were we going to make headlines? I wondered, as the plane dropped altitude.

Lukla seemed a strange place compared to the numerous treks I have done in and around Pokhara and Annapurna, particularly the altitude; it just hits you the moment you get off the plane. After a quick approbation of the surrounding black hills, I traced my way to a small teahouse owned by an old acquaintance where I had to drop off a very important letter. As I was coming out, I noticed she had a plate of hot roasted potatoes in one hand and some rough grounded powder in the other. She offered me a potato and I gladly picked one and dipped it in the powder as she commented that “Its *timboor*”. I knew what it was and I sumptuously swallowed it. It felt so different unlike the tastes I had known earlier. It



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It felt so different unlike the tastes I had known earlier. It had a particular sting that madly numbed my tongue -but it was a good sting.

had a particular sting that madly numbed my tongue -but it was a good sting.

I felt warm within seconds, which helped me get on with my journey down a dusty-stony path filled with trekkers, porters, villagers and not to forget the Dzopkyo trains. It was the last phase of spring and many teahouse owners were migrating to Kathmandu because monsoon was fast approaching. Amidst the busy human traffic along the trail, I noticed endless lines of bushes along the edges, its leaves thick and spiny. People hardly seemed to notice the bright red berries that decorated the bushes like a Christmas tree.

It was dusk and I found myself amongst unfamiliar faces of weary hungry travelers huddled closely to the kitchen fire while the lodge owner’s wife was busy preparing dinner. “You serve food here, don’t you?” – was my prompt question. Everyone looked at me as if I had uttered a forbidden word? – “Its monsoon, and we are closed, but we have potatoes if you want,” she replied. She

brought me a plate of potatoes with timboor and it seemed like I could eat a dozen. “We have lots of these growing around, goes well with the potatoes,” said the owner’s wife. We mostly prepare timboor achar at home grinded finely with boiled tomatoes and chilies but this one was different and sharp, “very sharp” I said. “Well, it’s good for you travelers, you won’t get mountain sickness,” she added. I had never heard of that one before and politely nodded in acknowledgment. She quickly came over and vigorously dropped a handful of powder on my plate. I survived the cold nasty night.

I reached Dole after two days and my mouth was still numb but it wasn’t all bad. It was enlightening for me to rediscover timboor in its truest form. I returned home a bit wiser and while it still happens to be one of my favorites, I have kept myself away from it for quite some time after that maiden voyage to Lukla. ■

Timboor Effect

1. Keeps you warm in sub-zero temperature.
2. It acts like an aspirin and helps relieve headache.
3. Bush is so spiny, it keeps the cattle’s away from the fields, so the farmers/villagers plant it along the edges of their fields.



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A bond of a lifetime

Friends promise on being with each other forever. What if they do?

Text By ANUBHUTI POUDYAL

In an age when making a friend is just a click away, when you can “follow” another person with an online name and an internet connection, a lifelong bond of friendship seems redundant. However, the trend of creating a kind of spiritual kinship, commonly known in Nepal as *Mit Laume* is not unheard of. The idea was popular in the past; even king Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha and the crown prince of Bhaktapur were bonded by this custom. The popularity and more importantly the significance of this trend today however, is something worth discussing.

Two prospective spiritual brothers/sisters or *mits* are chosen mostly by the family members. Usually, these two are friends who are intended to be bonded by a relation much stronger. So in the presence of a priest and family members, these two are bonded together by a process that differs for different cultures. There are however, practices like exchange of gifts between these two during the ceremony and the much popular practice that everyone associates with this custom – a slow striking of one person’s head with the other’s. The ceremony itself is a short procedure but what follows is a lifetime of

The spiritual brothers or sisters are to address each other by adding a term of respect, such as *ji*, and it is expected that that each will involve the other in all big and small family functions and festivals.

friendship that goes beyond just these two and binds the families and friends of each other.

Subash Rijal and Paras Adhikari have been bounded for years now. “I have had him as my *Mit jyu* for about 25 years now. We were young when our families decided to bind us together this way. I do not remember much of the ceremony but after that day I have always had him around,” shares Paras adding, “It isn’t just a union of two people. Our families are close too. We celebrate *Bhai Tika* together and my sister puts *tika* on both of us. In a way, we are family. We celebrate Dashain together too by putting *tika* on each other.”

In some cases, even grandchildren of the spiritual brothers and sisters celebrate cultural and religious festivals together. While it is an obligation that the two spiritual brothers or sisters invite each other in all the functions of the house, there are instances that demonstrate how the bond compares to a blood relation.

There are some guidelines. The spiritual brothers or sisters are to address each other by adding a term of respect, such as *ji*, and it is expected that that each will involve the other in all big and small family functions and festivals.

In a time where social network has made friendship so easy and convenient, the importance of such a trend might be questioned. However, this traditional practice has been in our society for a



In the older days, a studio photo followed the ritual

long time now and there are reasons. One is that, the bond is for life, which gives an individual a person he can rely on for forever. Second, it is not just a union between two people of two families. There are instances where the grandchildren of spiritual brothers/sisters participate in cultural and religious festivals of each other. Therefore, it is a union of two families and societies. Marriage is a strong bond that unites two families; *mit laume* might be a weaker bond but is definitely worth considering.

Mit laume might slowly be losing its importance in our society but one must understand the possible reasons of starting the tradition at the first place. It could be considered to be one of the first social networking trends in our society and a really strong one at that for it has been carried out over centuries. ■



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A big, fat, Newari Nakhatya

A Newar get together follows every major Kathmandu festival, bringing together extended families for a gala time.

Text By UTSAV SHAKYA

Every Nepali autumn, during and for the festivals of Dashain and Tihar, thousands of Nepalis leave Kathmandu valley to celebrate with their families. This is because besides Kathmandu's native Newars, the capital's burgeoning population comprises Nepalis from cities, towns and villages spread over the country's mountains, hills and plains. Result: this temporary, seasonal migration, transforms Kathmandu into a different place. The chaos of Kathmandu's traffic dies down significantly and delighted children descend on to the streets with their cricket bats, badminton rackets and footballs. What I know and most people don't seem to is that there

is a price to pay for this peace and quiet and that I pay this price. Because you see, the chaos doesn't just vanish into thin air or seep down through the many cracks in the city's roads. Alarmingly, it pulls off an amazing Houdini act from the streets to reappear magically in my home. Introducing the *Nakhatya* - the loud, crowded and chaotic Newar family get-together.

In olden days and as is still the case, a *Nakhatya* would follow any major festival in the Kathmandu valley. Anyone familiar to the generous sprinkling of festivals on the Nepali calendar will agree that this makes up for many get-togethers. Take the chariot festival of Rato Matsyendranath as an example. During this

festival, each community in the valley has its own *obhwela bu*, *naika luigu*, *bhujya* and *yaka bhujya* rituals when the chariot reaches their locality. The 'bhujya' ritual of the festival is celebrated after the 'naika luigu' ritual; the former marks the arrival of the chariot into their neighborhood and is celebrated with family gatherings and feasts. As the chariot makes its round, the get-togethers (read: feasts) follow.

Gai Jatra, Ghode Jatra, Indira Jatra, Bisket Jatra; the list goes on and on. The mother of all festivals and hence of all get-togethers is the Dashain *Nakhatya*. My modest bungalow for ten bulges at its sides, it's pillars and walls creaking and sighing to accommodate about seventy relatives of all ages and distinct characteristics. As I struggle to remember the names of young children that I struggled to remember the names of the previous year, the older aunts and uncles struggle with my own. Preparations will have started days in advance for the feast. Newar feasts are popular for their lavishness and variety, with an array of succulent meat dishes, vegetable curries, spicy homemade pickles and sweets on offer. No Newar feast would be complete without a healthy dose of home brewed liquor or *thbwon*. As the level in the jerry can falls, the cacophony rises. The merriment to a passing stranger would probably sound like full on verbal sparring but loud voices and louder laughter seems to run in Newar bloodlines.

The noise and celebratory mood penetrate and permeate everything in its wake - the furniture, the curtains, the primer on the walls and even the people. Later, at the end of the night, (and the end of the festive season), there's an empty ring in the air, from perforations left behind by the chaos, as it retraces its locus to find its way back into Kathmandu's streets. ■

Anyone familiar to the generous sprinkling of festivals on the Nepali calendar will agree that this makes up for many get-togethers.



A traditional Newari feast is the main event at a *Nakhatya*



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A thousand words

Popular cartoonist Rabin Sayami says a lot and then some with his satirical sketches

Text & Photo By PAT KAUBA

Soft spoken and calmly humorous, followed by a satirical smile, is one way to describe Rabin Shayami in under ten words.

Now, who is he? Rabin Sayami without a hint of an ego calls himself amongst the first generation of professional Nepali newspaper cartoonists. You know, the ones who make sharp stabs at the day's events, using the power of satire and cartoon sketching—a politician's slip-up, war, disaster and many happy events too.

Rabin's journey began at the early age of 16 with the Newari digest *Sabalaber*, making non-political cartoons. After completing his S.L.C from the British Council, he studied science. Surprise, he didn't enjoy it and soon dropped out. A worried father asked him what will you do now? And took him to a mechanic friend, to learn a trade. Again surprise, the artist was not in love with that trade either. Once more a worried father asked what will you do? I will live by my cartoons; his father was not so convinced. At 19, Rabin published his first satirical and political cartoon with *Dristi*, a weekly paper, receiving the un-handsome sum of 300 rupees. His work was so warmly accepted that by his third published piece, he was commanding 1,000 rupees! Soon, his father's tone warmed, becoming "very proud" of his son.

Sitting with Rabin becomes a small education in the history of Nepal's publishing world. His time started in 1990, just as Nepal's old system of governance: the *Panchayat* System, was being replaced by a democratic one. With that the freedom of press and expression was being allowed. Before that, nobody could question the monarchy, so there was definitely no such thing as satirical cartoons. Except, recalls Rabin with great humour, during the festival of *Gai Jatra* (Cow Festival) which celebrates the lives of the deceased humour, could those images be published.



Rabin finds himself asked often about where the new generation of cartoon artists are? He wonders this himself too.

Rabin tells how in the days before technology his cartoons used to be made on a zinc block the day before printing began and those plates needed a day to dry in the sun. And, if there was no sun, which is common in rainy season, then his cartoon would not be printed!

Rabin finds himself asked often about where the new generation of cartoon artists are? He wonders this himself too. He declares that in India, you can find many artists, yet here the next generation is sparse. Rabin can only surmise that it is not easy to find people who can both sketch and think. There seems to be a lack of people who can punch a thought home within the confines of a sketch within a short time.

Rabin finds working at home more productive than in an office. So after his meals, he retreats to his studio with

the day's newspaper to search for ideas. Once he finds one, he spends time enhancing it, only then does the sketching begin, followed by the filling in. This can take an entire day.

This artist does not believe it ever possible to change his job, he feels like he could not survive without this work in his life. It seems like he has no good reason too, with work aplenty from agencies such as the Red Cross, UNICEF and Save the Children, looking for his special touch, as well as demands from publications.

As he is now expecting his first child, I ask would he be happy for him or her to become a cartoon artist? Rabin Sayami smiles his satirical smile and says his child would receive every support. ■

Pat Kauba is a freelance writer and photographer with a love for the humorous. You can contact him at patkauba@gmail.com.



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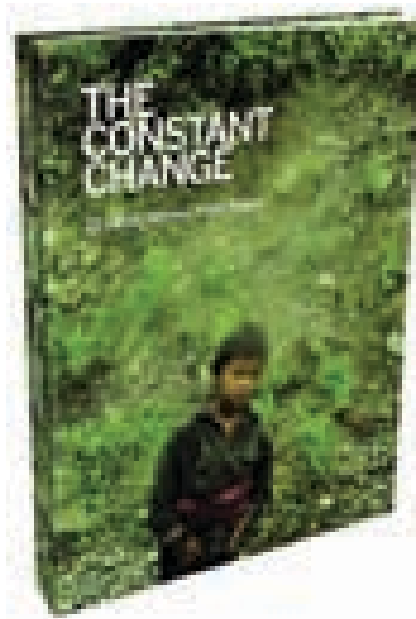
Change, Inclusion and Diversity

A REVIEW OF THE CONSTANT CHANGE: 12 PHOTO STORIES FROM NEPAL

Text By ANIL CHITRAKAR

The only thing that is certain is change. We all know this and yet we pretend to be in control of everything, all the time. It is an illusion. When the most profitable trade routes passed through Kathmandu, the Newar traders were rich. When we relied on rock salt from Tibet, the Thak Khola area prospered. When the trade moved to the sea and we began to use sea salt, only those who were willing to change continued to prosper. When the Araniko and Prithivi Highways were built, the value of property in Bhaktapur and Bandipur took a turn for the worse; people left for greener pastures. When both these towns were restored and domestic and international tourism increased, both of these destinations became the most livable places in Nepal. The stories and images in this book tell us the wonderful story of change such as this.

Peace is often defined as the absence of conflict. But we all know that peace is much more than this. If we go back to the days before the armed conflict began, we will recall that there was huge disparity among people and exclusion of certain sections of Nepali society. Some were excluded by a lack of infrastructure, yet



others because of their sexual orientation. A widow was a widow because of something she “must have done” in her previous life, etc. The peace that we seek for Nepal is a synonym for inclusion – an open society where each and every person can live in dignity and pursue happiness and prosperity. We do not want to go back to any conflict, let alone an armed one. This book is a story of Nepal’s journey towards inclusion.

Nature has bestowed Nepal with amazing wealth in the form of the Himalayas, lush green hills, thousands of rivers and the breadbasket – the Terai. From the highest point on earth to the birth place of the Buddha; from the home of the tiger, rhino and the elephant to the deepest valleys in the world, Nepal has it all. This diversity is matched by an incredible diversity of cultures, each with their own traditional knowledge, handed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. This diversity is the greatest asset of the 26.6 million Nepalis in creating a peaceful and prosperous country; Nepal and Nepalis are “more than the sum of their parts”. This book is a story of these gifted people and their land.

As you go through this book, allow your mind to open up, let your imagination run free. Do not limit your imagination to what Nepal is, but focus on what it can be. ■

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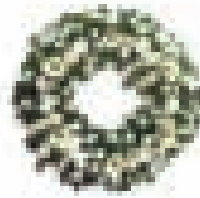
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Heartfelt Condolence



Park Young Seok

Date of Birth : 02/11/1963



Shin Dong Min

Date of Birth : 13/05/1974



Kang Ki Seok

Date of Birth : 10/05/1978

We express our heartfelt condolences to Korean mountaineers,

Park Young Seok, Shin Dong Min and Kang Ki Seok who met with an unfortunate accident while journeying on the trails of Annapurna (8091 meters).

The climbers had radioed reporting their retreat from 6400 meters when heavy snowfall had increased avalanche risk. This, on the 18th of October 2011, was their last contact.

The loss has been tremendously crushing. We ask almighty God to give their grief-stricken families enough strength to pull through this hurtful hour of need.

We shall remember that these mountaineers had always enjoyed Nepal at its heights. Now their engulfing courage and astute swiftness have been forever foot-marked in the deeps of our Himalayas. May these valiant sons of the mountains, rest in peace.



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Upper Mustang, 'on the brink of great change'

Text & Photos By DON MESSERSCHMIDT

Wild, windy and harsh, yet stunningly beautiful.

(A description of Lo Manthang, at
Buddhisttravel.com)



Niligiri and Annapurna-I from the upper Mustang trail



Photo by Cornelia Buchner

It was a chance to see trans-Himalayan region of upper Mustang, the isolated Kingdom of Lo, and the ancient walled city of Manthang, before the region suffers irreversible change. Lo is home to the last vestiges of traditional Tibetan culture: old villages, medieval forts, monasteries, Buddhist art, relics, sacred caves, and more. But not for long.

A HALF-CENTURY OLD GOAL

It's been my goal since the 1960s to trek to Lo, upper Mustang. I've been to nearby Muktinath shrine many times, and I once peered into upper Mustang from the 13,000 foot ridge straight up west above Kagbeni. But no further.

In 2010 I decided that since I wasn't getting any younger, and was physically fit, it was time. So I recruited 12 trekkers to join me and early in October 2011 we flew to the Mustang District airport at Jomsom (8,900 ft.), ready to go to Lo. Our Nepali team was also ready: guide Santosh Sherchan, his assistant Pasang, two wranglers (for the three ponies we hired for the slowest of us to ride as needed), and a muleteer with seven mules (for our duffel).

After breakfast at Om's Home Hotel, Jomsom, we set out. Day 1: up the Kali Gandaki river to Kagbeni where the upper Mustang trail officially begins. That three hour stroll is deceptively easy, but don't be fooled—the trail to Lo is not for wimps. We did it up and back in 10 days, crossing 11 high passes (three over 13,000 feet), without incident or accident. At times, though, it did seem “harsh.”

KAGBENI, IN WIND AND DUST

Kagbeni (9,220 ft.) sits strategically at the sacred confluence (*beni*) of the Jhong and the Kali Gandaki rivers, and at the junction of four trade routes. Centuries ago, the king of Kag earned his keep by taxing the trade to/from Manthang and Tibet (north), and lower Mustang (south), Muktinath (east), and Dolpa (west). Clever fellow. ▶

Because Kagbeni is located at a very narrow point on the river, stiff winds and dust storms blow through like fury each afternoon.

Because Kagbeni is located at a narrow point on the river, stiff winds and dust storms blow through like fury each afternoon, wildly twisting and snapping the prayer flags on every rooftop. Only the great red *gompa* (Buddhist monastery) on a bluff in the old part of town stands firm, impervious to the gales. In recent years, this windblown old traders' town has become a popular destination for trekkers and a major stop on the east-west Great Himalaya Trail.

There are a dozen hotels to choose from (Niligiri, Annapurna, Everest, Dhaulagiri and others), an Oasis Restaurant and Bar, the cleverly named 'YacDonald's Cyber Café', and an 'Illy' brand Italian gourmet coffee shop. My choice was the legendary old Red House Lodge. When I first stayed there in 1964 it was

a private home and I remember a lot of well-armed Tibetan Khampa 'Freedom Fighters' hanging around. Now it's a commercial lodge, but because it was too small for our group we had to settle for the Paradise-Trekker Home (neither heavenly nor homely, and no Khampas).

In trekking season Kagbeni is abuzz with foreigners. And during Hindu festivals it fills up with hundreds of pilgrims enroute to the shrine at Muktinath, over 3,000 feet higher, east, up the Jhong river. Before going up valley, however, they perform special rituals at Kagbeni in memory of deceased kinfolk, including a dip in the frigid waters at the *beni*. We didn't.

Day 2: we got an early start to get as far as possible ahead of the wind. While walking through old Kagbeni we

were confronted by the town's two mute guardians—a crude, sexually explicit figure of a naked woman at the south entrance and a tall male image, prominently tumescent, at the north.

Upper Mustang is a restricted area for sensitive cultural and environmental reasons. It's only been open to group treks since 1992. Permits (pre-paid in Kathmandu) cost \$500 each for a 10-day trek. Santosh registered us at the Kagbeni checkpoint as we passed out of town.

CHHUSANG AND CHELE

For awhile we followed the jeep track across a barren rocky landscape. On a high mesa before Tangbe we passed a Chinese-funded organic farm and a small tea shop, then continued on to Chhusang for lunch.

Out on the river flats between Jomsom and Kagbeni and north of Chhusang we looked for *saligrams*, the 165 million year old black ammonite fossils that are ardently sought by devout Hindus who worship them as representations of Lord Vishnu. Ammonites are fossilized cephalopods, a type of coiled mollusk that once lived in the warm shallow Tethys sea separating prehistoric Gondwanaland (India) from Laurasia (Tibet). *Saligrams* show up in the high mountains and along the river bed as a result of plate tectonics. As the two super continents slowly collided, the sea bed rose up to form the Himalayas. They are still rising, but at an imperceptible rate.

Beyond Chhusang the Kali Gandaki discharges dramatically out of a natural red rock tunnel. After crossing to the west bank on a metal footbridge we climbed directly uphill to Chele, our night stop.

The topography here is dominated by a vertical escarpment of conglomerate geology. We were impressed throughout our trek by the twisted folds of steep, heavily eroded arroyos, and sandstone cliffs, many with caves cut into them. The wild arid landscape is also dotted with religious monuments (*chortens*) and ▶

Kagbeni fields and North Niligiri Peak



Prayer flags on a high pass



Photo By Cornelia Buchner



Trekkers on a viewpoint



Old ruins on a hilltop

occasional monasteries (*gompas*). The few villages in this extreme, virtually treeless place exist only where there are springs or small streams with water enough to irrigate one crop of buckwheat or barley per year. Poplars and willows grow where it's wet, and in a few places the villagers cultivate seabuckthorn berry bushes. Seabuckthorn juice is a popular sweet drink, known for its medicinal properties, rich in vitamins A, C, D, E and K, beta-carotene and omega-3 fatty acids.

The mules arrived ahead of us at Chele and our duffels were stacked neatly inside the Bishal Hotel for us to take to our rooms. The innkeeper and his wife were a happy couple who prepared a fine supper for us that

“Mustang is perched on the brink of great change...” says the *Lonely Planet* guide... If you want to see Lo before its Tibetan lifestyle is fundamentally altered, go soon.

night, and breakfast in the morning, topped off with fresh apples from their orchard.

Between Chhusang and Shyangbochen, about 18 kilometers on the map, there is no road. A link to the northern jeep track from Tibet is being bulldozed, and should be complete in a year or two. It is quite likely, however, that landslides and washouts will shut it down often.

“Mustang is perched on the brink of great change...” says the *Lonely Planet* guide. Blame the increase in foreign trekkers and near completion of the road. If you want to see Lo before its Tibetan lifestyle is fundamentally altered, go soon. There's already electricity in most villages, cell phone communication, satellite TV, and modern consumer goods from India and China. But the new road will bring an advanced kind of 'progress'—greater

access to the outside world, new ideas and rising aspirations among the youth, and other inevitable transformations.

Early on Day 3, above Chele, we climbed up out of a deeply eroded canyon, then slowly ascended Taklam La (pass) followed by Dajorl La (11,900 and 12,254 ft., respectively), the first of 11 high passes.

At Samar we stopped for vegetable soup, chow mien and fried rice, the typical mid-day fare except on days when we packed boiled eggs and Tibetan bread for lunch. Rice, noodles, breads, and potatoes are the mainstay up here; vegetables

and meat are scarce. In our day packs we each carried apples, granola bars, and a liter or two of water.

After Samar we crossed Bhena La (12,664 ft.) and Yamda La (12,664 ft.) then descended easily to Shyangbochen. Most settlements are small; often only one or two houses or hotels for tea-house trekkers like us, and a tenting ground. We spent the night in one of Shyangbochen's two small hotels.

In the morning a Tibetan mastiff greeted us out front where he posed lazily for the dog-fanciers in the group (including me) to take pictures. At night the

Tibetan mastiffs guard the compounds; their job is to bark loudly to repel intruders—people, animals, malicious spirits and ghosts—a bark that has been described as “sepulchral and ‘far away’... as if each dog kept his own ghost in his stomach and it was only that ghost that barked.” It would be foolhardy to challenge their instincts by venturing outside after dark.

NYI LA, WHERE LO BEGINS

Day 4. We crossed Shyangbochen La (12,631 ft.) this morning and Nyi La (13,156 ft.) in the afternoon above Jhaite, our lunch stop. From Nyi La north the culture is pure ▶





Women of Ghami winnowing grain

Tibetan. Most villagers up here also speak Nepali and some English (and Hindi, from watching Indian movies on TV).

We had a magnificent view from Nyi La looking south to the Niligiri peaks and the north face of Annapurna-I. We worked our digital cameras overtime there trying to find a unique angle to frame the mountains between the brightly colored prayer flags that whipped wildly in the wind.

Later, after Ghami La (12,352 ft.), we descended to Ghami village, the third largest in Lo (after Tsarang and Manthang). We stayed at the Royal Mustang Hotel owned by Lobsang ('Raju') Bista, a grand-nephew of the Raja of Mustang. Originally, we had hoped to walk two hours to Dhakmar, but there's no inn there large enough to accommodate our group.

For awhile I joined Raju in the hotel kitchen/living room, chatting and sipping *suja*, the traditional salt-butter tea

that Tibetans serve to friends and special guests. Authentic "tea-house trekking of old" has been described where sitting "in the living room or the kitchen (often the same thing) you'll eat, drink and be merry with extended family members, passing traders and the drivers of mule trains..." Genuine hospitality.

Then several of us went out for a village walk-about, admiring the freshly painted *chortens* and *mani* (prayer) walls, and looking for more of the famed Tibetan mastiffs of Lo. Early travelers often commented on the red dogs of Mustang. We found one out in a field where some women were winnowing freshly harvested buckwheat.

We also noted the common rammed earth style of house and monastery construction. Along the narrow lanes between houses we marveled at villagers precariously carrying huge loads of straw up notched log ladders to store on the flat roof tops,

while small children rolled gleefully in piles of straw not yet hauled away.

Everything about Ghami indicated great industry and great age, with structures and customs dating back over centuries of isolation. There was no electricity, so the lights in Raju's rooms were powered by solar cells mounted on the roof. We slept early that night in anticipation of tomorrow's nine-hour walk to the walled city of Manthang, our ultimate destination.

Day 5 took us high on a long, tiresome trail under blue skies with broad, brown arid vistas. Above Dhakmar we ascended Mui La (13,681 ft.) past steeply eroded arroyos carved out by the wind and occasional violent cloud bursts. The map says that blue sheep may be seen near here, and Lo also has snow leopards, lynx, arghali sheep and wild asses. But we saw none. On most passes, however, Himalayan Griffon Vultures and Lammergeiers (Bearded Vulture-Eagles) soared close overhead. These giant birds have wing spans of up to nine feet.

The afternoon wore thin and wearisome as we trudged on and up, endlessly it seemed, towards the highest pass, Marang La (also called Chogo La; 13,878 ft.). We were now five days and almost 5,000 feet above Jomsom. It wasn't far until we had a broad view of the plain of Manthang, the 'Fertile Plain' or the 'Plain of Aspiration', depending on which translation you prefer. Our destination, over an hour's walk and 1300 feet down, was destination surrounded by barley fields and groves of poplar trees with (in October) leaves of gold. To the east and west were snow peaks with tongue-twister names like Nhubine and Chungen Changma Himal, and Kekyllap, Rijopuwa and Talung Danda. These high points mark the boundary of Nepal where it butts gently up into western Tibet.

It was late and with the sun low at our backs we followed our own long shadows into the ancient town.

EXPLORING MANTHANG

We stayed in the new part of town, outside of the walls, at the Mystique ►



Deserted lane in Ghami

Himalayan Resort Hotel. It's hardly a 'resort', but the nine rooms (two with attached baths) have sheets and woolen blankets on the beds (pure luxury!) and carpets on the floors, which keep the interminable dust down that otherwise permeates everything. There's also a shower room with hot water (at no extra cost). The Mystique is written up in the *Lonely Planet* guide at \$99 per room—but don't believe it. Some rooms are only a few hundred rupees per night (less than \$5), negotiable.

Ram Gurung runs the hotel, and also works at the local Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) office. He's well connected with the local power structure, so if you want an audience with the Raja of Mustang, for example, Ram will fix the time and tickets, 200

rupees each. His wife and a helper do the cooking, and meals are served in a comfortable room that seats 12 to 15 people, near the kitchen. On cold evenings, a space heater burning yak dung chips takes the chill off.

We stayed two full days (three nights). On the morning of Day 6 we visited three monasteries, including a school for young monks. Had we come 10 days later, all the monks and school boys would have been gone to Kathmandu for the winter.

Two of our trekkers presented the school boys with soccer balls. After watching the rambunctious boys play dodge ball in the bright sun of the main courtyard, the school principal, Tsering Tashi, showed us the monastic museum. It houses ritual dancing costumes, nu-

merous old monastic artifacts, and a large and priceless collection of ancient scriptures dating back many centuries to a time when this region was dominated by the pre-Buddhist Bonpo religion. Discovery of the rare Bonpo books is featured in a recent National Geographic Society film entitled 'The Lost Caves of Mustang'. Nowadays, all Lobas (people of Lo) are Buddhist.

Chode Gompa is the oldest monastery, dating to the time of Lo Manthang's first king, the legendary Ame Pal, around 1380 AD. Jampa Monastery, second oldest, is noted for ancient tantrik mandalas painted on the walls, and a large image of the Future Buddha, Jampa Chenpo, in a meditative pose. Thupchen Monastery was built during the period of the third king of Lo. The ceiling, walls, beams and rafters are covered in gold, silver and natural colors, and there are priceless images of Buddha and other deities in various poses.

MEETING THE RAJA

In the afternoon we had an audience with the Raja of Mustang, 79-year old Jigme Palbar Bista. His is the 25th generation since Ame Pal. Once an independent kingdom, upper Mustang was annexed to Nepal in the late 18th century and remained partially autonomous until 1951 when its status was further reduced. Today the Raja's position is entirely honorary, though he is still held in great respect by the locals.

It is an honor to meet the Raja. Audiences are held in his sitting room at the top the palace, an old structure built and decorated in the Tibetan style. After climbing three steep ladder-like wooden stairways we entered his audience room. Following local custom, we each presented him with a silk *kebata* scarf, which he, in turn, put around our necks. Then we sat sipping mint tea and politely asked a few questions about Manthang through an interpreter. Before leaving, we sat on the floor in front of (respectfully lower than) the Raja for pictures.



Line of chortens in Manthang



KyiApso at palace in Manthang



The Raja of Lo

Photo by Lantimo Paul

The Raja's palace is guarded by two large black-&-tan Tibetan mastiffs. One is a normal *do-kyi* ('door-dog') and the other is a rare 'bearded' (hairy-muzzled) *kyi-apso*. They barked furiously at our intrusion.

On the way out, several of us took a short detour to see the dogs. The Raja's palace is guarded by two large black-&-tan Tibetan mastiffs. One is a normal *do-kyi* ('door-dog') and the other is a rare 'bearded' (hairy-muzzled) *kyi-apso*. They barked furiously at our intrusion.

The Raja also raises fine horses, which he enjoys riding. Until recently, it was the only mode of transportation in his kingdom, other than walking.

In one alley of the maze that makes up the inner city we found a sign that read "**←Way to Viwe Top**" (*si*), where an old man guided us up for a rooftop "viwe" of old Manthang.

Next morning, Day 7, the team rode off on rented ponies to visit the spectacular caves of Garphu, 6-7 miles north of town. The caves are easily accessible and impressive. When he got back, one of the riders exclaimed: "That was one cool trip. Awesome!", but complained of a sore backside from straddling the small, hard Tibetan style saddle.

There are numerous souvenir shops in Manthang, mostly inside the walls by the palace. The local ACAP office has maps, brochures, Internet access and local advice for visitors. Outside the walls there are many provision shops with all manner of goods imported across the Chinese (Tibet) border a few miles north of town. And, here in rapidly globalizing Lo, there's another 'Illy' coffee shop run by the same family as the one in Kagbeni. There's also a community library, Internet café, and several small restaurants, tea shops and bars. Everyone we met was friendly, though some asked us not to take their pictures.

WALKING OUT

On Day 8 we set out on the return portion of our trek, first over Lo La (12,959 ft.), then all afternoon down to Tsarang (the second largest village in Lo). We stayed in Maya's Hotel, Maya being another of the Raja's relatives. A big attraction in Tsarang is an old Gompa partly in

ruins. We could have spent several days exploring, but time was short.

The next day when Santosh phoned ahead to reconfirm our rooms in Ghiling, they were already taken. So much for advance reservations! That forced us to make a major change of plans requiring a longer, harder day's walk. After crossing Chinggel La (also called Tsarang or Dhoya La; 12,697 ft.) we rejoined our previous trail at Ghami. On the way we passed upper Mustang's longest *mani*-wall, which our most hi-tech trekker with GPS device determined to be 0.19 mile long. Long enough.

Our destination now was Shyangbochen, which some of us reached late and exhausted. It got dark quickly, so after a few beers and another high-carb dinner, we were off to bed.

On Day 9 the team split up temporarily. One group followed the regular trail back over Yamda La and Bhena La to Samar. A smaller group detoured down valley to Rangchung Cave Gompa where ▶

it is believed that Padmasambhava once meditated. Padmasambhava is the Indian sage who brought Buddhism to the Himalayas in the 8th century AD, after defeating the spirits of the pre-Buddhist Bon religion (according to legend). The cave has wall carvings of many deities, and an image of the revered sage. One of the trekkers remarked later that she felt a special, calming atmosphere there, and could understand why it's considered sacred to Buddhists.

A deaf elderly man looks after the cave, opening it for visitors and collecting the 100 rupee entrance fee. He lives nearby,

alone, with a little dog for company. He grows a small vegetable garden just outside the cave, which is festooned with numerous brightly colored prayer flags.

After their visit, the group climbed for 90 minutes up and over a high ridge, then rejoined the main trail. By evening we were all back together, at Samar's Annapurna Hotel.

Behind the hotel in Samar is a large terraced garden with many trees, a small stream, and a black mastiff chained to a sturdy post. During the 1960s, during the clandestine war of resistance against the Chinese occupation of Tibet, a large contin-

gent of Khampa guerilla fighters lived here. Standing in the garden, I tried to imagine them with their horses and guns, preparing to set off on a raid against the PLO across the border. In 1971, as the USA pursued diplomatic relations with Beijing, CIA support to the Khampas ceased. Shortly thereafter the guerillas (growing old) were disarmed and resettled at cheese factories and in carpet factories around Nepal.

On the 10th morning, our last day inside the restricted area, we set out at 5:30 am, hoping to reach Kagbeni before of the daily dust storm. We stopped to eat a quick breakfast in Chele, then scurried on. By early afternoon we were safely inside Kagbeni's Paradise Lodge, out of the wind. The following day we were back at Om's Home in Jomsom, and the morning after that we flew out to Pokhara and back to Kathmandu.

Mission accomplished. I'd achieved my 48-year quest. We 13 trekkers, some in our 60s and 70s, were back from upper Mustang with no complaints more serious than sore feet and runny noses. Were we among the last to see what remains of the region's rich and unique Tibetan culture? Perhaps not, but when the road is done upper Mustang of old will certainly see "great change" and a new reality. It's already begun, so if Lo on your list 'to do', do it now. Go soon... ■

Thanks to Joe Whittington of Sahale Travel (sahaletravel.com), Vidya Hirachan-Piyya of Mustang Trails, Treks & Expeditions (mustangtrailsnepal.com), and our guide Santosh Sherchan and his trail crew for their parts in our adventure and a job well done.

For more on the caves of upper Mustang see the PBS TV special, 'Lost Caves of Mustang', at nationalgeographic.com. The description of a Tibetan mastiff's bark as "sepulchral and 'far away'" is by R.F. Johnston, *From Peking to Mandalay* (1908). The quote about sitting around in tea-house kitchens is from thegreathimalayatrail.org. For more on the Khampas, see *The CIA's Secret War in Tibet* (by K. Conboy & J. Morrison, 2002).

The author's previous writings about Mustang include 'The Muktinath Trail' (March 2011) and 'Winter Trek to Muktinath' (November 2007), archived at ecs.com.np. See also 'The Great Himalaya Trail' in the November 2011 issue. His books include *Muktinath: Himalayan Pilgrimage* (1992), and *Big Dogs of Tibet and the Himalayas* (2010; orchid-books.com). Don is also on Facebook, and can be contacted by email at don.editor@gmail.com.

Charang



Photo by Andy Marang

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Thakurbaba

God to the Tharus

The Ram temple in Bardia National Park adds a touch of mystique to the legend of the Tharubaba

Text By PAT KAUBA



A young boy, no more than seven years, works his way around a small temple in Bardia National Park. He sweeps between the large pillars of the Rajsthani style Ram Temple, far removed from the desert, but in the pre-monsoon season, not so far from its heat. He moves with repetition, confident of his work, repeated too many times to count. A tap fills pails of water, and he commences to strew it left and right, washing walls and paths around the temple's inner sanctum—before proceeding inside.

Bells hang from the roof, near the door; small, medium and large. Worn beyond identity some ring-out the auspicious *Aum* and some just *clung*. The boy moves through the door into the dimly lit room. He begins washing the four-foot statue of *Thakurbaba*, the local Tharu peoples name for Lord Vishnu, also another incarnation of his is Lord Rama. The statue has a deep, near black hue, aged beyond centuries. Next he moves onto a statue of Lord Hanuman, the monkey formed deity who represents

unquestionable devotion through his love for Ram and his wife Sita; the boy repeats his task.

His job done, he moves outside to complete more tasks. In the yard around the temple's perimeter wall is a *duni* or religious fire, long decommissioned. Nowadays it is used only during *Dashain* festivities. He moves onto a small white temple to *Bolinath* (Shiva), proceeding to wash the *lingam* (phallus) inside.

With few words and no complaints, the boy moves onto his most interest-

ing last task. A pieced together wall of carved stone, only two feet tall and about six across. Pieces of a large statue that fits together, telling a long-lost and unknown story. Only some sections are present, many others have been either lost to time, or uncollected, making the tale incomplete. At the far left side of the wall is a bust of Durga Devi, wife of Lord Shiva in her representation as pure *shakti* or power. She looks ferocious, wielding a blade above her head, but to strike what; is unknown and lost. The stone shares the same tone as Thakurbaba.

THE BURNING GLARE

A small matchbox size Durga/Parvati Temple on an adjacent hill doesn't get the boys attention today. I ask where the *pujari* (temple priest) is, "My grandfather is away," he answers, with an indefinite return. His grandmother watches from a hut between the two temples. She wears *tulsi* beads (basilica seeds used for meditation by those who abstain from meat and alcohol) and an untrusting glare. She is slowly reluctant to share any of the temple's stories with me. Strangely though, she offers me the kind gesture of staying for dinner, informing me that her husband is the *pujari*, and he's a Sitaram baba.

The next day I come to learn the story of how Thakurbaba and the stonewall came to be through locals.

HAVE I GOT A STORY FOR YOU

One tourist guide comes visiting the temple with a French couple; he gives his knowledge freely, even too much so. He tells of a *jhankari* or shaman, who was walking through the park more than 150 years ago. He was on the road to holy Mt. Kailash in southern Tibet, home to Lord Shiva and his wife. These were the days long before immigration officers. Strapped to his back was the large statue of Thakurbaba. He decided to rest next to the park and one of its streams for a day or two. But on the morning he was to continue to Kailash, no force could get the statue back onto his back and moving again. He believed ▶

At the far left side of the wall is a bust of Durga Devi, wife of Lord Shiva in her representation as pure *shakti* or power. She looks ferocious, wielding a blade above her head, but to strike what; is unknown and lost.



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he was meant to keep the statue where it was, and so it remained.

I sat looking at the man, but found his story a little too strange to understand, especially considering the size of Thakurbaba and its sheer weight. And also, how did the wall, with Durga's image come to be?

Unsatisfied I continued investigating.

DIGGING AROUND

People filled me with plenty of random knowledge. Most couldn't tell me how old Thakurbaba was, or where he came from. Most people also dismissed the previous story. They were happy to tell how many years ago the temple owned a large area of land, 12 *bigha*, and more than 100 cattle. Which anywhere, to anyone, is a vast wealth. But time, depths and tigers took care of all that. Some talked, saddened, how *arti puja*, the worship of the rising and setting sun was no longer observed, how the duni lay empty and how little ever happened at the temple. But still, nobody could tell me about the wall and statue.

Still unhappy with the answers I had, I was near ready to give up on finding out the tale during my journey into western Nepal's Tarai flatlands, until, an eventful meeting on my last night. A man with a deep interest in local lore and Hinduism, had heard of my inquiries and wished to share his version of events.

He told me how many centuries ago a farmer was digging down by the river, when he hit upon a lump of rock. So the man dug further around the lump, eventually and to his surprise uncovering a statue. Not knowing what to do, the man ran to the great king (more likely the local chief) who upon hearing about the find, demanded the statue to be dug up and brought to his home. The next day many workers starting digging to bring out the statue for the king, but to no avail. Waters mysteriously rose around both workers and statue. Then the pond became infested with snakes. That night, at a loss of ideas, the king retired for restless sleep.

AND SO IT WAS

In a deep sleep, the king dreamed that the statue was talking to him. It tells him

not to remove the statue from its place or there will be grave consequences for him. In the morning, shaken, the king called for the digging to cease and ordered a temple built on the site for the statue to remain with the Tharu people. And as for the wall of carvings, this turned up in or near the river, piece by piece in the years since, mostly after large rainfall or when fields were ploughed.

I don't know if the tale is a true account, but for me it was more believable than the statue being carried from India. Personally I always enjoy a bit of the mysterious or unexplainable. But it doesn't matter, for like most things of this nature, it is all a matter of faith and belief. If you are in the area, go check and ask around for yourself, maybe you can uncover the truth, or even a missing piece of the wall and its puzzle. ■

Pat Kauba is a freelance writer and photographer with a deep interest in religion and the unexplainable. He can be contacted at patkauba@gmail.com.



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Feast of love

A sneak peek into celebrating Christmas and all that it entails for Nepali Christians

Text By LIZBETH LUCKSOM

I believe we all have our own versions of this very special festival that is celebrated at the end of each year on December 25 by Christians all around the world. All thanks to the numerous shows on television and smart marketing strategies with gratifying sales and discounts, our memory is fully synchronised to the immaculately decorated buildings and shopping malls, songs about Rudolf the red nosed reindeer, Santa Claus and his magical elves from the north pole, massive Christmas trees with attractive presents underneath them, patterned sweaters, colourful candies, crunchy-cookies, creamy cakes and stuffed turkeys to add to the occasion. Church bells ringing in the background and carol groups singing “away in a manger, no crib for his bed...” A truly joyous occasion indeed and how well we’ve replicated the same magical world in our own Nepali households, mildly adjusting it to our tastes and culture.

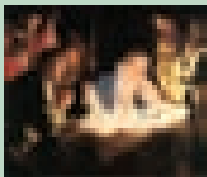
I used to love Christmas for the three great reasons or 3Cs as I recall - cardigans, cakes and carols. I always thought Christ-

THE GOOD NEWS

Luke 2:10-11

King James Version(KJV)

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord”





mas would be incomplete without these three. I remember choosing my favourite colours at the woolen store and whenever I spotted my mother with those needles, it got me all excited. Sometimes she'd make me stand straight whilst she'd meticulously measure me up to see if the arm size or the neck line was just right and I would look forward to the day when I would finally get to wear it with my matching new dress on Christmas Day. Just like Dashain is incomplete without new clothes, Christmas is incomplete without one too but as I grew older I started thinking otherwise. I don't know how the transition happened but I used to dread wearing new clothes to church on Christmas. The 'right out of the factory' smell of clothes and the neat and shiny outfit was so overrated that the obvious glance while walking down the pew was rather embarrassing.

Very few families' baked cakes back then and readymade cakes were not in high demand; at least I don't remember us buying one. Cakes had to be ordered weeks in

advance from bakeries but we were fortunate to have an enthusiastic mother who would spend hours after dinner baking fruit cakes and brownies in an old fashioned oven. Cakes are like the show-stopper of the season especially while delivering goodies or *bhaag*, an



Photo by Lizbeth Ludskom

While we expect *Sel rotis*, *peero aloo-dum*, *mula ko achar*, sweets and fruits from our friends during Dashain, they'd expect the same from us during Christmas

assortment of dishes, to our Hindu friends and neighbours. While we expect *Sel rotis*, *peero aloo-dum*, *mula ko achar*, sweets and fruits from our friends during Dashain, they'd expect the same from us during Christmas and it's one of the fun activities that keep us engaged during the festival. I wonder if our western counterparts can keep up with our age old *Sel* making tradition. We usually prepare medium sized double looped bread as opposed to the most common single loop doughnut shaped sel. *Sel* planning starts months in advance, shopping and preparations would follow right after and on one allotted day everyone gathers around to watch gifted people in the family work

wonders and mostly to take a bite of those hot delicious *roti*. It's funny how the whole neighbourhood knows which household is making *sel rotis* on particular days, maybe it's the unnecessary commotion and laughter or just the scintillating aroma of the *rotis* being prepared. It's one of the best family bonding times ever.

I disagree with my friend who once told me that for us it's only about the 'sweet stuff' and bakery items during Christmas. ▶

SINTERKLAAS



Saint Nicholas of Myra or modern day Turkey was the inspiration behind the American version of Santa Claus. Nicholas was a rich and generous man who lived in the 4th Century A.D. He gave gifts to the poor children and brought joy in their lives. St. Nicholas later became known as der Weihnachtsmann in the Protestant areas of central and northern Germany and Father Christmas in England or Sinter Klaas according to the Dutch. The Dutch settlers who arrived in America in the 17th Century introduced the Sinterklaas festivities.



Photo courtesy Phil Rai, Venue-Rideau Mall, Ottawa, Ontario

Hot, sour and spicy food items are very much a part of the menu. For non-vegetarians like me, Christmas is incomplete without meat. Turkey is not available easily so I'll settle for pork roast, beef or buff curry, mutton biryani, tandoori chicken or sweet and sour chicken and fried fish. Like any other festival, food is very important during Christmas. We come wisely prepared with antacid well ahead of the game. 'It only comes once in a year' spirit seemingly helps digest all the guilt.

Carol singing is one of the major events. Carol groups visit every other Christian household days before Christmas, singing glorious hymns in Nepali -spreading the good news about the birth of Jesus. Outdoor Carol singing tradition has transformed over the years but traditionally you'd find a small group of carefree youngsters standing out in the wintry cold, wrapped up in caps, mufflers and jackets, singing and clapping with almost frozen, numb hands. Their harmonious carols are usually accompanied by a guitar, a *madal*, a tambourine and a cold growling stomach. It's a fulfilling night nevertheless because every household invites them over for a bowl of hot *thukpa* or wanton soup, maybe *momos* if you're lucky. Chowmien, *aloo and sel rotis* are common too. I was a part of such a group when I was in Sunday school and it was a rich and rewarding experience no doubt.

The weeklong events and activities builds up to the grand day - Christmas morning service at the church, where you're greeted with a lively *Jaimasib'* and a



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'Merry Christmas' at the church entrance. Apart from the usual church goers you'd be surprised to notice new faces amongst the crowd neatly dressed with pretty button flower attached to their coat lapels. After the much awaited special sermon from the local pastor, everyone gathers outside the church compound for the famous 'love feast' complete with a plate of hot steamed rice, *daal*, vegetables, *achaar* and the legendary *saag* and *maasu*. It all ends with the occasional friendly nods, awkward smiles and snapshots and not to forget the sore throats from the late night carol singing and the leftovers to last you for days.

As I matured over the years, I took the liberty to add one more C to the 3Cs I mentioned earlier on and that is Christ. He is the reason why we celebrate Christmas and so as long as the real meaning is not crushed by our modern approach to this celebration. I think it really does not matter how you choose to celebrate one. Adorn an angel on top of your evergreen tree or a readymade Chinese tree, fix a bright paper star atop your freshly painted roof, decorate your house with magnificent lights and streamers, hang a red sock above your fire place if you please, spend thousands on gifts for your loved ones or maybe send a greeting card to show you care, make

POINSETTIA- THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

Poinsettia, with its ruby-coloured, star shaped leaves sees more than \$200 million in sales each year and many believe the star shaped leaves symbolize the Star of Bethlehem which led the three wise men to the manger where the baby Jesus was born.

(Source - <http://www.holidays.net/christmas/didyouknow.htm>)



miniature models of a manger with Joseph alongside Mary holding baby Jesus and of angels, shepherds and sheep, invite the less fortunate for brunch, give out gifts to the orphans and poor – it's a season of giving and thanksgiving. If only the true spirit of Christmas would continue all year round. It's something we can only hope for but special occasions like these make us realize that things can be better. Be it the Western way or the Nepali way, the true spirit and meaning of Christmas will forever remain unchanged. ■

Nepal celebrated its first official Christmas on 25th December 2008 after being declared a federal republic in December 2007.

MUST WATCH CHRISTMAS MOVIES

1. It's a Wonderful Life (1946)
 2. Miracle on 34th Street (1947)
 3. A Christmas Story (1983)
 4. Planes, Trains and Automobiles (1987)
 5. National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation (1989)
 6. Home Alone (1990)
 7. The Muppet Christmas Carol (1992)
 8. Elf (2003)
 9. Scrooged (1988)/Bad Santa (2003)
 10. The Polar Express (2004)
- (Source: www.collider.com)



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Thin Places

A pilgrimage to the Khembalung caves

Text & Photos By ANN ARMBRECHT

As Virginia Woolf wrote in *The Waves*, "There are moments when the walls of my mind grow thin; when nothing is unabsorbed."



At Prayers at Khembalung Caves

My skin was like wet tissue paper. It peeled off with my socks, pulled off under the damp bandage. It came off between my toes, from the soles of my feet and the edges of my heels. The exposed new skin was raw and tender. There was too much of it to cover and nothing solid or dry to hold down a new bandage. I had never seen anything like it and had no idea what to do. I glanced up with despair and saw the women already lifting their bamboo baskets and filing barefoot into the early morning mist. Pain was preferable to abandonment. Wincing, I pulled on my last dry pair of socks and laced up my soggy boots. I stuffed my jacket into the top of my pack and followed in the direction of the women – day number two on our pilgrimage to Khembalung.

At night in their dreams, shamans and priests from Hedangna, a village in the upper Arun Valley of northeastern Nepal, are said to travel to a cold clear lake on the right shoulder of Khembalung. Witches travel to the ridge as well, but they bathe instead in a lake of blood. When they are done washing, the shams, witches, and priests stretch out on the rocks, drying themselves in the moonlight and arguing over which of them is the most powerful. Khembalung refers to several places. It is Makalu, the fifth-highest mountain in the world and



Prayer flags and worshippers along the Khembalung cave cliffs

the home, so the villagers in Hedangna say, of Lord Shiva. Khembalung is also a *bhayul*, or hidden valley of Tibetan cosmology, a pure enchanted land set outside the destruction and corruption of time. Here, so the legends say, one will find refuge from the enemies of religion and will attain eternal youth, beauty, strength, and fertility.

These *bhayuls* are physical places hidden deep in the Himalaya and rendered inaccessible by the magic of the Tibetan *yogin* Padmasambhava. Years ago, so the story goes, in the paradisaical kingdom of Galdan, Arya Avalokitesvara made a prophecy:

Emaho! In the future, during the epoch of conflicts and disputes the land of snows, where live those who follow the way of the great compassion, will be conquered by the demons of ignorance. At that time all the followers

of the Arya, to flee from the demons will take refuge in this place which has sprung up from the flowers offered by the most powerful of the gods... It is the castle of the divinities, is the place of the purest prayers, is the natural site of the Vajra. It is surrounded by rocks and snowy mountains, and is known as *mKhanpa lung*, the valley of Artemisia. Everyone who arrives there will go to paradise of Akanisthah.

At the time when all temples are destroyed, Giacomella Orofino describes, when servants become masters, when “people sacrifices their own animals, drink blood, and eat flesh of their own fathers,” those disciples of Padmasambhava who “display greatness of heart” will take out the guidebooks hidden thousands of years before and set out to “open” these hidden lands.

“...what the pilgrims see along the way depends on what they are capable of seeing.”

The journey to Khembalung crosses the physical landscape, passing by a lake, so the guidebook says, that “by day is like boiling blood and by night like burning fire,” through a valley like “the outer curtain of a door,” and beneath “a mountain of black slate like untied hair.” But what the pilgrims see along the way depends on what they are capable of seeing. Some travelers encounter rocks and trees, snow and empty forest. Others travel over the same terrain and see mysterious landscapes shimmering with jewels, spacious deserts beneath strange ▶

Padma and Dhanmaya at the Khembalung caves



skies, and towering mountains floating above clouds of light. The hidden valley itself bestows a spiritual blessing on all who arrive there. How the pilgrims experience that blessing again depends on what they are ready to experience. Most who enter the hidden lands of Khembalung will have a vision of a peaceful and fertile valley with room for a settlement of 500 people. These pilgrims will receive health and long life, fertility and strength, and all of their desires will be fulfilled.

Though yogis trek beneath the same mountains and enter the same lush, green valley, they also undergo a spiritual transformation on their journey to Khembalung, a death and rebirth that allows them to transcend their usual state of consciousness and awaken to deeper levels of the mind. These pilgrims experience a flash of insight into the nature of reality, a vision

that is fleeting, but one that strengthens and deepens their own spiritual journey. The secret journey to Khembalung is reserved only for those who have reached the highest level of spiritual fulfillment. Here, at its most profound level, the hidden valley corresponds to the body and mind of the pilgrim to the realm where no distinctions are made between oneself and the outside world. Upon entering this innermost realm of the kingdom of Khembalung, the pilgrim acquires clarity of mind and openness of heart, the two qualities needed to attain the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

Few attempt to undertake this journey to the hidden lands. It is too dangerous, and they fear they will never return. But many make pilgrimages to the edges of these valleys, to the “gateways” (Tibetan *gnas go*) mentioned in the guidebooks and said to have been hidden by Padmasambhava.

Two caves carved out of a granite cliff 1,000 feet above the high altitude summer pastures of Yangle Meadow, a day’s walk south of the base of Makalu, are said to be one of the gateways into the hidden valley of Khembalung. Whether they are or not, these caves are believed to be places where gods have been; they are sacred places and are one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Hindus and Buddhists throughout the upper Arun valley.

Priests and shamans, lamas and yogis may be able to make the journey to Khembalung in their dreams or through intense spiritual practice. Everyone else must get here on foot. And so, at the height of the monsoon of 1992, I set out at dawn with twenty-five villagers from Hedangna on a pilgrimage made annually to the Khembalung caves during the August full moon. Most in our group were Yamphu

Rai, the original inhabitants of Hedangna, strong wiry people who have spent their lives as subsistence farmers in this remote subtropical Himalayan village.

Yamphu rituals and spiritual beliefs are based on oral texts passed down from the ancestors through the priests and shamans who learn these traditions in their dreams. Although they know that the caves are connected to the hidden valleys of Tibetan cosmology, they consider themselves to be Hindu and refer to the site as Shiva's cave. Two Brahmans from a less remote village to the south also joined us. These men were tall and thin and not at all suited to the long, hard days of walking. One of them complained incessantly, saying the trail was too hard, the trip too difficult. Each time the Brahman complained, Jadu Prasad, one of the oldest Yamphu men in the group, who was on his sixth pilgrimage to Khembalung, would reply, "It wouldn't be a pilgrimage if it wasn't difficult." By the end of the trip we were all repeating, again and again, "It wouldn't be a pilgrimage if it wasn't difficult."

Yogis and lamas travel to hidden valleys in search of enlightenment; they hope to escape samsara and attain eternal bliss. The Yamphu were going to Khembalung to ask for a son, a daughter, a job, a good harvest. As an anthropologist living in their community, I hoped to learn more about their pilgrimages, about what they did and found myself mumbling repetitive chants, over and over, to keep myself moving across the rocky terrain.

I carried a down sleeping bag, a Thermarest, a toothbrush, a pack cover, a flashlight, a notebook, iodine, four pairs of socks, long underwear, a synchiulla jacket, a camera, rice, and the boots on my feet. Every time I unpacked and repacked, the women gathered around to comment on each item I had brought. They carried a handwoven woolen blanket, bamboo mat to keep out the rain, rice, some spices, and a pot. They were barefoot. They had small bundles of string and bits of cloth, a shawl, their

finest clothing to wear on the day we climbed to the caves, and *raksi*, a type of wine made from millet. That was all.

Each morning we awoke in the dark. We walked all day along steep narrow trails, fording icy streams overflowing from the monsoon rains, and climbing from 5,000 feet in Hedangna over two

16,000-foot passes and up the Barun valley. In five days, we covered the same distance I had covered in two weeks the previous spring while trekking with family. The villagers would stop only at dusk, when we had reached a cave large enough to hold all twenty-five of us. We ate one meal of rice a day, mixed with wild plants ▶



Khembalung caves and worshippers

gathered along the trail. While hiking we snacked on roasted corn flour. Occasionally, we drank black tea.

By the third afternoon, we arrived at Yangle Meadow, the grazing lands at 13,000 feet below the Khembalung caves. We sat on the grassy floor of the narrow valley, flanked on either side by towering granite cliffs. Our words were swallowed by the roar of the Barun River, which carved its way through the center of the valley. Jadu Prasad pointed out some invisible trail going straight up the vertical rock face: "the path to the caves. I sat silently. A chill that had been with me the entire trip slowly crept up from my stomach. The two oldest women in the group, both in their seventies, looked at the cliff and then looked at me. "Don't go," they said. "Don't do it. The trail is too hard. Stay below and wait."

I know how to rock climb, I know that to be afraid of, and I shared their concern. "If these grandmothers can do it, of course you can," Jadu Prasad said. Having spent much of the past year trying to keep up with these same grandmothers while collecting firewood and stinging nettle in the jungles around Hedangna, I wasn't so sure. But the men promised we would all go together the next morning, and they would look out for me. If I could go with them, I agreed, I would give it a try. We lifted our loads and went in search of a dry cave for the night.

The next morning we again awoke in the dark. It was drizzling. It had rained all night, and I had slept fitfully, dreaming of slippery mud and slippery rocks. I again asked Jadu Prasad if he thought I could make it, and he again reassured me, so I went with the women to bathe. The

women were used to doing things on their own; they were strong, and they assumed I was equally strong. I couldn't count on them for help on the trail. After a perfunctory bath in the icy water, I returned to an empty cave. I waited, thinking the men must have gone to bathe as well.

Finally, one man returned. He was surprised to see me, said that the men had already left, and that he had just come back to get something he had forgotten. I grabbed my bag and scrambled after him. We walked silently and rapidly through the drizzle, turning off the main trail onto a narrow, overgrown path that climbed toward the cliff. We caught up with Jadu Prasad and the two Brahmans. They greeted us as we approached and told me that the trail was too slippery for my boots, that I should go barefoot; they then returned to their discussion of whether the



Flags and worshippers at Khembalung caves



Prayer Flags on lakeside near pass on trail to Khembalung Caves

two menstruating women should climb to the sacred caves. I was curious to hear what they had to say, but was distracted by the trail and, now, by my bare feet. Until now I had never thought of the cold. The soles of my feet were numb, so numb I didn't notice the stones underneath.

Soon the trail disappeared into the base of the rock. Those ahead had been slowed by the climb, and the women coming behind caught up with us. Hands gripping the rock, we slowly followed the others up the cliff. Along with our group of twenty-five from Hedangna, there were Bhotes (Tibetans) from the northern Arun Valley and Chetris (Hindus) from the south. Together, sixty or more people were making their way up the rock face.

In the West, we climb rocks with rope and protection. We wear soft rubber under our feet. We are on the rock, yet not on the rock. With these pilgrims I

“We take pilgrimages to thin places, to places where gods have made their mark on the land.”

climbed to the Khembalung caves bare-foot, with no rope. Perched on a tiny ledge, Jadu Prasad reached down to pull me over a difficult section. I clutched his hand as he hauled me up the cliff, not letting myself think about what he in turn was holding on to. At a particularly difficult part, one of the grandmothers looked at me with concern and suggested I go down. But then a man appeared with a twelve-foot piece of rope. He knelt above the difficult section and held the rope as I used it to climb up the crack.

Once, at a Quaker wedding I attended, the father of the groom talked about thin places, about places where one's nerve endings are bare. We take

pilgrimages to thin places, to places where gods have made their mark on the land. As the legends of the hidden valleys make clear, these journeys are internal as much as they are external. How thin the place seems to us depends on who we are and where we come from; most important, it depends on what we bring and what we can relinquish in order to make our journey. ■

Part 2 of the story will appear in the Feb issue of ECS NEPAL. Ann Armbrecht is an anthropologist and educator, and the author of *Settlements of Hope* (1989) and *Thin Places: A Pilgrimage Home* (2010). This article first appeared in *Terra Nova* 3 (1), 1998, and is reprinted by permission of Ann Armbrecht and The MIT Press. Ann Armbrecht can be contacted at a.armbrecht@gmail.com.

The history of hospitality

A walk down memory lane with Nepal's pioneering hoteliers provides a peek into the early days of Nepal's hospitality industry.

Text By AAYUSH NIROLA & UTSAV SHAKYA



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Hotel Soaltee

We are greeted by a brown Alsatian rushing down the stairs. Mr. Hanson walks out after and introduces himself extending both hands and we get right onto the topic. “My step father opened the first hotel in Nepal, a hotel for tourists and such. I was six then”, he starts as we move into his living room.

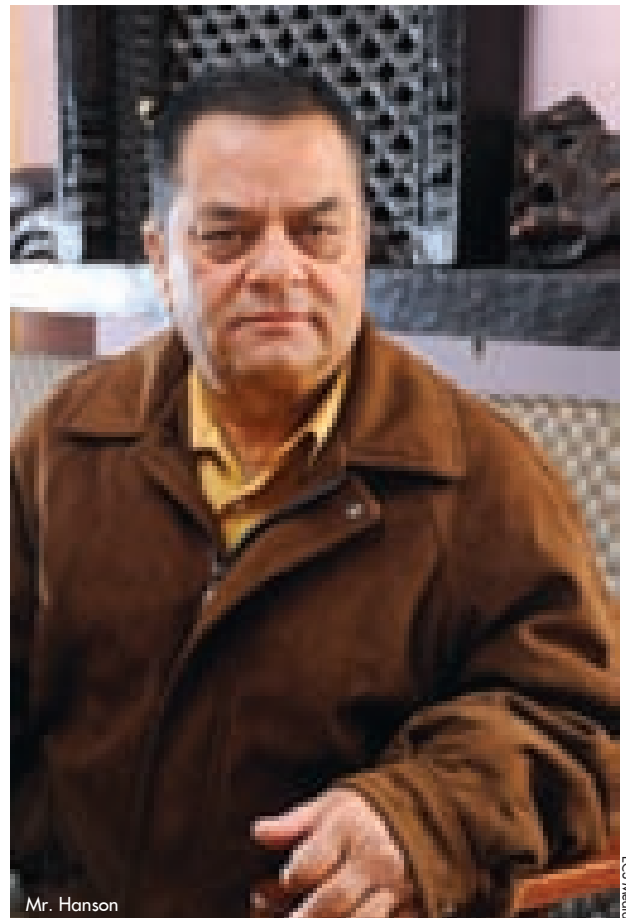
“Candles gave brighter illumination than electricity at the time. We had to use transformers to increase the brightness in rooms. There would be one tourist coming in about a month.” Pausing for a moment, he asks, “What was it though that you are writing about?” I cannot help a smile, “This, exactly”.

In the early 50’s, a Mr. Tom Mendes landed in Nepal with his friends to travel and sightsee. He saw that it was a nice place with a great view of mountains. In 1954, upon the guarantee of his pilot friends he opened Hotel Snow View, widely claimed to be Nepal’s first hotel. The hotel however, didn’t house a guest for the first six months. “Being a Christian, Mr. Mendes prayed. He said, ‘Lord if we do not get a guest now, we will have to close down the hotel. Exactly on that day, two travelers had walked from Darjeeling to Kathmandu checked in. Mr. Mendes took it as a sign and the hotel was kept running,” says Hanson. Snow View was host to some of the earliest tourists visiting Nepal, including dignitaries, and a party for Queen Elizabeth. He shows me faded black and white pictures of the hotel located at the same spot in Lazimpat where the Mahaguthi building stands today. In its brochures, the Snow View Hotel advertised itself as “your home away from home”. It listed among its facilities single and double rooms with private bathrooms, private car touring trips and moderate rates, which came to about IRs. 100. The brochure also announced in bold letters: Meet the fascinating people of Nepal.

“This is how we publicized the hotel back then”, he says handing me a paper-

thin postcard printed in Calcutta, with a color sketch of the hotel and tourists lounging around. The market was composed of the occasional European and primarily pilots from Indian Airlines who wanted good accommodations.

“Let’s not talk about the past. More than what was it like then, it is more interesting to talk about what tourism is like today and what shape it will take in the future, isn’t it? Why are we so stuck in the past?” Karna Shakya is sitting on a chair, relaxed as he says this. When persisted, he gives short, astute answers. At one point, when asked what difference in terms of interests, nationalities



Mr. Hanson

ECS Media

You see tourism is not a business. It is a science of understanding human psychology. It’s a culmination of the studies of sociology, economy and conservation.

and such he finds between the tourists coming in then and now, he says he has no idea. “I am not in the tourism business right now. It’s been quite some time since I have not looked into the operations of Kathmandu Guest House”.

“You see tourism is not a business. It is a science of understanding human psychology. It’s a culmination of the studies of sociology, economy and conservation. It is ever changing and constant. When we look into the past of our tourism, we focus on the hippie

era of the 60’s. That is also not wrong. In the 70’s, it morphed into adventure and nature tourism, which was the idea behind opening KGH. It was to open up Thamel, where at the time foxes would cry out into the night. Today we are into trekking and cultural tourism. I believe the future lies in adventure sports and in the balance of conservation and tourism. How much has it changed? Did we have any idea before that the tourists who came to Nepal and went back after going to Pashupati and Swayambhu would



we put those guests?” She points at the different blocks of the current hotel and introduces them. “We had five rooms in all; there was a cowshed in there which was turned into two rooms later on, we made do with whatever we had. In time, with the favorable response of guests, we left the place, added ten rooms here and registered as a hotel. We kept adding onto it and built that block between ’81 and ’91”.

Dwarika’s is popular for its traditional décor and woodwork, I mentioned. “Yes, our aim has always been to conserve old architecture by incorporating it here. My husband would collect old craft windows, some of it already rotting. It’d be brought here and trainees of master artisans would repair them. So much of the woodwork we have used in the hotel today is restored items.” What she remembers from those days comes up: “People would gather to see foreigners, but they didn’t ask for anything back then. They were just curious about the blue eyed, blonde haired people,” she says, smiling.

Over the years, of course, we have grown accustomed to the blue eyed, blonde haired people as the market has grown in leaps and bounds. In 1979,

someday be jumping off of Sarangkot hill on a paraglider?”

Maybe not. Mr. Hanson tells me that even until 1966 when he opened a branch of his hotel in Pokhara, the people in Kathmandu would not recommend Pokhara. “What is there in Pokhara – people would question. There was no electricity, no vehicles. I had to take a local person as a guide and find out places to sightsee. There weren’t many tourists either. They really started coming after 1974”.

“Dwarika’s was opened in nineteen seventy...” I stall, confused about the exact date. “Sixty nine,” Mrs. Ambika Shrestha, the proprietor corrects me, “No, seventy seven,” she adds, remembering.

“What was the scene like before that?” I ask, prodding her to go back in time. “See, even before that, my husband had started the first hotel in Nepal in 1950, Hotel Paras. We had Indian tourists, as well as Japanese and pilots from the Indian Airlines. Dwarika’s was started in 1972 but we registered in 1977. Regarding hotels at the time, there was the Royal

Hotel, Coronation and in Lazimpat, Hotel Snow View, run by Mendes.”

I ask her how Dwarika’s came to be. “In 1972, during the coronation of King Birendra, all the rooms were booked by royalty. We had a travel company then and had guests coming in. Where would



when Shyam Bahadur Pandey started Hotel Shangri-la, there were more tourists coming in from countries like America, Japan, France and Germany and the business registered a modest but predictable growth of about ten percent. However, even in the 70's, opening a hotel was not easy. "It was very difficult to get the license, you needed a highly placed source. If you had that, it was still difficult to get the construction materials to actually build the hotel. During my early days of opening Shangri-la, I would always be busy running around trying to get hold of the bricks, rod, cement and so on. One even needed to be well connected to get a loan," he recounts.

Why then did he get involved in tourism at the first place, I ask him. "Well, before Shangri-la, I was in government service," he replies. Having worked in countless ministries and commissions after his graduation, he didn't picture



himself in the same line. He was attracted to tourism because of one, its economic potential - he saw that Hotel Soaltee was full almost always, and two, because of the prestige attached to the

line of work. "At that time, royalty was involved in the hotel business. Having worked in government service, I think, one gets a little image-conscious. I had a feeling that things would work out in the tourism business".

Shangri-la today is a boutique hotel and although it has not expanded itself much in terms of physical space, it has changed over the years in its concept.

It does seem like it has. Shangri-la today is a boutique hotel and although it has not expanded itself much in terms of physical space, it has changed over the years in its concept. "At the start it was just a hotel. After many consultations, it acquired a vision to brand it as a tourist-friendly hotel."

Inside the smart interiors of Hotel Soaltee, I am ushered down a richly carpeted corridor into the private office of Prabhakar Rana. Although the concept of the hotel was thought of by prince Himalaya and Rana's sister princess Princep, Rana was a part of the team right from the beginning, starting as a Purchase and Personnel Manager at a salary of NRs.300 and working his way to the top.

Under soft lighting, with a regal air to his stature, Rana regaled me with tales from his memories from before opening the doors of the hotel in November 25, 1966. "I have always given full credit to Boris for opening up tourism in Nepal, for convincing the then royalty about its advantages. He certainly was the father of tourism in Nepal but not so much



Mr. Prabhakar Rana



ECS Media

Mr. Karna Shakya

“I am opposed to the opening up of virgin mountains for trekking and climbing. Why can’t we show tourists those mountains from a hill afar and tell them, ‘See that is a mountain that has never been trampled by humans?’”

of the hotel industry. Once there were people, the need for a world-class hotel was felt. This is where Nepal Industrial Development Corporation - backed by USAID in Nepal - came into the picture, which provided concessional loans to private companies, including us. When I come back after completing my studies, progress on the hotel had moved forward. The hotel was open, but a lot was in chaos. No one in expertise in hotels was around, so the idea to join hands with an international chain came up.”

With just 90 rooms then, the Hilton and Intercontinental chain did not fit the bill. It was then that the Oberoi group showed interest in the endeavor. Rana’s

personal friendship came in handy. The Oberoi group was so enthusiastic and hands on about their first hotel outside their native India, that Rai Bahadur Oberoi himself spent 3 months here, supervising every small detail of the hotel. Rana himself benefitted immensely from this, as he had studied history in college and had no formal training at running a five star hotel. Soon there were many additions and renovations to the country’s first five star hotel, the most prominent of which was the addition of seven identical presidential suites that were built to accommodate the heads of state for the SAARC summit. Famous guests include Princess Diana and Queen

Elizabeth II besides numerous heads of state and celebrities.

With world class services and a valley that is brimming with culture and traditions, most hotels did and are doing well. However, the hotel industry as rightly pointed out by Karna Shakya is not all business. In times of political turmoil and economic stride, what has kept these hotels and tourism in Nepal going? Karna Shakya thinks Nepal’s tourism is based on mystique and argues, “I am opposed to the opening up of virgin mountains for trekking and climbing. Why can’t we show tourists those mountains from a hill afar and tell them, ‘See that is a mountain that has never been trampled by humans?’”

Prabhakar Rana’s take on the subject differs. “We have training programs that have produced some really good managers. A lot of them have gone on to work for other great hotels, some in Kathmandu itself. But when a guest returns after ten years and is greeted like an old friend by a member of the hotel staff at my hotel, it does not have anything to do with our training and his education. I believe Nepal’s appeal for tourists is based on this friendly demeanor and genuine sense of hospitality.” This aspect of the country’s hotel industry, unlike the hotels and their world-class services is exclusive to the country.

The history of the hotel industry in Nepal dates back a couple of decades with a handful of pioneers who really opened up the country to many, many opportunities. Tourism today is still one of the major contributors to the state’s coffers. But the history of hospitality in Nepal, dates back several hundred years and several hundred people, to a time when there were no international visitors and certainly no need for any hotels. It was borne not because of necessity but due to the Nepali people’s culture, traditions and collective belief in an adage borrowed from a Hindu scripture, the Taittiriya Upanishad: *‘Athiti Devo Bhavah’* – the guest is god. ■

IH&RA Annual Congress

Hospitality Revisited in Kathmandu

Text & Photos By PRIANKA RAUNIYAR

As Nepal ambles along the last leg of its tourism year, it's but an honor to host the 49th Annual World Congress of IH&RA (International Hotel & Restaurant Association) at the five star Soltee Crowne Plaza from the 28th - 30th November. HAN (Hotel Association of Nepal) missed the opportunity to host the event last year to Serbia but the timing could not have been more perfect, to contemplate "redefining excellence in standards for the hospitality industry".

IH&RA is an international organization that helps standardize industry norms by consulting its national hotel and restaurant associations members from across 100 countries. IH&RA is also the voice for these national organizations to represent the collective industry interests to policy makers and lobbying for better recognition of the hospitality industry worldwide. Formed in 1946 in Paris, France, IH&RA has come a long way in representing 200,000 hotels and 6 million restaurants worldwide. With the move to shift base to Geneva, the President Dr. Ghassan Aidi believes that with the start of the new decade, the congress will highlight the future for opportunities of growth and development in the industry.

HAN, the only representative of tourism sector in the National Planning Council of Nepal, is predominantly helping the government in its decision-making processes to foster the tourism industry, which contributes a sizeable amount to the nation's economy and has immense untapped growth potential. To bring an international perspective and be actively involved in raising the bar



for Nepal's hospitality standards, HAN is an active member of the IH&RA. Together, they are bringing the world of hospitality to the Himalayan land to delve on various issues ranging from the new trends in hospitality to climate change and biodiversity issues.

The 49th Annual IH&RA World Congress meeting this November, focuses on sustainable development of tourism, bringing to fore the basic challenges faced and trying to find viable solutions through constructive discourse. Set amidst a traditional ethnic cultural program and an inaugural address by the Honorable President of Nepal, Dr. Ram Baran Yadav in the presence of Dr. Ghassan, President IH&RA, Dr. Ganesh Raj Joshi, Secretary of Ministry of Tourism and Mr. Prasadha B. Panday, the event is set to take off in an exuberant fashion. The days unravel

with panel discussions by panelists from ILO, ISO and UNWTO. Moderated by Mr. Dipendra Bahadur Chhetri, Vice Chairman, Nepal Planning Commission (NPC), the discussion on Nepal Tourism Investment and Realities with panelists like Mr. Dipendra Purush Dhaka (Former Tourism Secretary and Tourism Consultant), Mrs Ambika Shrestha (Owner of Dwarika's Hotel and Tourism Expert), Mr. Prachanda Man Shrestha (Tourism Expert) with insights from Dr. Yuba Raj Khatriwada, Governor of Central Bank of Nepal is important from Nepal's perspective.

With a host of government delegates, IH&RA and HAN members and panelists from different backgrounds, it's an all-encompassing, mega meet helping to promote Nepal as a favorable tourist destination to the world and make Visit Nepal 2011 a grander success. ■





The story of 'Nepali time'

Text By UTSAV SHAKYA, Photos By HARI MAHARJAN(ECS Media)

Over the years, as history waged its wars and maps were redrawn, as dynasties ended and people took the power back, a conspiracy was brewing in Nepal. In dark, crowded teashops, in unassuming roadside stalls, in smoke filled backroom round tables and in lay homes across the country, people participated, alone and in groups, with strangers or with family, silently agreeing, every occasion helping reinforce their belief in it.

Tea would have to be it. Not time, not the sun, but a single cup of tea would be the center of their universe. This would define their day, when they'd wake up, when they'd go to work, when they'd break from work and what they'd start much of their conversations with. (*Chya khayō?* Did you have your tea?) And so it came to be; a revolution by tea lovers,

for tea lovers and the rest of us, to free us from the shackles of the hour, the minute and seconds and instead have us savor the allure of the eastern tea plantations, the folksy tunes ringing in the rolling hills and the joy hanging heavy with the moisture in the cold hillside air.

Tea defines the Nepali day, and the order of things that takes place throughout. This is true for everyone, from the student to the banker, the farmer to the socialite as they go about their day, their schedules built around tea timings. So when you hear mention of Nepali time next, you know it's not resistance to the movement of the hands on your watch but a quiet agreement to partake in a centuries-old Nepali conspiracy. ■

The pictures in the following pages offer a glimpse of the scenic tea plantations of Ilam, Nepal's eastern tea district, from the precise tealeaf plucking to the processing in factories.











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Photo by Sanjeev Madhavan



Photo by Jimmy Pramod Malakar



Photo by Kapil Raj Khadgi

A Photo *Yatra* to Bhaktapur

Text By PRABINDRA LAL SINGH



Photo by Ravin Man Bajracharya



Photo by Suman Shrestha

Photo by Sanjeev Maharjan



Photo by Ravin Man Bajracharya



As a student at School of Creative Communications (SCC), we took the initiative to organize a *photo yatra* (journey) to the cultural city of Bhaktapur.

In the morning of October 22, 2011 with the first rays of the sun, we were already standing in historical Bhaktapur. Immediately, a plethora of fascinating images greeted us;

a woman in traditional Newari attire, the red, black and white *baku patashi*, carried a *gagri* (vessel) full of water, a symbol of good luck, a row of traditional houses, which gave the city its own distinct look and the play of lights in the narrow alleys of the architecturally splendid city.

Known fondly as the living museum, it is a bit disheartening to see modern, concrete ▶

Photo by Shailesh Hamal





Photo by Kapil Raj Khadgi



Photo by Milan Ratna Bajracharya



Photo by Ajaya Karmacharya



Photo by Ajaya Karmacharya

Photo by Pradipratna



Photo by Bhuwan Maharjan





Photo by Narayan Maharjan



Photo by Ramesh Tamang



Photo by Milan Rana Bojraeharya



Photo by Jimmy Pramod Makkar

houses come up between, beside and behind the charming old structures. As the popular adage goes, photos speak a thousand words and all of us tried our best to convey how these images translated to us through our pictures.

There are many other images that will catch an eager eye in Bhaktapur; elderly folk basking in the sun, numerous temples and their fascinating architec-

tural elements, ponds and the city's extraordinary culture of pottery. We also had the opportunity to visit Namuna Ghar, a century old UNESCO awarded house, renovated by architect Rabindra Puri.

Ours was an interesting group with writers, radio journalists and video editors joined by bankers, entrepreneurs and medical officers brought together by a common interest: photography. ■

The pictures have been edited by SCC's resident mentor Deependra Bajracharya and will soon be part of an exhibition. School of Creative Communications, SCC is an organization that creates a common platform for photographers and creative artistes for the preservation and promotion of Nepali culture and traditions through art and photography. For details: www.scc.org.np

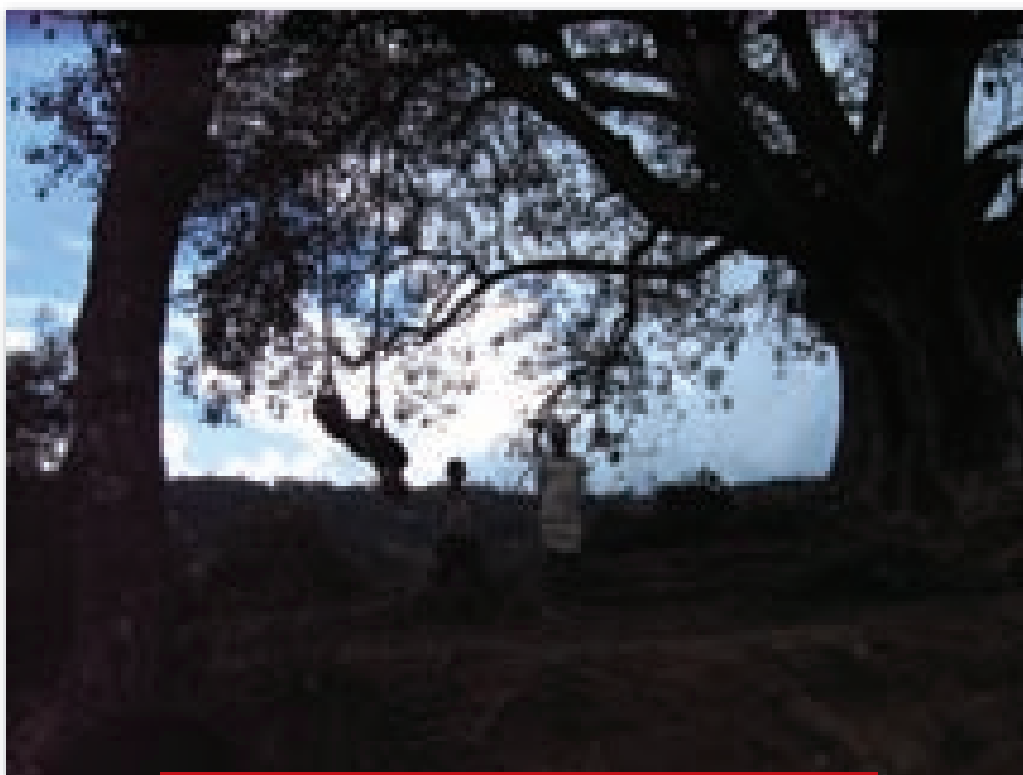
The Nepali Way

AN ECS NEPAL PHOTO COMPETITION

Celebrations

The Nepali Way is what we see, how it makes us feel and how we perceive it. What is the everyday to some might seem unique to others. These images can be very generic or very personal; it can be an idea or an emotion we immediately recall when speaking of The Nepali Way.

The photographs compiled are an attempt to gather and document how the term celebrations can encompass such varied meanings.



First

Dipesh Dhakal

Old Baneshwor, Kathmandu

Children and adults enjoy the ping, a traditional rope swing set up on a Banyan tree during the Hindu festival of Dashain at Melamchi, Sindupalchowk, Nepal (October, 2009)



Second

Manish Paudel

Shreepur-14, Birgunj

A local youth celebrates Holi, with his friends in Shreepur, Birgunj, an industrial town in the scenic southern plains of Nepal. Holi, the festival of colors is a popular Hindu festival that has been embraced by people of all religious beliefs. The youth and the youthful have a gala time in their homes and on the streets as they color themselves and friends in bright colors that for a day at least blur the lines created by society.



Bhushan Dahal

Lekhani-5, Udayapur

Third

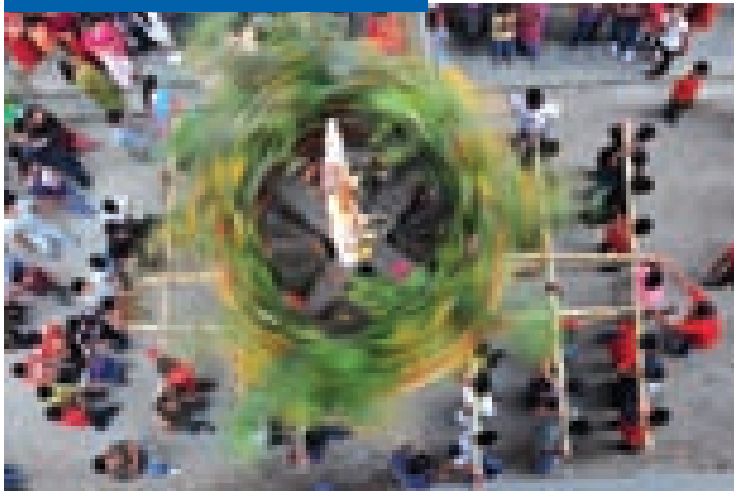
There always seems to be more celebrations when one is younger than when one grows up. This photo from Udayapur captures the joy of children as they come together to celebrate the birth of a peer. The pure joy on their faces makes this a superb capture.



CONSOLATION

Sanu Raja Maharjan

Agnishal, Kumaripati



“Kahi navayeko jatra Hadigaun ma” is a popular Nepali saying. It refers to the unique way in which the locals of Hadigaun town celebrate their festivals. ▲

CONSOLATION

Rajiv Singh Maharjan

This photo by Rajiv Singh captures a candid moment in the child's day. Without mention of the exact occasion, the smile becomes a celebration in itself. ►►





Pradeep Ratna Tuladhar
Agnishal, Kumaripati

People bring in the Nepali new year (Bikram Sambat) in Thimi, Bhaktapur by celebrating with traditional Newar instruments. Bhaktapur is home to many such spirited celebrations, itself being a town steeped in culture.



Samir Maharjan
Pulchowk, Lalitpur

Dashains is, amongst other things, also the festival of kites. By day, the sky is filled with colorful kites like shining stars in the night!

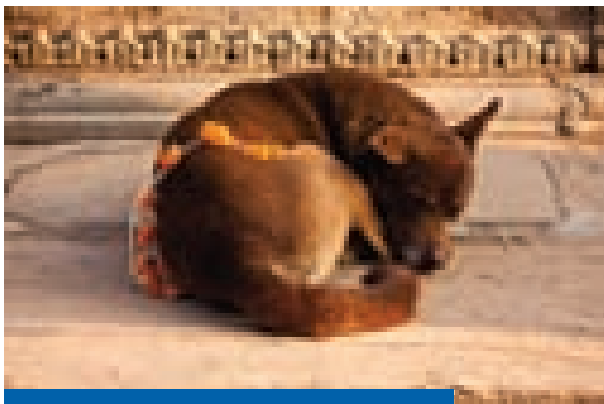


Anuja
Lalitpur

A family enjoying *paani puri* and chatpatey together. The mother is pouring the *paani* into the *puri* from her plate.



A traditional mandap is made for *Mha Puja*, a unique celebration among the valley's Newar community during Tihar. The body and soul is believed to be blessed by these small but important food items.

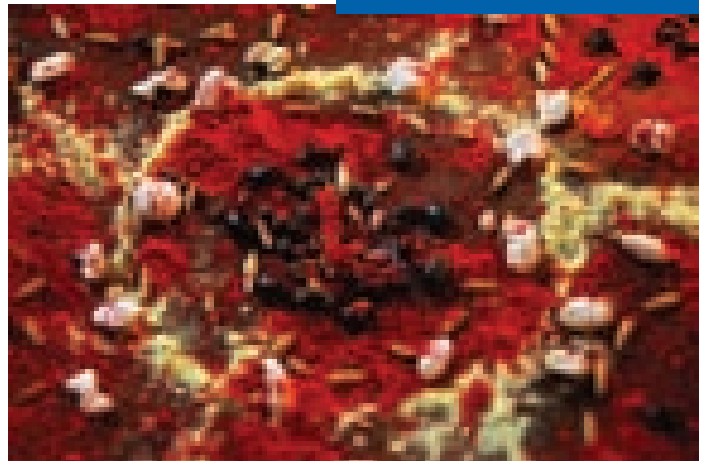


Karel Nierop
Laligurans Tol 42, Pokhara

Having received his blessing on Kukur Puja during Tihar, this street dog is taking a rest on ancient temple steps in Bhaktapur, probably to power up for yet another barking frenzy throughout the night to keep locals awake.



Archana Shrestha
Kanya Mandir



The theme for December is 'Journeys'. For more information : www.ecs.com.np/contest

www.ecs.com.np
CRAFTS

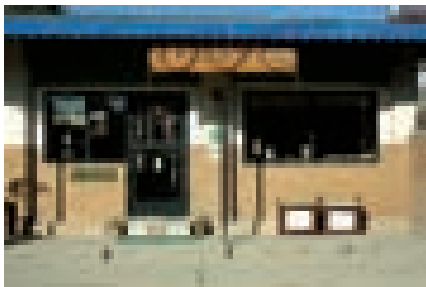
92 CRAFT RIGHT NOW

94 REVIEWS: A Wild Earth - beautiful and clean

96 IN THE STUDIO WITH: Hands of fortune

98 CRAFT IT YOURSELF: Eating green

Jamarko's First Anniversary



Jamarko, a paper product outlet at Jhamsikhel was started by sisters Kritika and Ritika Lacoul on 22 November 2010. For the first anniversary of the store, they have come out with a collection of paper tables

and a range of nettle products. There is also a 5% discount for customers until 31 December 2011.

Jamarko sells various kinds of paper, handicraft and nettle products such as lamp shades, photo frames, wrapping papers, wallpapers, window blinds, jewelry boxes, felt slippers, decorative items, stationeries and candles to local and wholesale customers which also include Godavari Village Resort and WWF.

They also take orders and customize products like wedding cards, restaurant's menu, visiting cards and greeting cards on demand.

The Craft Walk

Handicraft Design and Development Centre (HANDECEN) organized The Craft Walk, 2nd Handicraft Fashion Show on 22nd Nov 2011 at Megha Malhar Hall, Soaltee Crown Plaza coinciding with the 9th Handicraft Trade Fair.

The Craft Walk promoted Nepalese garments, jewelries, and fashion accessories to international business clients and displayed fashion accessories, pashmina, cotton and linen garments, hand knit fashion accessories, custom fashion jewelries, silver, gold and diamond jewelries, natural fibers and leather garments and accessories. Professional designers' team facilitated the participating enterprises in

developing, arranging and showcasing their collection.

Participants included New Human Fit Tailors, Swoniga Design, Everest Fashion, Sabah Nepal, Yak & Yeti Enterprises, Base Footwear, Nepal Pashmina Industry, Mahaguthi, Sana Hastakala, Women Skill Development Organization and Asri Jewelers who displayed the product range of dhaka, allo, pashmina, felt, silk, chiffon, bamboo fabric, cotton, knitwear, leather garments, leather shoes, cotton bags, hemp, silver jewelry and diamond jewelry.

300 spectators constituted mostly of professional buyers, diplomats, expatriates, and exporters. The event ticket was priced at Rs. 2,000 with dinner.

9th Handicraft Trade Fair



The Federation of Handicraft Associations of Nepal (FHAN) with NTIS Program, Commerce and Supply Ministry, Nepal and Trade and Export Promotion Centre (TEPC) organized the 9th Handicraft Trade Fair from 24 November 2011, Thursday to 28 November 2011, Monday. The event intends to promote Nepalese handicraft products and develop the region as a business hub for the SAARC region's

handicraft entrepreneurs with 20 participants from Bangladesh, 15 from India, 15 from Pakistan and 4 from Ceylon.

The event garnered support from the Federation of Nepal Chamber of Commerce (FNCCI), Micro Enterprises Development Program (MEDEP), Federation of Nepal Cottage and Small Industries (FNCSI) and several other product and district handicraft associations.

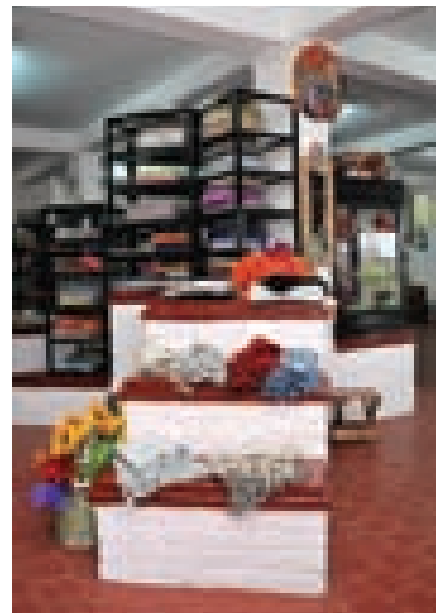
Among 160 stalls at the venue, there were 8 pavilions of Pashmina, Nepalese handmade paper, leather products, woolen products, natural fiber products, wood products and ceramics. There were more than 300,000 visitors and a turnover of NRs. 50 crores during the event. The 7th Craft Competition and Fashion Show also took place on the spot with live demonstration.

Nepal- Russia Handicraft Exhibition

Russian Centre of Science and Culture (RCSC) in association with Kaal Bhairav Events and Management organized a two-day long handicraft exhibition entitled 'Russian and Nepali Handicrafts Exhibition' at Russian Culture Centre, Kamalpokhari starting from November 3 to mark the National Unity Day of Russia on November 4.

The exhibition displayed handicrafts that reflected cultural heritage of Nepal and Russia. There were over 20 stalls with sculpture, traditional furniture, clay pieces, pottery, paper work, fabric, and paintings from Nepal. Three other stalls showcased Russian handicraft like Matryoshka dolls, Zhostovo, Orenburg and Samovar.

Pashmina Week at Sana Hastakala



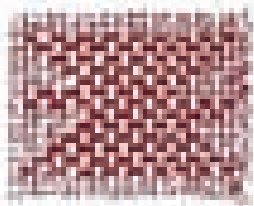
A range of pashmina items were put on display with 10% percent discount from 13 November to 20 November at Sana Hastakala to mark eighteen years of its service in Nepal's pashmina industry. The Pashmina Week showcased a variety of stoles, shawls, blankets, mufflers, sweaters, ponchos, coats, scarves, socks and gloves.

Price range for the week began from Rs. 580- Rs. 1600 for mufflers, Rs. 2700- Rs. 6,000 for water and wrinkle shawls, Rs. 40,000 for a grey hand-woven pashmina coat and Rs. 1, 01, 250 for a black pashmina blanket. According to Sales Incharge Bidya Kayastha, the customers were fairly responsive as the items were made available for an affordable price range.

SHOPPING



- A. Pure Pashmina 4 ways ladies sweater Code: 351-65529 Price: Rs. 5625.00 Size: Normal
- B. Pure Pashmina knitted stripe muffer Code: 351-65442 Price: Rs. 3660.00 Size: 30x152 cm
- C. Pure Pashmina knitted cap Code 351-65428 Price: Rs. 1570.00
- D. Pure Pashmina knitted cap Code 351-65472 Price: Rs. 6075.00 Size: Medium
- E. Pure Pashmina knitted glove Code 351-65429 Price: Rs. 1420.00
- F. Pure Pashmina single blanket Code: 366-65491 Price Rs. 12300.00 Size: 152x228cm
- G. Pure Pashmina knitted half jaali shawl Code: 351-65524 Price: Rs. 3525.00 Size: 70x100cm
- H. Pure Pashmina knitted jaali shawl Code: 351-65523 Price: Rs. 5740.00 Size: 60x200cm



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A Wild Earth - beautiful and clean

A local company sets the bar high for eco-friendly every day commodities

Text By PAT KAUBA

The mighty Himal: home to a wide variety of wildlife, flora and fauna has long been recognized in ancient Hindu and Tibetan texts for being abundant in its variety of herbs and remedies. Ancient sages (and many modern ones too) have dedicated their lives to understanding these heavenly gifts, grown in one of the world's highest and most unique environments. One small company has today taken these old teachings further, producing a variety of products to ease the stresses of everyday life: enter Wild Earth.

Started by American Carroll Dunham nearly 15 years ago, Wild Earth provides a range of herbal products for customers, from: heavenly soaps to relieving essential oils, pungent smudge sticks to therapeutic pillows, tantalizing shampoos to life-changing massage oils and so much more.

This small scale company, which today exports its products to countries like India, Japan, Europe and America uses:



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A SELECTION OF WILD EARTHS PRODUCTS

Wild Earths products are made using only the finest selection of organic materials and none of their items are tested on animals. Various product ranges are available such as: Tibetan Hotsprings, Yogi-Yogini, Wild Wares, Ayurvedic Formula, Aromatic Home Products and Wake Up. Within these product ranges include novel formulas such as:

Wild Wares Mongolian Mares Milk Soap—with rose and frankincense

Aromatic Home Products Pillow—with dream, passion, energy mixes
Yogi-Yogini Oils—with Sandalwood, Jasmine, Rose, Lavender
Himalayan Naturals Vegetable Soap Bar—with Mint, Lemongrass, Citronella
Wake Up Body Scrub—with Green Tea, Coffee
Ayurvedic Formula Eye Pillow—qualities of Vata (wind), Kapha (water/earth), Pitta (fire)

One small company has today taken these old teachings further, producing a variety of products to ease the stresses of everyday life: enter Wild Earth.

“Ayurvedic knowledge, Tibetan therapies and the wisdom of mountain healers”, when producing all its products.

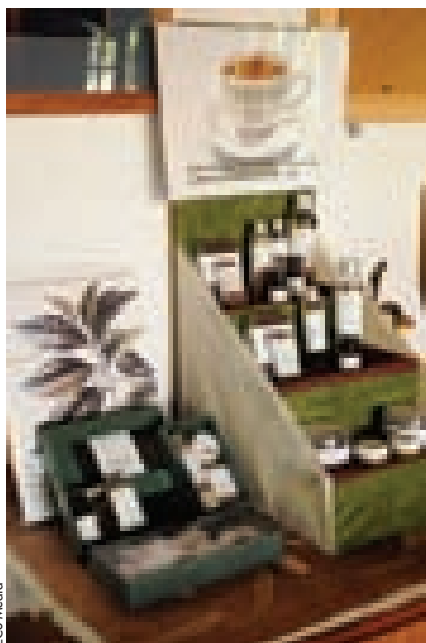
Wild Earth uses small-scale collection methods, where women in remote areas such as Humla and Mustang collect (mostly) wild herbs in ethical ways, without disturbing the grow areas. In turn this keeps the money earned where it is needed most, providing sustainable livelihoods for those on the peripheries of the country.

After collection, the herbs are dried and processed (by women), in their rural areas, as well as in Kathmandu at their training centre and factory, at the British Gorkha College in Basbari. On top of all the training women receive for the herbal collection, processing and production; Wild Earth also

trains women to be professional masseuses, arming them with more knowledge and skills to make a better future for themselves and their families. One of Wild Earth's core values is to create: “a working environment based on respect and dignity”.

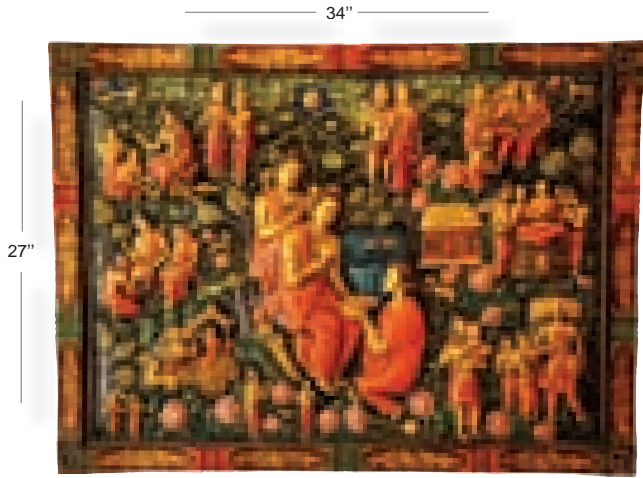
Even though Wild Earth products can be found in every supermarket and shop in town, they themselves keep one small showroom in Lazimpat, open now for four years. From here you can learn and see for yourself how the products are made and the ethics that are incorporated into the business. ■

Pat Kauba is a freelance storyteller. You can contact him at patkauba@gmail.com. For more information on these products check www.wildearthnepal.com.



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SHOPPING



Ramayana

Rs. 25000



Shiva Parvati

Rs. 25000



Padma Sambhav

Rs. 19000



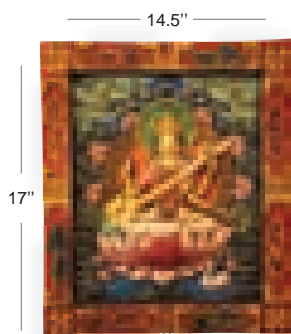
Kharchari Mandala

Rs. 38000



White Tara

Rs. 19000



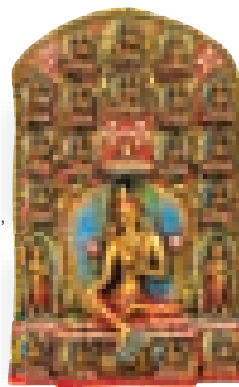
Saraswoti

Rs. 7500



Manjushree

Rs. 4500



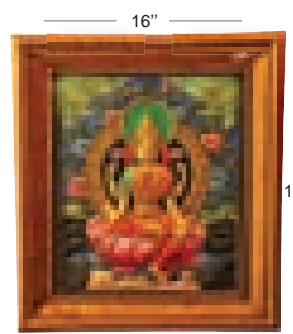
21 Tara

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Aparamitta

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Hands of fortune

Within the Souvenir Paper Craft store are innumerable creative innovations, all with a distinct Nepali soul.

Text By NIMMA ADHIKARI

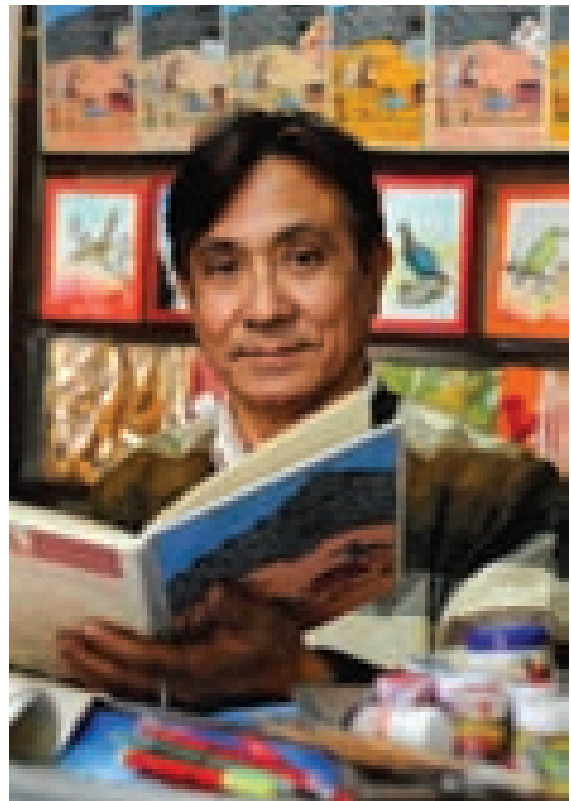
Neither a busy street nor a completely empty one, the sidewalk opposite the Hotel Himalaya in Kupondole lets you in to a small store - Souvenir Paper Craft. The store holds several items inside like paper crafts, books, calendars, *nanglo* paintings and photo holders; just everything that bears a Nepali soul. Every now and then a few tourists and locals stop by to scan the items on display. The owner, busy on his laptop, stops to assist his prospective customers.

The store does not look much different from others that are lined up displaying handmade notebooks, beautiful pictures of a mystic Nepal, decorative traditional masks – all souvenirs from one small dot on the globe. Few people know, and I unfortunately am not one of them, are aware of the store's specialty. Dheeraj Nath Amatya, the owner of the store, tells me and I simply listen. Amatya did not always have the paper craft store. He started with a stationery shop but his creative hands led him to the handicraft training. Two years of training was enough to encourage him to create something of his own and open up a store to display them.

His works of art include several books, calendars, wooden and *nanglo* paintings, and greeting cards. With the exception of paintings, all his creations are found on Nepali rice

paper. To date, he has already published four books. His first book "Barnamala" was a tutorial guide to learning alphabets for children and his other three books- Sapana, Sathiko Mel and Cave of Mitraban- are children's fiction. What's so special about the books? His last book, Cave of Mitraban, has been translated into 12 different languages and is in the process of being translated into nine more languages.

There is more to the story. All his books are hand printed on Nepali rice paper and the illustrations in the books are all done by him. His books are more popular internationally so much so that his book "Sapana" sold out in S. Korea. The moral aspects of his book like the issues of Dalits and the importance of democracy has been much appreciated in the literary circle. The man has another way of exposing Nepal in foreign lands besides his book. Unlike the calendar we are used to, he makes calendars, again, on lokta paper in Nepali and a foreign language. So far, calendars in fifteen different languages can be seen hanging on the walls of his store.



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Hand printed greeting cards and bird paintings from the book "Birds of Nepal" on wooden pieces and nanglos along with beautiful snow-capped mountains are the other specialties of Amatya. A strong work ethic guides Amatya, something that has got him to the stature he enjoys today. He creates art at home and recreates the joys at his store. Just as the clock strikes seven in the evening, the door to his shop closes and a light goes on in his home, as he creates one more wonder. ■

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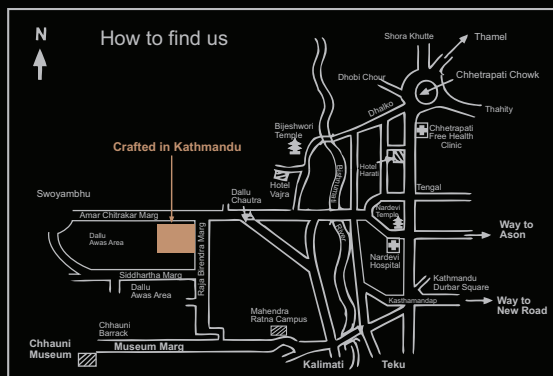
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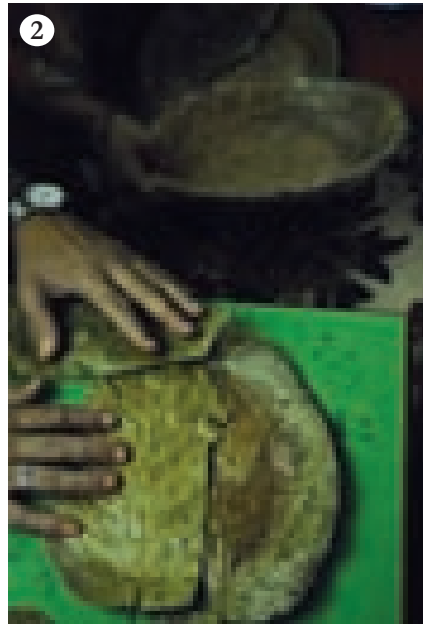


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• Soak the leaves in water overnight.



• Choose a few leaves and press some portions of it against something heavy to get the leaves with raised up boundaries (this will be for the sides of the plate).
• Dry the leaves.



• Take about 8 to 10 leaves and arrange them in a circular shape. Start with a leaf for the center-most portion and go on arrange the leaves, one overlapping the other, in the form of a plate.



• Once you get the rough idea of how to place the leaves, start stitching the leaves, one by one with the help of the bamboo stick pieces. Pierce into and out of the leaves, connecting leaf one with another and slowly adding more leaves to create a circular shape.

Eating green

For those of you willing to get your hands dirty and go a little eco-friendly, here are some simple steps on making leaf plates.

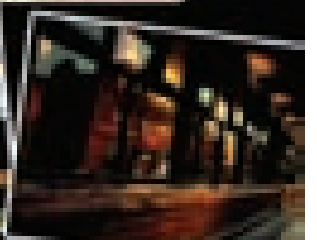
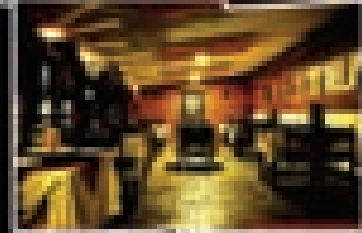
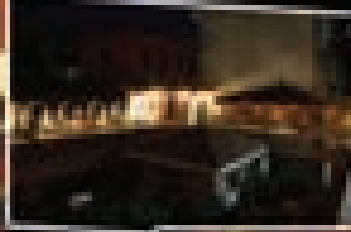
Text By YUKTA BAJRACHARYA, Photos By ECS MEDIA

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Fresh Sal (Shorea Robusta) leaves
- Thin bamboo stick pieces about an inch long



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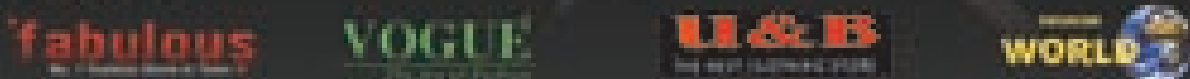
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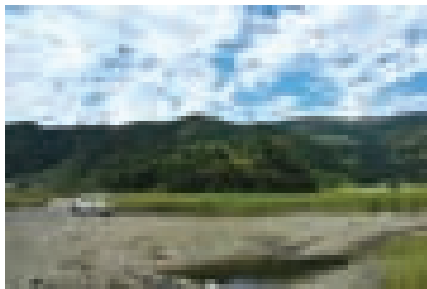
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TRAVEL



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Astam locals initiate home-stay program



Around two dozen homes in Astam village, Dhital of Kaksi district have launched the home-stay program in the

village which provide economical accommodation to foreign tourists and employment opportunities for local youth.

The villagers have started the home-stay service with the hope that the tourist flow will increase and it will help create employment opportunities within the village itself. The locals are hopeful that the initiative will turn Astam into a tourist village and help boost domestic tourism.

The homes in the village have added essential facilities and the capacity of home-stay can accommodate up to 75 guests.

Yeti Airlines hands over assistance check as their CSR

As a part of their Corporate Social Responsibility, Yeti Airlines donated NRs. 4 per flight ticket to the four social organizations: CWIN Nepal, The United Mission to Nepal (UMN), CVICT and Save the Children at an event organized on 7 November, Monday at Hotel Annapurna, Durbar Marg.

A cheque of Rs. 210,141 was handed over to the four social organizations as per their commitment for the period of 1 April to 30 Sept. 2011, the total amounting to Rs. 840,564.

Yeti Airlines has already presented a total financial assistance of Rs. 72,76,616 to organizations such as Tewa, OCCED, Maiti Nepal, Nepal Leprosy Relief, Nepal Glaucoma Eye Clinic (Tilganga), Sewa Kendra Leprosy, Helpless Children Welfare Mission, Itahari; Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre, Sangha; and Women for Human Rights, Kathmandu since its initiation in October 2006.

The total amount donated till date is Rs. 81, 17, 180. Besides this, they have also donated Rs. 10, 00, 000 to Nepal Ortho-

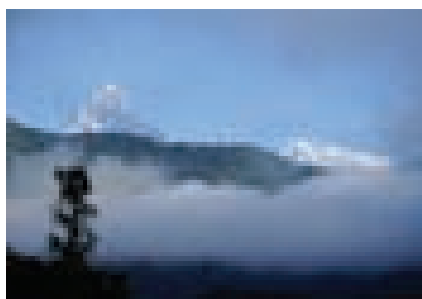
paedic Hospital, Jorpati last October for the construction of their building.

A Green Project in the far western region of Nepal has also been started since June 2010. For every passenger who flies on the Kathmandu-Dhangadhi-Kathmandu or Kathmandu-Nepalgunj-Kathmandu route, Rs. 20 is set aside on each one-way ticket and Rs 40 on every round trip ticket. The fund goes towards the expenses in planting appropriate tree saplings in several of the targeted community forests in the Far-Western region of Nepal in collaboration with local partners Raatika Tours and Travels (Dhangadhi GSA, Kailali District), Tiger Mountain Nepal, (Bardia District) and District Road Support Programme (DRSP, Baitadi District). Till date 66231 trees have been planted under this campaign.

Social discounts to disabled people (50%), Senior Citizens (25%), Child Discount (33.33%), and Infant (90%) in all the Jetstream-41 sectors like Bharatpur, Tumlingtar, Biratnagar, Janakpur, Bharatpur, Pokhara, Bhairahawa, Nepalgunj and Dhangadhi to and from Kathmandu are also allocated by Yeti Airlines.

Three Koreans missing in Annapurna

According to the Tourism Industry Division of Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, three Korean climbers have been missing since 18 October, Friday while trying to summit Mt Annapurna. The missing have been identified as Park Young-seok – the first Asian climber to reach the summit of all 8,000 meter peaks in the world, who has also reached both the poles and climbed the tallest peaks in all seven continents, along with Kang Ki-seok and Shin Dong-min, They were a part of a seven-member team that was trying to carve out a new route to the summit of Mt Annapurna.



Source: <http://www.taam.org.np/newsdetail/three-korean-climbers-missing-in-annapurna>

400 tourists airlifted to Kathmandu

400 stranded tourists were airlifted from Lukla and Surke on 6 November, Sunday. Out of the 53 flights operated by helicopter and fixed wing aircraft of private airlines along with a Skytruck of Nepal Army (NA), 18 flights were to Lamidanda and remaining to Kathmandu. It is estimated that there are still around 3,500 people including more than 2,000 tourists at the Lukla airport waiting to be airlifted to Kathmandu.

The scheduled Nepal Army (NA) chopper could not operate the flight due to bad weather. Mi-17, the biggest chopper in operation in Nepal, could not continue its flight to Lukla as it was unable to make its way back to Kathmandu and ended up landing in Rumjhatar instead.

Tourists along with their guides and porters have been stranded in Lukla airport for a week after inclement weather made it impossible to operate any flights.



Private sector's urge to elect a capable CEO

At an interaction organized by Journalist Association for Tourism (JAT) Nepal on 20 October, Thursday, tourism entrepreneurs urged the private sector representative in the governing board not to work under any pressure and discouraged politicization in the board. They suggested the governing board of Nepal Tourism Board to elect a capable chief executive officer (CEO) after the term of incumbent CEO Prachanda Man Shrestha expires in the end of November.

NTB's governing board has formed a three-member committee to select the new CEO. Most of the participants in the interaction suggested that it was high time the government reviewed the structure of the governing board to make representation of private sector in the governing board effective.

Source: <http://www.taam.org.np/newsdetail/bring-a-capable-ceo-in-ntb-pvt-sector>

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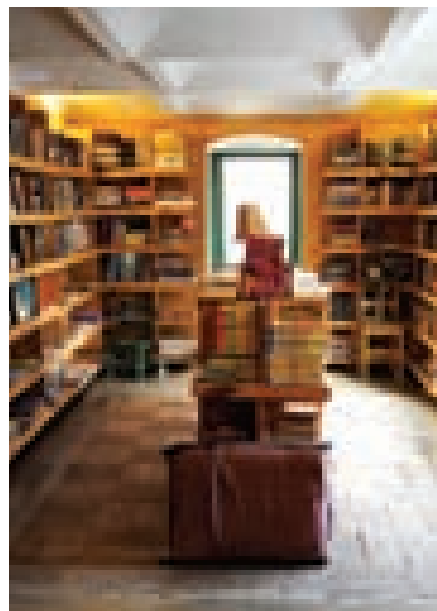
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Quaint little Quixote's Cove

Text By **SCILLA PRADHAN**



Kathmandu may not have a bookstore on every street, but we have a wide variety of outlets. From large buildings filled with books of every genre and type, to little second hand stores on the back streets of Thamel and even mini stalls laid out on sidewalks—books are abundant. Even then, Quixote's Cove (QC) in Jhamsikhel, is able to stand out from all other bookstores.

To begin with, the bookstore has a unique structure and a building with a rich history. QC's roadside entrance is located in between Café Hessed and New Orleans, but it is also accessible from inside New Orleans. Built in the early 1930s, the structure stood as a Catholic church for Jesuits and a meeting point for some of Nepals' revolutionaries advocating democracy.

Now running as a bookstore, one has to climb up the narrow and curved stairs to get to the room lined with bookshelves. The shop may be small but it offers a selection of fine literature for adults and children. Ranging from contemporary novels to classics, Quixote's is the place to go if you're trying to get your hands on a quality collection.

On a local level, the bookstore often features works by Nepali authors.

If you're looking for literary events, this is a place you must check out. Taking literature to the community, Quixote's fame lies in the events that it organizes.

Just about all of the latest releases are available so you can keep up to date on the literature in the market. And going one step beyond, QC also hosts events with authors so those interested have an opportunity to interact with writers and readers.

Run and founded by Suvani Singh, the beauty of the bookstore lies in all that it achieves beyond the walls of the store. If you're looking for literary events, this is a place you must check out. Taking literature to the community, Quixote's fame lies in the events that it organizes.

From writing workshops, competitions, book readings and much more, QC has really taken literature to the public instead of waiting for them to wander into a bookshop. These events not only offer a great chance for people

of all ages to come together, but combined with art and music they are fun for all.

It's safe to say that if QC is putting together something, a crowd will definitely show up. With a handful of successful events like the hunt for slam poets and more recently, the Kathmandu Literary Jatra held in September, this is one bookstore that is linking Nepal to South Asia and even as far as America. Through guests, writers, poets, and acclaimed authors, QC is turning Kathmandu into a literary hub.

Cozy and comfortable, it's everything a bookshop should be, except with Quixote's Cove, the friendship found in literature goes beyond the pages of a novel and extends to the larger community. Stop by the bookshop for a visit or browse their website qcbookshop.com.

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Mountaineers and mountains for Nepal

The President of NMA is a passionate mountaineer and ambassador for Nepal's snow white beauties.

Text By NIRAK KARKI

“I was born in Khumjung, in Solukhumbu which is at around 3800 metres above sea level,” I hear him say and I recall from the little trekking I’ve done that 3800m is high - higher than most people can go for they succumb to acute mountain sickness (AMS). But I forget whom I’m talking to, momentarily.

I’m sitting in the office of Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) talking to its President Mr Zimba Zangbu Sherpa - a true mountaineer, the bearer of a proud legacy of mountaineers – himself the third of a generation of mountaineers starting with his grandfather Dawa Tenzing Sherpa who had been the Sardar of the Sherpas from the time Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay climbed Mt. Everest.



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The list of places he has been to and the things he has done is impressive to say the least and to me it looks like a bucket list for any aspiring adventurer and mountaineer.

The list of places he has been to and the things he has done is impressive to say the least and to me it looks like a bucket list for any aspiring adventurer and mountaineer. Trekking from the age of 14 with his father he has successful ascents of most of the 7000m trekking mountains, three winter Everest campaigns, Mt. Blanc and many peaks in France around Charmonix and Sierre Chevelier, and all the trekking destinations in Nepal.

“My best climbs were climbing Ama Dablam in 1981 and the Mattro Horn in Switzerland,” says Mr Sherpa. “Two people I thank for constant support and motivation are John Louis Rattier and with Robert Rieffel. I was the first person from Nepal to receive mountain guide training in ENSA (Ecole Nationale de Ski et d’Alpinisme). This was in 1983.”

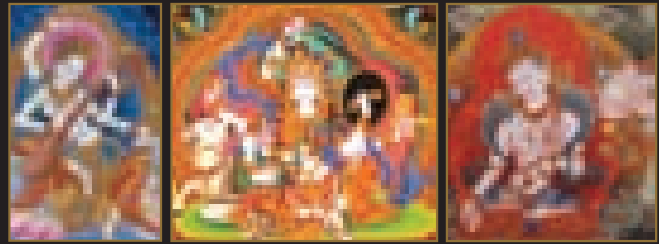
I’m fascinated, but there is more to Mr Sherpa’s stories than adventure and mountaineering. The NMA is Nepal’s national alpine association – a non-

profit, non-political NGO – in a way the caretaker of Nepal’s mountains. They facilitate and make mountaineering in Nepal possible - this includes logistics, training mountaineers and everything else. “The Himalayas are god’s gift to Nepal just the way petroleum is to the Middle Eastern countries’ says Mr. Zimba. “The difference is that backed by their government those countries have managed to capitalize on it. The mountains now are under threat and there have been no efforts from the government for real mountain conservation. We must protect Himalayan beauty for without it Nepal, wouldn’t be what it is.’ The passionate mountaineer also helped strengthen diplomatic ties with Mongolia when he climbed their highest peak Mt. Khuiten along with the Mongolian President.

It makes sense, who better than mountaineers to understand what endangers the mountains and to improve ties between two lands using its tallest ambassadors.



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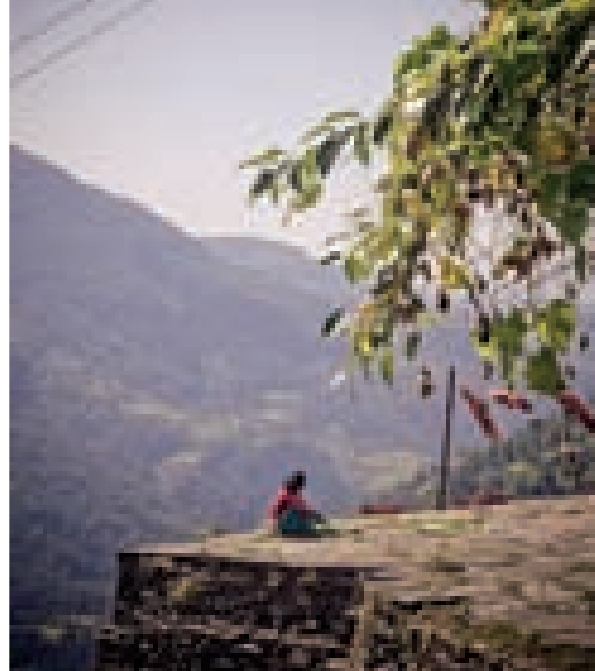
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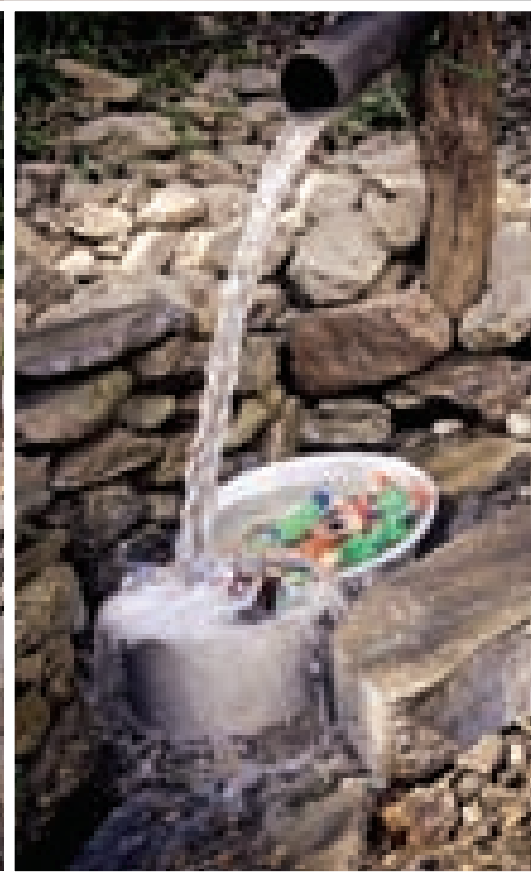
A newbie hiker and photography enthusiast shares the story of his trek up to Ghandruk, an old Gurung village on the scenic Annapurna Base Camp trail.

Text & Photos By SURAJ RATNA SHAKYA



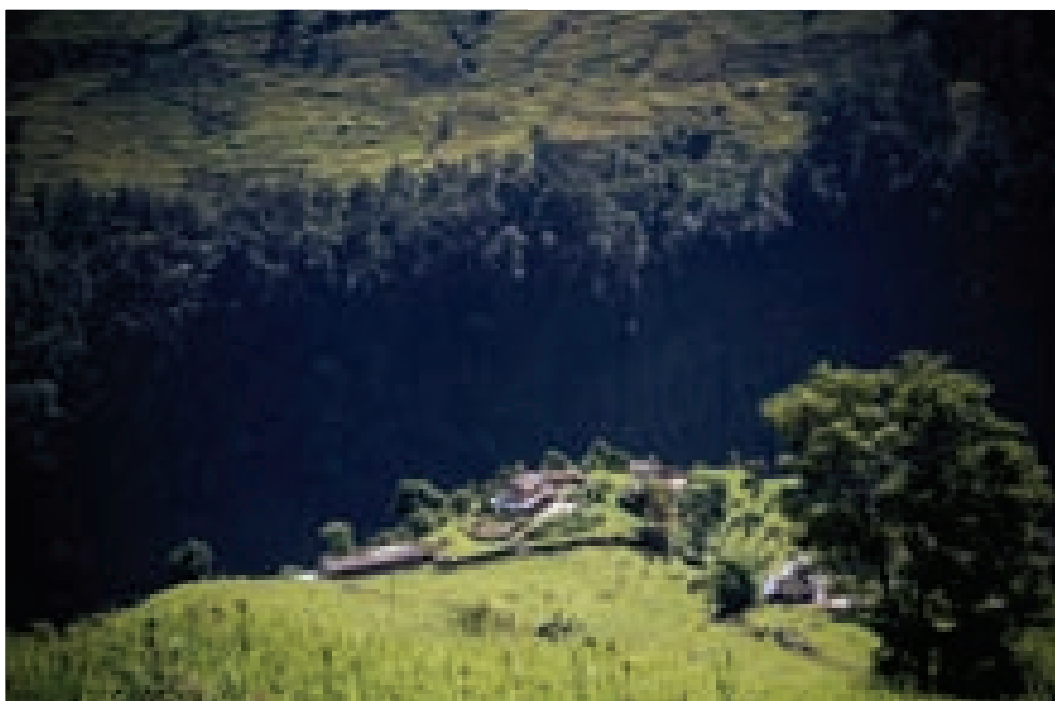
“So this dashain, we trek to Ghandruk,” confirmed my friend on the phone. I had always wanted to trek to Ghandruk, more so after my sister reached there a few months before me. The whole trek started to take shape once we started shopping in Thamel for our trekking gear. For some reason, every shopkeeper would assume we were trekking further up to Annapurna Base Camp (ABC), we were not but even the shorter Ghandruk was as challenging for us.

The trip began in Pokhara, from where we took a taxi to Nayapul. A crowd of tourists had already gathered to trek either to Ghorepani, ABC or



Ghandruk. After lunch at around 11 AM, we started heading towards our first stop, Birethanti. From there on our real trek started. Hiking along the riverbank, having fun, pointless conversations and stopping intermittently for a drink made it feel easy at first. The habitual comfort of commuting on a motorcycle in the city slowly started taking its toll on me as we made our way to Syauli Bazar. I started to question my decision about carrying along a tripod for my camera as the load of bag dragged me down as we ascended towards Kilyu and Kimche. Just then, as each of us complained about the weight of our bags, a porter passed carrying a huge package labeled “refrigerator” on his back!

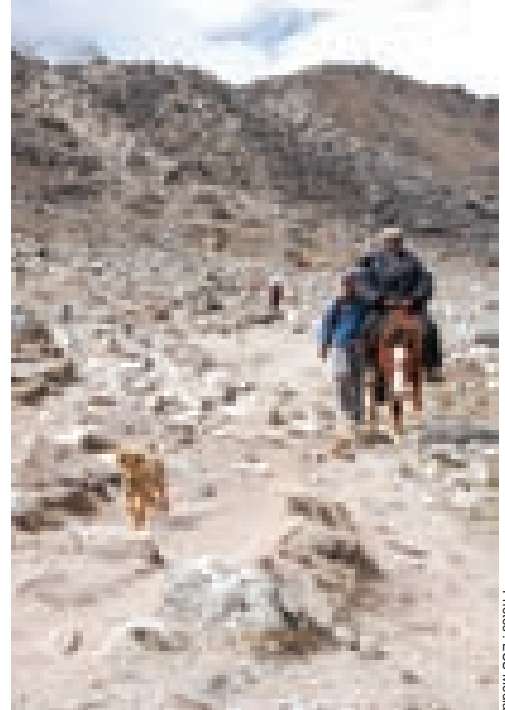
Our troubles were worthwhile. The trail towards Ghandruk is very scenic and offers jaw-dropping, great views of Annapurna and Macchapuchhre peaks. After 6 hours, we were resting at Annapurna View Hotel in Ghandruk and as the name suggested, Annapurna lay right before us, basking us in its pristine glory. The next morning, we woke up early, huddling in the cold terrace, joining many other trekkers positioned similarly with their cameras to catch the sun as it rose over the Himalayas. Witnessing the magical sunrise, we started our trek down from Ghandruk around eight, reaching Nayapul by three in the afternoon. Overall, the trek was a learning experience. The amazing views, the scenic trail and hospitable locals make Ghandruk a definite recommendation for a superb two-day hike. ■



Following adventure

Text By NIMMA ADHIKARI

The heart calls for wilderness and the mind calls for, peace? However, there is a perfect way to attain both. Trekking—to the least explored and most beautiful regions of Nepal—is the best way to rejuvenate your senses. Taking care of a basic checklist before you head out will ensure you have a hassle free, good time.



Photos: ECS Media

1 A Trekkers' Information Management System (TIMS) and/or Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) permits are required for foreign trekkers depending on where they are trekking. These permits can be obtained from Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal (TAAN) and government registered trekking companies. A special permission from the Department of Immigration is required if you need to trek into restricted territories. Ram Pahari, the owner of Himalaya Journey Treks and Expedition, says that the policy for TIMS and ACAP permits for trekking was issued in 2008 to put an end to illegal trekking. The permit also helps in case of lost trekkers and to ensure trekkers' safety. The law also requires trekkers to hire a porter/guide. Registered trekking companies would be best at assigning you with an experienced one.

2 With its unique topography, there are numerous trekking destinations in Nepal. Some of the most popular trekking destinations are trails in the Everest, Annapurna, Langtang and Manaslu region.

However, if you fancy yourself more adventurer, do try out the mother of all trekking trails, the Great Himalaya Trail, which stretches 1700 km along the length of Nepal. Amongst other attractions, the trail boasts views of eight of the fourteen highest mountains in the world. (For more information, read "The Great Himalaya Trail" by Don Messerschmidt, ECS Nepal, October 2011.)

3 Be extra careful while packing for a trek. A comfortable rucksack, a sleeping bag, comfortable and durable walking shoes, loose fitting lightweight trousers, a parka, several pairs of warm socks, thermal inner-wears, woolen clothes, gloves and a hat are essential. Other items to check for are a torch and batteries, matches/lighter, water bottle, toiletries, towel and water purifying tablets. Don't forget to pack a basic trekker's medicine kit and make sure that it has anti-diarrhea and anti-nausea drugs, antihistamine, decongestant, Dioma for altitude sickness, eye drops and other essential antibiotics. Take a spare bag to collect and bring down the as much waste as possible, for instance plastics.

4 Trekking can require 5-7 hours of walking. Any person intending to go on a trek should be willing enough to put aside the physical trauma for the adventure. People should drink more water when they reach higher altitude, says Hari Maharjan, a trekking enthusiast and professional photographer. He adds that some people experience altitude sickness quicker than others with the the most telling symptoms being vomiting, wooziness, swelling of hands, irregular breathing and nausea. Any of these symptoms is a sign for the trekker head back to lower climes. Trekkers should also evaluate their own fitness; it's a good idea to start training for your trek a few weeks in advance.

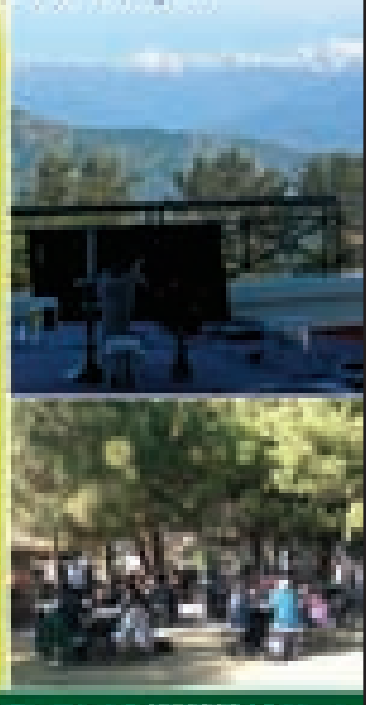
5 Experts recommend that you choose the time for trekking wisely. June through August marks the monsoon season and the trails become muddy, making it impossible to trek safely. October to November is the season most trekkers enjoy. Routes are the busiest in this time of the year. However, if you want to see the beautiful rhododendron forests at its best then the last week of March to the first week of April is good, which can be extended to the end of May.

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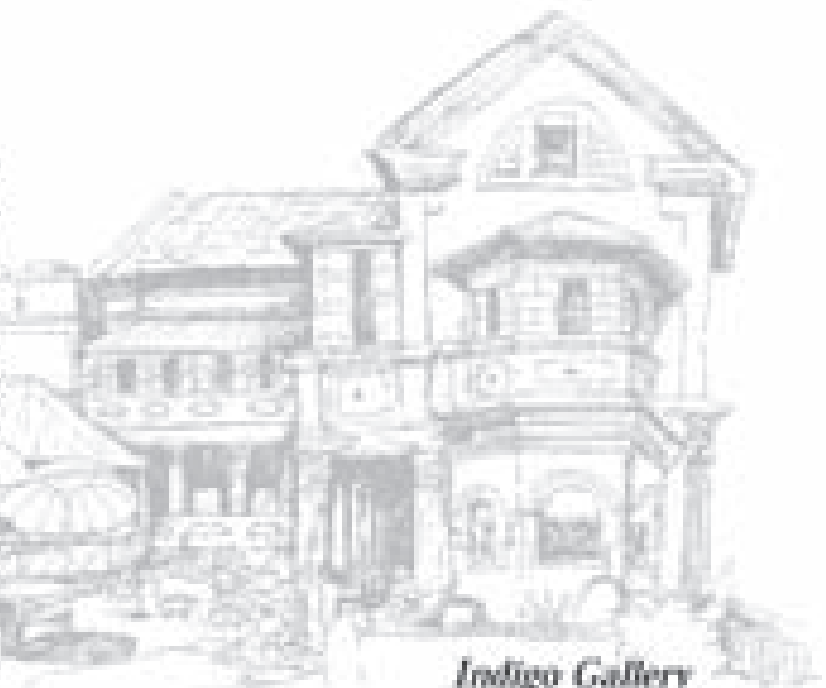
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Many excellent staff are registered with us, including cooks, guards, gardeners, maids and drivers. Our list is constantly updated. Interviews are carried at our office to help resolve language problems between our clients and the staff. If you are looking for efficient and reliable staff, please come and discuss your requirements with us and don't forget to register your staff with us before you leave.

INTERVIEW FEE: Rs. 1,500 **PLACEMENT FEE:** Rs. 2,500



NEPALI LANGUAGE CLASS FOR FOREIGNERS

ECS Services has been supporting foreigners to learn the Nepali Language (speaking, reading and writing) for many years. If you would like to learn or improve your Nepali vocabulary, please call us. Group or individual classes are available.

BASIC ENGLISH READING & WRITING

FOR HOUSEHOLD STAFF

Our clients and their staff often face problems when not communicating face to face. If your staff could read and write memos or notes, things could be easier for you. We present this reading and writing course that will enable your household staff to read notes/memos, write simple sentences, and take telephone messages. This will also help your staff to get employed after you leave. This is a two months course, 5 days a week, one hour a day. **FEE:** Rs. 8,000

BASIC ENGLISH LANGUAGE

FOR HOUSEHOLD STAFF

Our English class for household staff enables them to communicate with you in simple English. Language structures are taught along with vocabulary that is related to household matters (for daily use). Oral communication skills will be emphasized in this course rather than reading and writing skills. This is a one month course, 5 days week, one hour a day. **FEE:** Rs. 4,000

NEPALI LANGUAGE CD

The revised ECS Nepali language CD is now available. It gives you the chance not only to listen but also to practice your Nepali along with the CD. We feel that this improved CD will help you learn the Nepali language more effectively. A booklet comes with the CD. **PRICE:** Rs. 999 (including booklet)

FOOD HANDLING & HYGIENE

FOR HOUSEHOLD STAFF

ECS is organizing food handling and hygiene course for your household staff. If you are unsure whether your staff is aware about hygiene then this is the ideal course. This hands-on class includes daily hygiene, importance of hand washing and preparation of fruits and vegetables. We will teach them the proper way of cleaning - tables, windows, kitchen floor and bathroom. We will also teach them how to take care of a refrigerator. We will discuss how illness is spread and why the corner and behind the door is important to clean. We intend this course to help your staff to clean the house properly. Two days course, 1p.m. to 5p.m. **VENUE:** Maharajgunj

SPECIAL COOKING

FOR HOUSEHOLD STAFF

ECS cooking course is an opportunity for your maid or cook to improve his/her cooking skills. At the end of this course, participants will be able to work as a cook independently and can even organize a small party. The course content includes information on different food items for practical cooking and will also make them aware about kitchen hygiene. We teach them how to prepare Indian, Chinese and continental items, as well as basic Western cooking techniques like simmer, sauté, etc. We will also discuss how to organize a kitchen, to prepare menus, cutting techniques, steps for serving food during small and big parties. We will also teach them how to keep food and the kitchen hygienically clean. This course helps them improve their skills so your staff will not only serve you better while you are here, but they will find it easier to find a job when you leave. Duration of course: 6 weeks, five days a week and two hours a day. **VENUE:** Maharajgunj **FEE:** Rs.15,000

CHRISTMAS COOKING

Participants will be able to cook the following items.

1. Stuffed roast chicken with gravy
2. Bake sweet potato mash
3. Christmas sugar cookies
4. Stuffed mushrooms
5. Whole cauliflower with avocado sauce

DATE: 18th December 2011

TIME: 1.00 pm to 5.00 pm

VENUE: Maharajgunj

FEE: Rs. 1,200

MEXICAN COOKING

Participants will be able to cook the following items.

1. Chicken toco pie
2. Mexican tomato rice
3. Spicy vegetable casserole
4. Chicken breast cream tomato sauce
5. Avocado bean salad

DATE: 29th January 2012

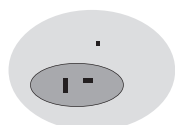
TIME: 1.00 pm to 5.00 pm

VENUE: Maharajgunj

FEE: Rs. 1,200

ECS

Maharajgunj, Kathmandu
Phone: 442.6439/98510.07.900
ecs@infoclub.com.np or
services@ecs.com.np
Office Hour:
11:00am to 3:00pm
(Monday through Friday)



ECS Services offers staff employment services (cooks, watchmen, gardeners, housemaids and drivers); courses for household staff (cooking and health); Nepali language for expatriates and English language for household staff. We hope that these services provided by ECS help make your life more comfortable.

Starry Night BBQ



SHANGRI-LA
KATHMANDU

MOUTH WATERING BARBECUES

Every Friday at Shambala Garden,
7 p.m. onwards

Enjoy a myriad of succulent morsel of meats and vegetables along with delectable desserts with Family, Friends and Beloved at the Shangri-La Hotel

Live Performance **Ciney Gurung**

Enjoy live music that awakens your soul



NRs. 1299^{*/-} per person
(Inclusive of a Welcome Drink)

* The above rate is inclusive of 10% Service Charge & 13% VAT

For Reservation: Ph: 4412999,
Lazimpat, Kathmandu
Email: salesmgr@hotelshangrila.com
www.hotelshangrila.com

Restaurant & Bars



CHINESE CUISINE

THE GHANGRI CAFÉ

Pulchowk Lalitpur
Tel: 5528703
Chicken Sumai Mo:Mo Rs.70
Cordeu Blue Mutton Rs.150

CAFÉ DU TEMPLE

Patan Durbar Square
Tel: 5527127
Spaghetti Bolognese Rs. 175
Temple Special Chicken Rs. 225
Nepali Style Grilled Fish Rs. 250

ITALIAN RESTAURANT OLIVE GARDEN

Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat
Tel: 441818
Italian Cuisine
Gourmet Trout Rs. 800
Dinner 6:30pm onwards

FIRE AND ICE

Pizzeria
Thamel,
Tel: 4250210
Pizza's Spaghetti
Ice Creams

THAI CUISINE YING YANG RESTAURANT

Thamel, 4701510
Prawn Tempura-Rs 595
Chicken Satay- Rs 385

THIRD EYE RESTAURANT

Thamel, 4260289
Wrapped Prawn- Rs 595
Potato Cush Bara with
Peanut sauce -Rs 145

JAPANESE AND KOREAN CUISINE

KOTO RESTAURANT

Durbar Marg
Sakeyaki Rs. 290
Donburi Rs. 310
Tempura Rs. 260

FRENCH CUISINE

DELICES DE FRANCE RESTAURANT

Thamel
Tel.4260326
Chicken Sandeko
Salad: Rs 290/-
Salmon with cream &
Wine Sauce: Rs 760/-
Mediterranean
Platter: Rs 580

CONTINENTAL CUISINE

TFC

Radisson Hotel
Lazimpat, Tel: 4411818
Congi Lamb Rs. 600
Seasame
Chicken Rs 500
Fillet Mignon Rs. 550

CHEZ CAROLINE RES- TAURANT

Mediterranean and French
food
Babar Mahal Revisited
Tel: 4263070 / 4264187
Salad Caroline Rs. 780
Pepper steak Rs. 785
Lamb chop Rs. 1295

CAFÉ DE PATAN

Patan Mangalbarzar

Tel: 5537599

BlueBird Food Court

Tel: 4228833,

Ext. no. 4476

Newari Samay

With Chicken Rs.175

Nepali Thali Rs. 190

With Buff Rs.150

COURTYARD RESTAURANT

Kamaladi
Tel: 4253056
Roasted Chicken Rs.195
Chicken Steak Rs.190
Mix Pizza Rs.220

RICE & BOWL RESTAURANT

Tripureswar
Tel: 4251678
Hakka Prawn Rs.550
Jambo Prawn Special
sauce Rs.950

WALTER'S RESTAURANT AND BAR

(Continental Gourmet)
BabarMahal Revisited
Tel: 4253337
Fried Salmon
With Cumin Rs. 850
Sea Food
Platter Rs. 950
Creper A La Goat
Cheese Rs. 550

OR2K

Thamel
Tel: 4422097
Mint Lemonade Rs. 70
Stuffed Vegetable
Combination Rs. 290
OR2K Combo

NANGLO BAKERY CAFÉ

BAKERY CAFÉ NEW BANESHWOR

Tel: 4488528
Chicken sizzler Rs 250
Chicken mo mo Rs 120
Taglatella at sungi Rs 190

BAKERY CAFÉ PULCHOCK

Tel: 5010110
Buffet set lunch Rs 310
Chicken barbeque Rs 195

C: Mo mo Chicken Rs 130

BAKERY CAFÉ BOUD- DHA

Nepali lunch set Rs 240
Club sandwich Rs 225
Bandel tareko /
sandeko Rs 205

BAKERY CAFÉ TEKU

Tel: 4265987

Margeritta Pizza Rs 165

Chicken Burger Rs145
Grilled fish
with rice Rs 250

BAKERY CAFÉ TINDHARA

Fpaghetti alla
bolognes Rs 190
Masala dosa Rs 105
Mutton Mo mo Rs 160

Platter Rs. 310
Beautiful Antipasti
Platter Rs. 180

STATION BBQ

Jhamsikhel 552208
Shredded pork with
spring onion-500
Pork Chop-450
Burrito-350
Spicy whole Fish-700

NEPALI AND NEWARI CUISINE

BHUMI RESTRO LOUNGE

Lazimpat
Tel: 4412193
Mix Bara: Rs. 90
Mix Chatamari: Rs.90
Choyela : Rs.100

BAITHAK

Babar Mahal Revisited
BabarMahal
Tel: 4267346
Feast Of Rana Maharaja
Normal Menu Rs. 1040
Royal Menu Rs. 1430
Delux Menu Rs. 1595

UTSAV

Durbarmarg
Tel: 4430170
Samay Bajji Rs. 450
Chicken Bara Rs. 260
Chicken Chatamari
Rs. 310

CAFÉ & BAKERY

aCube Cafe
Sanepa, Lalitpur
9841218773
Safallay- Rs 80
Newari Khaja Set- Rs 80
Chicken tandori- Rs 300

Bu Keba The Organic Village

Bakhundole, Lalitpur
5524368

THE EVEREST HOTEL

New Baneshwor, Kathmandu, Tel: 01 4780100

The Café- Lobby Level Coffee Shop

Executive Buffet Lunch:
Nrs 1100
Executive Buffet Dinner:
Nrs 1200
Saturday Brunch: Nrs 1200
Nasi Goreng: Nrs 650
Grilled Prawns: Nrs 1200
Crumb Fried Stuffed Mush-
rooms: Nrs 375

Far Pavilion Roof Top Indian Restaurant

Kakori Kabab: Nrs 725
Chandi Chowk Tikki: Nrs
525
Gosht Ki Biryani: Nrs 725

Mandarin Roof Top Chinese Restaurant

Crispy Fried salt & pepper
Duck: Nrs 995
Lobster in Mushroom & wine
sauce: Nrs 2150
Multi Flavoured shredded
Chicken: Nrs 625
Tibetan Gyakok (Veg or Non
Veg)
(Minimum order for 2 persons):
Nrs 1400

Bugles and Tigers Roof Top Gurkha Bar

Kama Kazi: Nrs 520
Flatliner: Nrs 595
Beer (Domestic): Nrs 475

Applicable taxes extra

Buck wheat Pan Cake0-
Rs 280
Mediterrain Platter- Rs
480

CAFÉ CHEENO

Krishna Galli
Tel: 2210423
Paneer Skewer Rs.475
Salmon Fillet Rs.875
Fish and Chips Rs. 475
Chicken Burger Rs. 250
Home made Veg/
Non-Veg lasagna Rs.

275/350

DHOKAIMA CAFE

Patan Dhoka
5522113
Grilled Australian Steak
Rs.1099
Grilled Shilake Mush-
room Rs. 359

BAR AND LOUNGES

ABSOLUTE BAR

Hotel Narayani
Complex, Pulchowk
Tel: 5521408

HYATT REGENCY KATHMANDU

Taragon, Boudha, Tel: 4491234

ROX RESTAURANT

Melting Chocolate:
NRs 750
Smoked Trout & Salmon
Cutlet: NRs 690
Prawn and Salmon Risotto:
NRs 1050
Skewers: NRs 1150-1450

THE CAFE

Pepper Steak:
NRs 800
Arabic Chicken Shishta-
wouk:
NRs 800
Japanese Pork Chop:
NRs 800

PLAYGROUND OF THE BOLD & BEAUTIFUL



SOALTEE CROWNE PLAZA

Tahachal, Kathmandu, Nepal

INDIAN

Kakori
Tel: 4273999 Extn: 6555
Kakori Seekh Rs. 750
Raan E Awadh Rs. 1575
Doodhiya Paneer Rs. 575
Lehsni Methi
Chilgoza Rs. 775

ITALIAN

Alfresco
Tel: 4273999 Ext. 6123
Norwegian Salmon
Rs. 1195
Australian Lamb Cutlet
Rs.1195

Pizzas Rs.395
Chocolate surprise Rs.395

CAFÉ

Garden terrace
Tel: 4273999 Ext. 6152
Prawn and Salmon
Fantasia Rs.1295
Chicken Chutney
Roll Rs. 550
Grilled Churrasco Steak
Rs. 695
Bhujure Rs. 595

BAR

Rodi Bar
Tel: 4273999 Ext. 6224

Red label Rs. 450 per peg
Beer Rs. 350
Black Label
Rs. 1000 per peg

CHINESE

China Garden
Tel: 4273999 Ext. 6159
Corn Cream Rs. 400
Gin Chicken Rs. 575
Chicken Lung Fung Soup
Rs. 275
Soya Wine Chilli Pomfret
Rs. 1050
Sapo Chicken Rs. 600
Honey Pork Ribs Rs. 575

Bandel Tareko Rs. 300.00
Chicken Chowela Rs.
300.00

ATTIC BAR

Tejbbawan, Lazimpat
4442615
Bacon Potato Roll- Rs 200
Chicken Wings with Hot
Garlic Sauce Rs 350

BOURBON ROOM RESTRO BAR

Durbamarg,
Tel: 4441703
Nachos Grande Rs. 400
Grilled Pork Chops Rs. 400
Hot and Spicy Pizza Rs. 200

CINNAMON GRILL LOUNGE

Jhamsikhel
Tel: 5521339
Chicken Rag Out Rs. 350
Grilled Pork Chop Rs. 425
Grilled Chicken Parmesan
Rs. 380

DEGGA RESTO LOUNGE

Kumaripati, 5008679
Mutton Fokso Tareko-Rs 90
Chicken Egg Bara- Rs 110

CAFE BROWN SUGAR

Jhamsikhel (Opposite British
School)
Tel: 5543003
Nepali authentic thali
Jagi bhat delight

CAFEREENA

Durbar Marg
Tel: 4231313
Som tom thai- 175
Kambo Chee- 365

EATEMPUS THE EATING LOUNGE AND BAR

Anamnagar, 4221037
All kinds of BBQ- Indian
Continental and Nepali
ET Hot Wings and Mo: Mo

FUNKY BUDDHA RESTAURANT & BAR

Thamel
Tel: 47000919
Funky special local platter
Rs. 395
Padthi- Rs. 225 to 350

FOOD BAZAAR

Thamel, Kathmandu
Newari Khaja (Non veg)-
Rs.120, Beef Sizzler- Rs.200
Chicken Tikka Kabab- Rs.250

GARDEN COURT RESTAURANT AND BAR

Tukuchamarga Gairidhara,
Kathmandu 4429207
Chicken Houro as one of the
speciality

HIMALAYAN CAFÉ

Boudha 6, Kathmandu
Chicken Biryani Rs.330
Cheese Pizza Rs.220
Veg Sandwich Rs. 140

HIMALAYAN JAVA

Thamel, Contact:4253956
Mixed Pizza: Rs. 285
Chicken Pasta: Rs. 180
Chicken Fajita: Rs. 160

JATRA

Thamel, Tel: 4700043
Sukuti Ko Achar Rs. 110
Sandwich Steak &
Cheese Rs. 360
Tenderloin Steak Rs. 220

K-TOO BEER

Thamel,
Tel No:4250440
Steaks365-955, Mexican
Chicken Fagita 440,
Apple Momo 220

KILROY'S OF KATHMANDU

Thapathali
Tel No:4250440
Garlic + Ginger Sauteed
Prawns

MANNY'S EATERY AND TAPAS BAR

Jawalakhel

Tel: 5536919
Fried calamai with basil
aioli Rs 399
Spicy buffalo wings
Rs 399

MOKSH LIVE RESTAURANT & BAR

Jhamsikhel
Tel: 5528362
Duck Breast Rs 650
Rainbow Trout Rs 550

NAMOBUDDHA RESTAURANT

Kavre, 9851106802
shaitan served with
garden fresh vegetables
and deep fried kalamari
- Rs 900

PICASSO "ARTISTE DE LA CUISINE"

Jawalakhel, 5009076
BBQ Pork - Rs 650
Seafood Platter - Rs 800

TAMARIND RESTRO AND BAR

Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur
Prawn In hot Bean Sauce
Rs. 450
Pork Chop Rs 425
Chicken Satay Rs. 275

THAMEL HOUSE RESTAURANT

Thamel
Tel: 4410388
Newari set Rs 850
Nepali set Rs 1000
Bara Special Rs 140

THE CORNER BAR

Radisson Hotel
Lazimpat Tel: 4411818

ZAIKA NEPALI CUISINE

Thamel
Tel: 4700972
Chicken Pizza Rs 270
Ham and cheese sanswich
Rs120

The details provided in the listings are tentative and are subject to change

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How to Pay?

Once the food is delivered, you need to pay to our delivery boy in cash. No Debit/Credit card or Online payment is required but we'll add these facilities also in near future for your convenience.

- Our Price: Ditto restaurant table menu price
- Approx. Delivery Time: 45 Min*
- Delivery Charge: Free on order above Rs. 500 within 2Km from selected restaurant*
- Service hour: 11:00 AM to 8:00 PM

*Conditions Apply

www.foodmandu.com

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ROYAL MOUNTAIN TRAVEL



NEPAL

RMT is one of Nepal's leading tour operators, specializing in a wide variety of tours, treks and mountaineering expeditions in Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan.



RMT will assist in tailoring the itineraries to suit your interests, abilities and time constraints and take care of every aspect of your trip from airport transfers and hotels to flight tickets, guides, permits and equipment - just tell us where and when you want to go and for how long. In addition to offering permits and ticket made trips at any time, we also offer fixed group departures of most popular tours and treks.



TIBET

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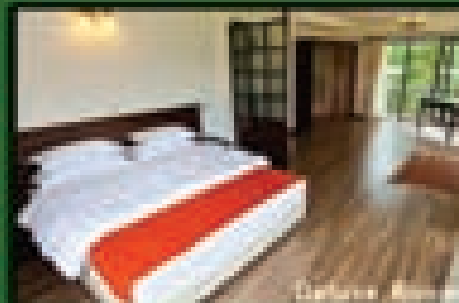
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Mustang's Chyungsi Rangchung Cave Monastery

Text By JOE WHITTINGTON, Guest Essayist

While trekking in upper Mustang recently, Joe Whittington (our guest essayist), with four other trekkers and a guide, set off to see the remarkable Chyungsi Rangchung Cave Monastery (Gompa). The route to the cave took them away from the main trail between Syangbochen and Samar villages. What they saw at the cave was remarkable... Afterward they climbed steeply up out of the canyon to rejoin the main trail and their companions at Samar. -DM

On Saturday, four other trekkers and I set off with Santosh, our guide, to see the Chyungsi Gompa. As the rest of our group walked the main trail to Samar (our night stop), we descended into a narrow canyon created by the Syangbochen Khola (river). All around us were high sandstone walls and towering pillars. Like other areas in Mustang, the soft sandstone is easily dug out to create caves, and many of these were in evidence though they did not appear to have been occupied recently. Higher up were numerous Himalayan Griffon nests, identifiable by the white droppings below the entrances. A few Griffons circled above the canyon, but we saw no activity at the nests. (Nesting season is late winter to early spring, with eggs typically laid in January and hatched in March.)

Near the bottom of the canyon we ascended a steep trail up to the right (west) to access the Rangchung Cave. The area is festooned with multiple strings of prayer flags. The rushing stream provided a pleasant sound as we climbed the many stone steps to the cave. The cave opening is mostly closed off by walls of stacked reddish stone. The caretaker has a garden near the entrance planted with corn, beans, and squash and flowers. There is also a friendly Tibetan mastiff.

The caretaker appeared to be mute, but Santosh was able to communicate with him in a form of sign language. He seemed happy to have visitors, and rupees in the donation box clearly perked him up. Two of our group gave him a scarf and a pair of gloves which also pleased him.

We entered the cave on small steps cut/worn into the stone. It was very dusty, dark, and steep. You could definitely take a tumble with a misstep. We ascended up past rock formations and circled around to the right. There are mani (prayer) inscriptions carved on the walls, some painted tankas (scroll paintings), and face-like projections stained



black from handprints. The rock formations resemble stalagmites and stalactites. There are also several small chortens made of clay with white painted features, and a large clay panel with tens of imbedded gold images.

On a wooden shelf, photos of the Sakya Trizin are displayed, plus the following hand-printed statement:

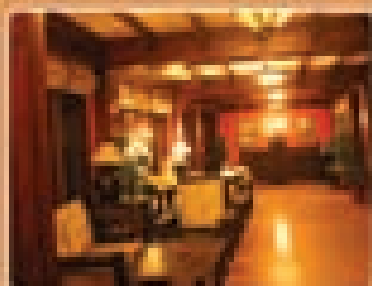
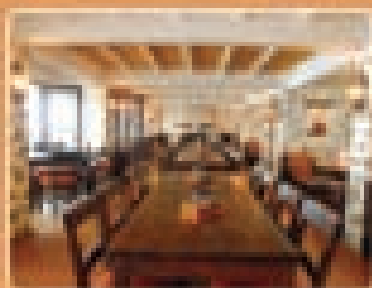
**Do nothing harmful,
Do only what is good
Discipline your own mind.
This is the Teaching of the Buddha.
"Sarvamangha Lam"**

Sarva Mangalam is a Sanskrit mantra meaning "Happiness to Everyone" and

is meant to be chanted in six directions: north, south, east, west, nadir and zenith.

Other features of the cave include a table of butter lamps, the caretaker's sleeping mat and kitchen area, and a small room that the caretaker (proudly) opened up to show us many brass bowls, lamps, and other ritual items, prayer wheels, and lots of prayer flags. ■

Joe Whittington runs Sahale Travels & Trekking of Portland, Oregon USA (www.sahaletravel.com) and was co-leader of the trek to Mustang described on page __. Joe may be contacted at joe@sahaletravel.com. Readers wishing to submit guest essays for Spilled Ink may send them to don.editor@gmail.com.



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The Valley Rim

Text By ANIL CHITRAKAR



EOS Media

As the rains have helped clear the dirty sky of dust and smoke in post monsoon Kathmandu, one should go to the roof top and look around the Kathmandu valley. The skyline is very impressive and green. These hills that surround the valley are the source of water for the numerous settlements and a habitat for unique birds, plants and animals. In ancient times, the four prominent peaks that marked the key vantage points around the valley were called Sipucho (shivapuri) to the north, Jamacho (above Nagarjun hill) to the north-west, Dhilacho (Chandragiri) to the south-west, and Pucho (Pulchowki) to the south. Cho in Newari means “tip” or point and pu-cho for example would literally mean the tip with ice, frost or snow. As with everything else in Nepal these high points are also the abode of the gods, saints and the sacred places of worship.

These summits are all accessible by foot trails or mountain bikes and in the case of Phulchowki, also accessible by

jeep. The residents of the valley are encouraged to scale these heights on particular days of the year. The view of the valley is quite something and a hike is recommended to anyone and at all times of the year. If it is good for the soul, it is definitely good for the legs, heart, belly and muscles. Recent event also require that some safety precautions be taken.

A closer look at the skyline will also reveal the CHAR BHANJYANG (four passes). These distinct depressions in the skyline have played a very critical function for all movement in and out of the valley today and throughout history. To the north, for example, is Kakani and the main trade route to Tibet that ensured prosperity for the valley residents for centuries. This route passing through valleys that lead to Kirung, through Nuwakot, was also the route followed by the Nepalis army to wage war on Tibet and in 1792, the route the Chinese army followed towards Kathmandu. The peace treaty to end the Nepal-China-Tibet

war was signed on the banks of the Betrawadi, just north of Kakani.

It was through the small villages of Chitlang and Markhu, just below the Chandragiri peak, from where all the European furnitures, glasses, mirrors, chandeliers, and cars were carried over into the valley to decorate the Rana Palaces until the building of the first highway in the 1950s.

To appreciate what it must have been for the Vipaswi Buddha to plant the lotus seed from Jamacho on the full moon day of Chaitra, for Manjushree to look down at Swayambhu and decide to drain the lake to start human settlements, or for the ambitious King of Gorkha, Prithvi Narayan Shah to design his military strategy to lay seize on the Kathmandu valley, we have to put on our boots and head up. Some day, we hope, there will be a “skyline drive” linking these sites and enabling us to appreciate a view from the valley rim a little more frequently and conveniently. ■

JOHNNIE WALKER. KEEP WALKING



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