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the NEPALI way



An ECSNEPAL
Photo Contest



Strong, emotional attachments with family is characteristic of Nepali living. Most Nepalese live with large, extended families and thus have a strong sense of family and community. What elements of family life do you think are Nepali in their essence?

Theme for March : "Family"

Submit your photos at www.ecs.com.np/contest for a chance to have your work published and win exciting prizes!

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Next month's theme:
Nature and Wildlife



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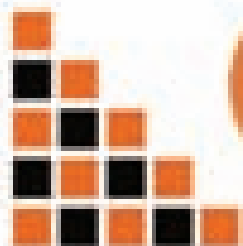
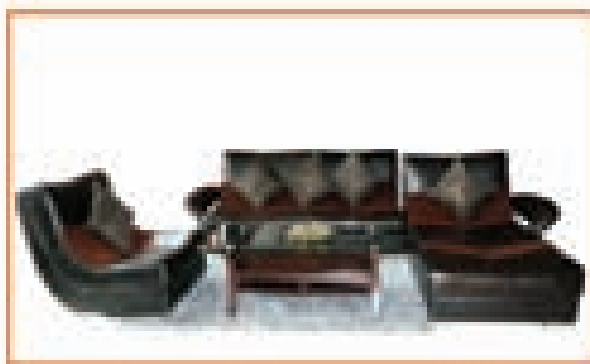
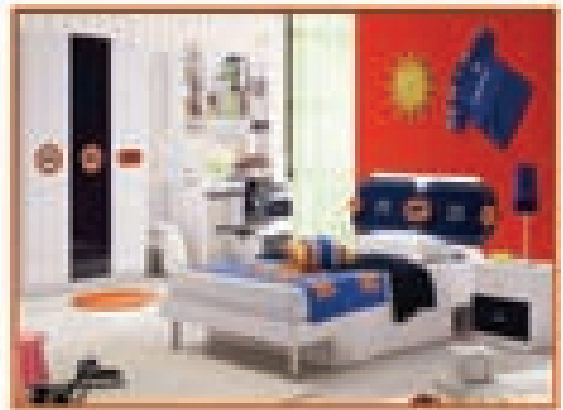

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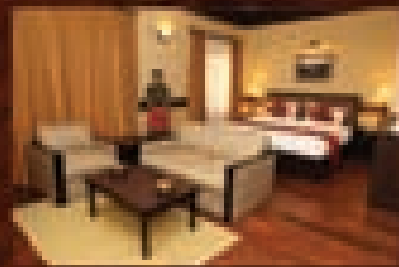


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COVER STORY

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Trekking is not just a touristy thing to do any more. Pack light, read our practical guide and head to the hills.

By **Robin Boustead**

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Trekking in Nepal has come a long way from scary bridges and the lack of proper gear to a full-fledged, modern industry.

By **Don Messerschmidt**

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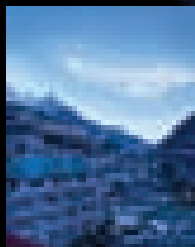
First time contributor Kashish D. Shrestha writes about the perils of global warming in regard to Nepal's trekking and tourism industry.

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By **Lizbeth Luksom**



ON THE COVER

A view of the Himalayas and their reflection on the hotel window from Hotel Namche in Namche Bazaar, Solukhumbu.

PHOTOGRAPHY:
PIX (The Light Sketch)
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Corrigendum

The editorial team regrets the error regarding the author's name and content for *Wild Mountains and Friendly People*, published in ECS NEPAL's October 2011 issue.

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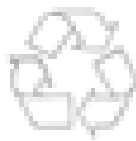


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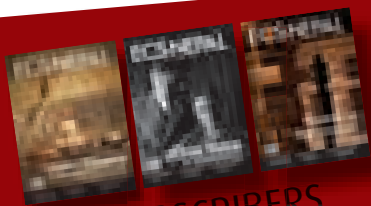
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Photo by Kashish Das Shrestha



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Photo by Robin Bourne

JUST DO IT

The word addiction is often associated with negative or 'bad' habits, but there are people addicted to being in the great outdoors. It is hard to say whether it is the air, the sounds of the birds, bees and the winds passing through the trees; or just the joy of getting up to the top and looking at the world all around, many people will just get up, strap on their boots, carry a back pack and start hiking and trekking. Look at all the gear and equipment shops and outlets out there. What a range of choices of jackets and boots, altimeter and compasses, water bottles and flashlights, backpacks and tents; it is a huge economy in itself. Like all habits and addictions, it has to start somewhere and sometime. This spring, in Nepal will be a good time and place to start. While many of the treks in Nepal follow the river valleys from south to north and over high passes into the adjacent river valleys; the Great Himalayan Trail goes from east to west Nepal.

With the arrival of spring and warmer days, the season of colors is here. The festival of Holi, which falls on March 7 this year, has been and can be a great day of fun and games for children, the whole family and even the entire neighborhood. The idea is to use this festival of colors to create space for everyone to get together and have fun and help tie the bonds and deepen relationships. One does need to take care about the quality of the colors one uses and its effect on the eyes and skin. Many will also decide to celebrate Holi on the streets; and there will be numerous concerts and music festivals that you may want to attend. You do need to take care and be "street smart" if you decide to venture out.

Talking of colors and trekking, the Annapurna Conservation Area is going to be full of spring blossoms and the villages and lodges are going to be busy hosting guests from all over the world. The basic idea that people are part of all conservation solutions has been proven by the population of the area. ACAP is one of those global flagship success programs in establishing the best ways to conserve and manage natural resources. ECS is proud to bring you stories that highlight this success and tell you the story of the people and places of ACAP. This is one of the most popular destinations for trekkers from all over the world. While in ACAP please make sure you spend some time listening to the stories of how the people are overcoming challenges in conserving the area for all future generations.

Each month ECS is dedicated to bringing you the best stories and images of Nepal. From the beautiful living spaces of the Newa Chen in Patan to the art and craft of candle making, we are all teaming up to tell stories in the best possible way. The team would appreciate your inputs as well. Whatever you are doing this month, please make some time for the Nepali way.

Anil Chitrakar
Group Editor
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Clear confidence contest



Clear Anti-Dandruff Shampoo, a brand from Unilever, has announced the winners of Clear Confidence contest. The brand had put up a month long "30 Seconds of Clear Confidence" contest on Facebook from 19 December 2011 onwards.

Anyone interested were eligible to upload 30 seconds of uncut and unedited video displaying their creativity and confidence.

141 videos were uploaded by the participants. The contest received overwhelming response and the videos uploaded were liked by 43756 users on Facebook. The Facebook page devoted to the contest received 3911 likes. The contest was an instant hit and 11000 people were already talking about it on Facebook. Two sets of winners were selected on 19 January 2012 on the basis of highest number of likes on Facebook

and the highest scorer marked by the panel of judges including Manoj K. C., famed guitarist from 1974 A. D., Malina Joshi, Lux Miss Nepal 2011 and Subu Shrestha, Creative Director at Business Advantage.

Confidence of the participants and the quality of the content were judged by the judges and concluded Abhishek Maskey, Noyo Onta, Ojashri Basnet, Barun Pradhan and Abhilash Khatri as the winners. Abhilash Khatri and the rest, a single team, received a Sony Cybershot Camera each.

Likewise, Mahendra Devkota won a cash prize of Rs.60000 on the basis of highest number of likes on Facebook, Sachin Thakuri received Rs.30000, and Sushil Ghale and Bibek Neupane won Rs.20000. (Nimma Adhikari)

Springwood launches new winter collection

Surya Nepal Private Limited's initiative Springwood recently launched their winter collection. A huge range of premium winter apparels are available within the collection. According to the manufacturers, this collection features denim and khaki in the finest designs straying away from the usual sweaters that are available in

the market. The clothes like half zip-neck sweater, V-neck sweater with round t-shirt, V-neck check sweater, Springwood sweaters, Springwood hoodies cater to both style quotient as well as comfort for the people. The clothes are available in various colors and designs which can even be paired with formal outfits.

Smirnoff® Gold Collection launched in Nepal

The world's number one vodka, Smirnoff, has come up with a new variant, Smirnoff Gold Collection- with the luxury of gold in every drop. The Smirnoff Gold Collection is a cinnamon spiced vodka. Gold cues feature prominently in all executions and the gold etched bottle itself showcases a flurry of real, edible gold leaf flakes suspended in this vodka.

Available in Nepal in 1 litre pack size with 40% alc.vol, it is priced at NRs.3900. The launch of Smirnoff Gold Collection in Nepal is expected to be highly successful since a trial in India duty free channel, the vodka exceeded the expected reception. The vodka is great for cocktails. The manufacturers recommend "The Golden Delicious" served in a martini glass of Smirnoff Gold Collection mixed with apple liqueur, cinnamon and a dash of maple syrup.

LG's New Exchange Offer



LG Electronics launched a new consumer scheme "LG Har Ghar Ma LG LCD wa LED, Purano Ko Satta Ma Naya TV" under LG Exchange Offer.

According to the scheme, consumers received LG LCD or LED TV in exchange of an old TV of any brand.

Whirlpool Dealers' Meet in Kathmandu



Whirlpool organized its Kathmandu Dealers Conference on 2 February 2012 in which approximately 100 dealers from all across the country participated. It was a forum where the officials from Whirlpool India interacted with all their trade partners to understand and review the performance of 2011 as well as plan for the upcoming year 2012. During this meet Whirlpool showcased its latest range of products and announced exciting trade schemes for the dealers.

Whirlpool's Vision for Nepal is "Every Home Every Where with Pride, Passion & Care".

Apex Short Film Competition

Apex Short Film Competition 2012 was organized in September with two workshop programs. The first workshop by Director Keshab Pandey was held on 16 September, he talked about the importance of camera angles, direction way, script, sound and music in a film. The second one by Sound Engineer Pradeep Upadhyay was held on 24 September. He gave ideas about sound and its effects in film making.

The screening of 20 short films started on 12 January, out of which 8 films were selected for the main event on 16 January in the auditorium Hall of Apex College. The guest of honor was CEO of Himalaya TV Narayan Puri.

Sisan Baniya's group won the first place and received a cash prize of Rs. 8000 along with certificates and a trophy. Similarly, Anup Sapkota and Biplav Gyawali's group stood in the second and third place respectively, receiving a cash prize of NRs. 5000 and NRs. 3000.

Principal L.P. Bhanu Sharma honored the four judges from the field of direction, sound, editing and camera with khada and a token of love. Director of Academic Affairs Vinaya Kumar Sharma distributed the certificates of participation to all the participants and the organizers.

Dragonair celebrates Year of the Dragon

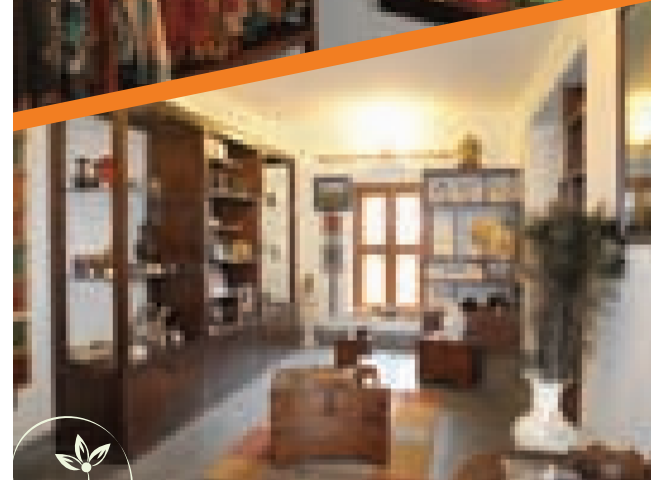


To celebrate the arrival of the Year of the Dragon, Dragonair offered festive giveaways to passengers travelling over the Lunar New Year period. First Class and Business Class passengers who travelled on all Dragonair flights on 22 and 23 January (eve of the Lunar New Year and the first day of the Lunar New

Year) were presented with a special delicacy – Lee Kum Kee XO Sauce (gift edition). Lee Kum Kee XO Sauce is praised as the "Caviar of the Orient" and provides a tasty complement.

First Class and Business Class passengers received Fook Ming Tong "Floral Symphony" tea on 24 and 25 January (the second and third day of the Lunar New Year) while Economy Class passengers were offered a special pastry, Kee Wah Bakery's Sesame Bites, on 23 and 24 January (the first and second day of the Lunar New Year).

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Tatva exhibition at Nepal Art Council



H.E. Dr. Sergey Vasilievich Velichkin, Russian Ambassador to Nepal inaugurated Sagar Manandhar's solo exhibition at the Nepal Art Council. H.E. Velichkin emphasized in his speech, Manandhar's unique ability to see things differently and to create art works that swallow the viewer to depths unknown. There were many artists at the venue to see "Tatva." Kapil Mani Dixit said he is always excited to see Manandhar's work and follows his progress intimately.

The audience was treated to a large collection of paintings focusing on the five elements of life—fire, water, air, light and earth. With a strict regiment of colors, the artist delved into the examination of bonds at both the elemental level and the broader realm of the exact reality. On grids of paint with scraped off layers of paint, Manandhar controlled the flow of pallets and lights to guide eyes through each dimension of his work.

Three in a crowd

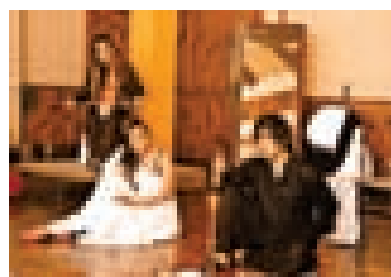
Pakistani artists Atif Khan, Sophiya Khwaja and Zaira Ahmad's prints were a great insight into what is happening in 'the land of the pure' - Pakistan. Atif Khan's monochrome Mughals explore the metaphor of the heart. "Landscape of the Heart" series follows the singled out subject on many adventures with the motif. In contrast, the hearts are vivid and colored. Lithe lines that wrap the organ are fabric-like. Ahmad on the other hand, strays away from the details and appropriates

eye-catching compositions straight out photographs of walls and brick structures. Brick-by-brick is rusty and nostalgic; the lines only lending a modicum weight of structure. Cracks crease the paper like prose Arabic calligraphy on faded paper. Finally, Khwaja's satirical take on the issues encountered in Pakistan resonates with frustrations akin to those of Nepalis. Using the crest and the star and the color green, continues the playfulness of Khans work and concludes one fine exhibition, one that is also strengthening ties between the two countries. (Nischal Oli)

Ishq: A poetic enactment

On 5 February, poetry from Iran, Turkey, India and Nepal came together in a dramatic enactment for 'Ishq – The Madness of Love'. The show took place in the premises of Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.

Deborah Merola, with One World Theatre, directed the enactment. It included some of the work from the mystics Mevlana Rumi and Amir Khusrau along with celebrated poets like Rabindranath Tagore, Kaifi Azmi and Laxmi Prasad Devkota, which was put beautifully together.



The actors Murad Ali, Diya Maskey and Divya Dev Pant gave a compelling performance, while the audience swayed away to Shyam Nepali's sarangi melodies. Nepali's rhythm perfectly complimented the act and Maskey's Kathak performance. (Mannat Shrestha)

Three Stars to Ruslan Vodka

Ruslan Vodka was recently awarded 3 Stars for its superior taste and quality by ITQI (International Taste and Quality Institute, Belgium).



what's on

things to do this month

Nepfest March

Date: 17 March (Saturday)
Time: 1 pm onwards
Venue: Fun Park, Bhrikuti Mandap
5541322

Nepfest is coming up with yet another big event as one of the promotional gig for the legendary polish death metal juggernaut 'Decapitated' who are set to perform at the Nepfest IV, this September. For all those who missed out on the Nepfest Reloaded, Nepfest in association with KTM Rocks presents Nepfest March with a big surprise for all the metal heads in the venue. The event will feature some of the metal bands in the city like Antim Grahan, Kalodin, White, Garudh, The Exorcist, Disintegrated, and Fractals.

Ticket Cost: Rs. 150

MUSIC AND PARTIES

Parikrama Live in Concert

Date: 24 March (Saturday)
Time: 1 pm onwards
Venue: Jawalakhel Football Ground, Jawalakhel,
9801032067

After the successful Baneshwor Street Fest, Frequency Events are organizing an informative musical event featuring the well known rock band from India Parikrama. The event will feature many artists like Nepal's famous rock band Cobweb, Abhaya and the Steam Injuns, X-Mantra, Mt. 8848 and also the hip-hop group Nepsydaz. Then all the excitement is set to be followed by a DJ session along with B-boying to top up the event. From mouth watering food stalls, interesting games the event will be one of its kind with something for everyone. The tickets are soon to be available at famous restaurants and retail shops.

Ticket Cost: To be announced

Nepal Naccha

Date: 13 April (Friday)
Time: 4 pm onwards
Venue: Club Paradiso, Lakeside, Pokhara

In celebration of Nepalese New Year 2069, Kandel Consultant (Melbourne, Australia) is organizing a global event featuring red carpet, photo shoots,

lots of dancing, and good house and club music. With various attractions from the likes of world class DJs, amazing decorations and even more amazing sound system, the party will definitely welcome 2069 in style.

Ticket Cost: To be announced.

MISCELLANEOUS

Purple themed Mad Hatter's Tea Party

Date: 2 March (Thursday)
Time: 3 pm onwards
Venue: Meconopsis Boutique Hotel, Pulchowk
(opposite Sajha Petrol Pump), 9849113388

An exhibition of the winners of the Kids 4 Kids art competition will also be held at the venue. 'Kids helping kids all over the world, that's what it's all about', that's a line from the theme song for Purple Cake Day, an event focused on the celebration of children. It's a day of fun and action for kids, encouraging them to think about their role in the global community – also to become aware of children with less educational opportunity and to demonstrate support by taking action. People of all ages can join the event and have fun while working for a noble cause. The Purple Cake Day country in profile for 2012 is Nepal.

So, wear something purple and come down to Meconopsis Boutique Hotel in Pulchowk for a purple themed Mad Hatter's Tea Party. Purple cakes, food and drink, stalls, live jazz, kid's corner and spot prizes for best purple outfits. There is also the chance to win two nights at Temple Tree Resort and Spa in Pokhara, a night at the Last Resort, meals out, language courses and other great prizes in a raffle. Raffle tickets will be available prior to the event at the Meconopsis Boutique Hotel, Chez Caroline and at the event itself.

Splash Fest 2012

Date: 8 March (Thursday)
Time: 10 am onwards
Venue: International Club,
Sanepa
9841269716

Enjoy and rejuvenate yourselves with the grand celebration of Holi, at the Splash Fest 2012. Being organized by ASpadez Entertainment, the event is looking to provide a refreshing break to all the working professionals from their busy working hours. The event will also feature the game of 'Water Football' as one of the main attractions.

All Women Scooty Rally

Date: 8 March (Thursday)
Time: 8 am onwards
Venue: Kathmandu Durbar Square to Bhaktapur
Durbar Square, 9851043398

Kgarira.com is organizing the first ever all women scooter rally on the occasion of International Women's Day, 8 March. The event will feature different activities in order to create awareness on issues related to women. Join them to celebrate womanhood with a difference. The starting point will be Kathmandu Durbar Square, passing through various hot spots the rally will finally end at Bhaktapur Durbar Square. There will be various checkpoints where the participants will be provided with refreshments. The rally will be followed by a formal program and a musical act at the start and the end points. With the band Abhaya and the Steam Injuns, the event will feature talks from leading women entrepreneurs and celebrities as well.

Registration fees: Rs. 250/- (including T-shirt and Refreshments)

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PLACE

Beads of time

The generations of Muslim pote necklace makers in Patan are a study in the complex nature of life in the capital

Text By YUKTA BAJRACHARYA

The Pote shops in the Patan Durbar Square Area also known locally as Mangal Bazaar adds bold shades to the square. The area comes alive with different colorful potes hanging and glistening in the yellow light of bulbs. These little shops are mostly owned by Muslim families who have been occupying these areas with their strings of potes and boxes of bangles for generations.

The ambience is further lit up by the chitchat and laughter of the shopkeepers and customers. The Muslim community, of around 30-35 families living in and around the area, are primarily known as pote sellers and have blended in with the Newari community of the area.

The colorful tiny glass beads commonly known as 'pote' (poh-tay) hold great significances in the lives of Nepali women, especially those belonging to the Brahmin and Chhetri castes. Often woven into strings to make a necklace, these necklaces when worn with long golden beads known as *tilhari* represent the marital status of women besides bringing in good luck and long life to their husbands.

"*Sanchai hunu huncha?*" (How are you?) A woman passing by Sakila Banu's shop inquires and after replying with a smile, she gets back to spooling the ends of the necklace with red and golden yarns. Sakila like most men and women of her generation in her family learnt the job from her grandparents when she was ten years old. That was the family tradition then. "But my daughters do not know how to make potes," she says adding, "this is something that you will be good at only if you really want to learn and my daughters aren't interested." She used to have a small stall on the Durbar Square's



"Our great grandfathers came to Kathmandu from Kashmir as traders and settled in the area during the Malla era..."

footpath before she shifted to her present, proper shop. Sakila spends her days at the shop, adding *tilharis* to the pote, stringing pote crystals, besides selling complementing bangles and other make up items.

Across from Sakila's store, on the temple porch, the husband and wife duo of Amina Banu and Firoz Din have their own stall, somewhere they have been for 42 years now. Wearing his *Taqiyah* and *salwar kameez*, Firoz Din sits at the front of the modest stall, tending to their customers. With decades of experience, he can simply feel the hands of his customer to bring out the right size and type of bangles that the customer would like. The revenue earned from the stall used to be their main source of income. Now, the generation after them has chosen other occupations and is no longer in the business.

"We have been doing this since forever. Our great grandfathers came to Kathmandu from Kashmir as traders and settled in the area during the Malla era, taking up pote and bangle selling as their means of livelihood," informs Firoz. "While earlier, Mangal Bazaar was the main market area and people used to come to us when they required potes and *choodi* (bangles), now you get this everywhere, which has affected our business," says Firoz Din.

Just like how the potes and bangles add to the beauty of a woman, the pote shops and the warm-hearted pote sellers add to the elegance of Mangal Bazaar area. When this tradition finally comes to a halt, sad but probable after the current generation of pote sellers, Mangal Bazaar will lose more than just a dash of color. ■

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A riot of colors

Mythology and folklore aside, Holi is a time to forget old rivalries and enjoy the onset of spring and harvest season.

Text By ANUBHUTI POUDEL

The best way to describe Holi would be to smear this sheet with big splashes of different colors and randomly carve in stick figures, indistinguishable from one another except in shape and size. This 'festival of colors' is one of the most important ones for Hindus. Although there is religious significance and mythological reference to Holi, it is essentially a time for merry-making, singing, dancing, cheerful banter, celebration of the coming of spring and the harvest season. It falls on the full moon day in early March (Falgun – Nepali calendar month) so is often referred to locally as *Fagu Purnima* or just *Fagu*.

Many legends and myths surround Holi. Colors and frolicking are just part of it and mark the last day of a week-long celebration in Nepal. Especially in Kathmandu, a long bamboo pole called the "chir" is erected in Basantapur and laden with colorful strips of cloth as good luck charms. This is related to the legend of how Lord Krishna being his amorous and mischievous self teasingly hid the *gopinis'* (female cow herders) clothes while they took a dip in the holy Yamuna and hung them on a tall tree.

Lord Krishna teasingly hid the *gopinis'* clothes while they took a dip in the holy Yamuna and hung them on a tall tree.

The legend behind this festival, gives leeway to tease and flirt amongst the young. In India, in parts of the Nepali Terai and even in cities *bhang*, a cheap intoxicant used recreationally for centuries during *Shiva Ratri* made from the cannabis plant is gaining popularity. It has now become synonymous with Holi celebrations and is available at local sweetshops. At the onset of the festival, teenagers and even adults throws water balloons at passers-by.

Another piece of folklore that marks how Holi gets its name is the widely known story of Holika, the sister of the demonic king Hiranyakashap. The king was granted a boon by Lord Brahma for his devotion that made it impossible to kill him. Riding high on this glory, the demon king wanted everyone in his kingdom to worship him as god. While everyone consented, his own son Prahlad became an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu. Enraged by

this apparently blasphemous behavior, the king made many attempts to kill his son. Holika, on the other hand had a special gift of being immune to fire. In an attempt to help her brother, the king kill his son, she sat on a huge fire with Prahlad on her lap. At this, Prahlad chanted Lord Vishnu's name continuously and in effect, Holika burnt to death whereas Prahlad walked out unscathed. Since Holika had misused the power bestowed on her, she was punished. This is the lesson children are taught over the bonfire lit every Holi's evening to mark the triumph of good over evil.

Sans the myths and the religious history, today Holi is mostly about wearing ragged clothes, coloring your faces, enjoying a little *bhang* with *pakor*s (vegetable tempuras), loud music, crazy dancing, forgetting old rivalries and reveling in a lot of colorful play – a reason to celebrate life in its myriad colors. ■




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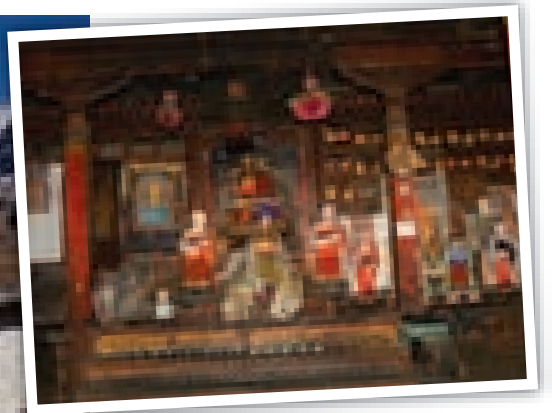
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स्विस इंटरनॅशनल, १००० दुर्बास मार्ग (किंग्स वे), वुडलॅण्ड होटल के पास, काठमांडू, नेपाल। टेल: ००९७७-१-४२२०१९०

Sherpa Heritage House

An ancestral house in Khumjung is set to be a living museum dedicated to the culture and lifestyle of the Sherpa people.

Text By NIRAJ KARKI



Built to be a living museum, the house reflects the old Sherpa lifestyle.

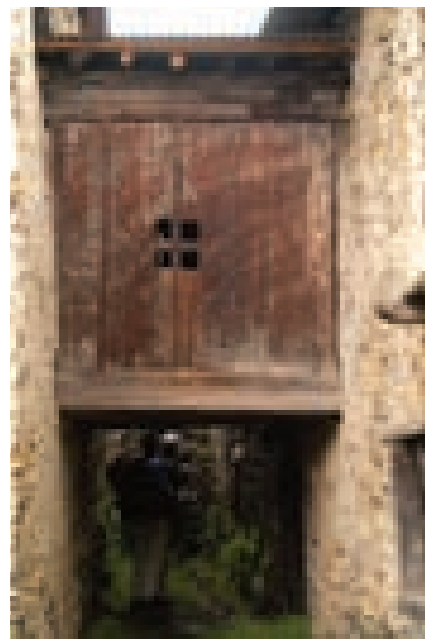
Among the many trekking routes that start from Pokhara, there is one named the Royal Trek – aptly named for it was a route tailored for HRH Prince Charles on his first trek to Nepal. His guide then was Pertemba Sherpa, who among his many accomplishments has climbed Everest three times including the first ascent of Everest by Doug Scott led by Sir Chris Bonington.

That ascent, a page already woven into history has only been the start of a story greater, a story about mountains, its people, their ways of life, a story of friendship and compassion. Both Sir Chris Bonington and Doug Scott have since dedicated great effort into helping the people of Nepal. One of their recent endeavours is the Sherpa Heritage House, an effort started by Pertemba Sherpa in 2006 to preserve the culture and heritage of the Sherpas, in a fast changing world and educate the younger generations about their old ways of living.

The committee running the project for the heritage house is headed by its President Prince Charles, Pertemba Sherpa, Chris Bonington the patron, Doug Scott, and Maggie Burgess who has been working extensively helping the people who are suffering from leprosy in Nepal. The project has so far had fund raisings done in London over a fund

raising dinner as well as a charity trek to the Everest Base Camp in October 2010.

Pertemba Sherpa has donated his ancestral home, which is at present the oldest house in Khumjung, older even than most of the monasteries in the area and the last historic one, unlike most others that have been converted into modern homes. The house is built in the traditional Sherpa style using slate and stone with carved doors, windows and



furniture. The house comprises two wings joined at right angles to each other – the living wing for accommodation and the religious wing for prayers also housing statues, sacred texts and Buddhist emblems.

With a working fund of over £80,000, the project is under way and promises to be a great step towards the preservation of the ancient Sherpa ways. Built to be a living museum, the house reflects the old Sherpa lifestyle reflecting the connection of the Sherpa people, their livestock, their religion and the mountains.

While the renovation of the heritage house is close to completion, a coffee shop just next to the heritage house has already been built. All proceeds from the coffee shop will go to the maintenance of the heritage house.

The best way to get to the Sherpa Heritage is to fly to Lukla and then trek to Namche Bazaar, walk up past the Syangboche Airstrip and arrive at Khumjung Village. The walk from Lukla to Namche Bazaar is about 7 Hours and from Namche Bazaar to Khumjung is about 3 - 4 hours. ■

For more information:
www.sherpaheritagehouse.org
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Shagun

Preparing for the uncertain with a little prayer and lots of love

Text By ANUBHUTI POUDYAL



It is strange how within a group of friends you easily forget their unique cultural backgrounds. You do not care about their castes or culture until you are presented face to face with what they believe in. I looked at my friend as one after another of her relatives gave her wishes and their blessing, in the form of items more than words. The environment was a strange mix of excitement and uncertainty; excitement for the trip that was ahead for my friend and uncertainty for all that the future held for her. As a Newar woman, giving *Shagun* before a long trip away from home might be a normal, even mundane practice. But to someone who belongs to a non-Newari culture, this is an extremely interesting ritual and one worth talking about.

Shagun basically means good luck. It is given in different occasions most prominent in Newari culture to symbolize a healthy time. It is a normal practice in various religious and cultural rituals. However, during travels, its significance is greater.

A balance between five elements, earth, fire, wind, water and sky or space is regarded integral for human safety and

A balance between five elements, earth, fire, wind, water and sky or space is regarded integral for human safety and prosperity.

prosperity. *Shagun* is given to make sure there is balance between these elements, which is integral for the happiness and safety of the one who is leaving. Items symbolizing these elements in different ways, namely, egg, fish, alcohol, water and fire are all present as a part of this ritual, creating the balance that we talked about.

Lord Ganesh, regarded as the protector deity who removes obstructions from people's lives is the central character of the ritual. On the day of the departure, family and friends gather and present all items regarded important for good luck. There is Lord Ganesh, followed by a *Mandala* made with rice and colors, curd, duck's egg, fish and alcohol. One after another, relatives present these items to the person who is traveling. The methods and few practices might differ within Newari culture as well but the core of the practice is the same.

Unlike in other cultures, Newars were permanent inhabitants of the Kathmandu valley. Traveling was a rare and uncertain practice, which was met by an equally interesting tradition of presenting *Shagun* and praying for the person's safety. Experts of the culture believe that it has expanded over the years resembling something more than good luck and has grown bigger into a festive occasion as a result of prosperity. It is a practice involving many family members and relatives, eating and celebrating together and bidding the person goodbye.

Shagun intrigues some and is a way of life for others. As an idea or a feeling, it is a practice that is a part of a very old and respected culture and still involves the humble idea of praying for an individual's safety before he ventures to a little known location. There is added splendor to the ritual but the idea remains and that is why it still holds its place in the culture. ■

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The Life of Food in Nepal

WORLD FOOD PROGRAM NEPAL

Reviewed by Don Messerschmidt

“‘Have you eaten?’ is the same as ‘How are you?’ in the Nepali context. This standard conversational gambit shows the place of food in our culture.”

– Anil Chitrakar

The Life of Food in Nepal “is a powerful portrayal of the incredible beauty, diversity and harshness of Nepal’s landscape and a tribute to the resilient spirit of her farmers.”

– from the Acknowledgments

In Nepali culture when food tastes good, something looks great, or the written or spoken word sounds nice, it is common to say that it is ‘*mitho*’ – loosely, ‘sweet’. More expansively ‘*mitho*’ means *delicious, tasty* or *appetizing* (food); *nice, interesting* or *beautiful* (things); and *softspoken, charming* or *persuasive* (words).

While seeking the appropriate term to describe this remarkable book, ‘*mitho*’ comes immediately to mind, in all its contexts. As a book, it is beautiful. It’s about Nepali food in all its culinary variety and gustatory glory, from seeds-in-the-field, to harvest and the market place, and on to the dinner platter on normal days and at festivals. It is basically a book of photos, dozens of them in full color, some of which cover whole pages. There are also short essays, plus an introduction and a brief description of the UN World Food Programme.

The idea for this publication was developed by the former World Food Programme Country Director Richard Ragan and local photographer James Giambone. This remarkable collaboration first came to light as a photo exhibition held at the Nepal Arts Council in July 2010. The published version features over a 100 pages of photos from 18 photographers, and ten short essays from six authors. They include

- Anil Chitrakar’s ‘My tribute to a book about food’ and the section introductions – ‘The food’, ‘The land’, ‘The life’ and ‘The ritual’;
- Sujeev Shakya’s ‘From farm to market’ (on the need to support farmers, and the rise of farmers’ cooperatives);
- Muna Gurung’s ‘Sishnu’ (heaping praise on the stinging

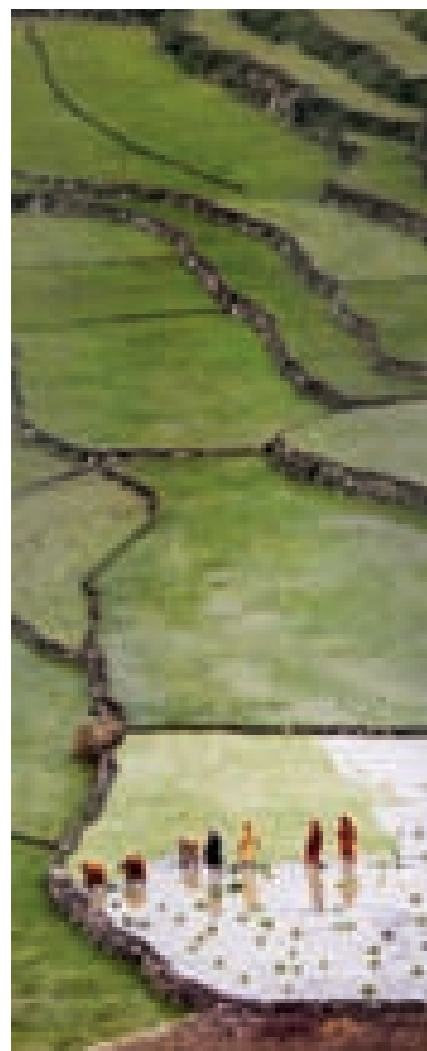
nettles, including a recipe for nettle soup);

- Bibek Bhandari’s ‘Potato’ (the lowly “meat to the poor” that revolutionized Nepali farming after its introduction to the Himalayas in the 18th century);
- Prawin Adhikari’s ‘A certain kind of loss’ (about the traditional preparation of a once popular yam-like wild tuber); and
- Utsav Shakya’s ‘Yomari’ (the mythology and festivity associated with this popular Newari sweet).

Insights on the meaning of food in the Nepali cultural context permeate the book. They begin with an observation by the WFP’s Richard Ragan in the Foreword, harkening back to that age-old notion that “You are what you eat,” and on to reveal the deep association between Nepali people and their cuisine that “goes way beyond that of simple sustenance...” Ragan writes that “Ritual and a daily dedication to spirituality permeates this land” a combination that he characterizes as “a marriage where food always features heavily...” He concludes with this observation: “To the crops they grow, the Nepalese award the highest honour; they pass it to the Gods. In no other place on earth will you find food accorded such spirituality and respect.” Ultimately, the book celebrates the central role that food plays in the lives of the Nepalese.

It says and portrays more about the daily life of the people, rich and poor, east to west, rural and urban, and from the lowlands across the mid-hills to the high mountains, than most other coffee-table sized picture books on Nepal. And, although it is a UN World Food Programme production, it is thankfully not strewn with UN logos and other

hagiographic hype. Instead, it gives us a simple, genuine look at the story of food through the eyes and experiences of the people, especially Nepalese farmers. ■

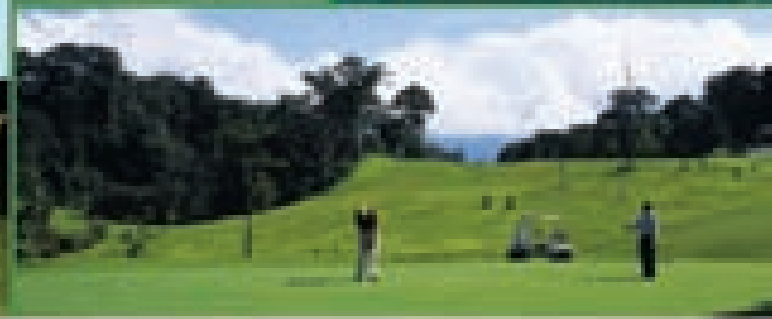
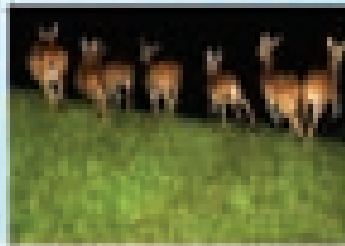
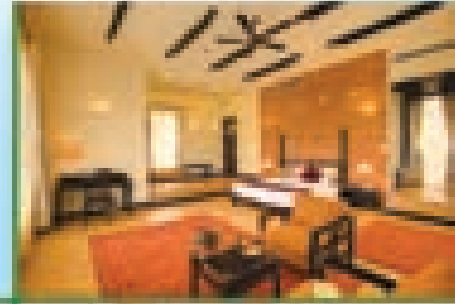


U.N. World Food Program/Nepal, 2010, 120pp., profusely illustrated. Available at Vajra Books, the Patan Museum Gift Shop, Indigo Gallery and other bookstores.

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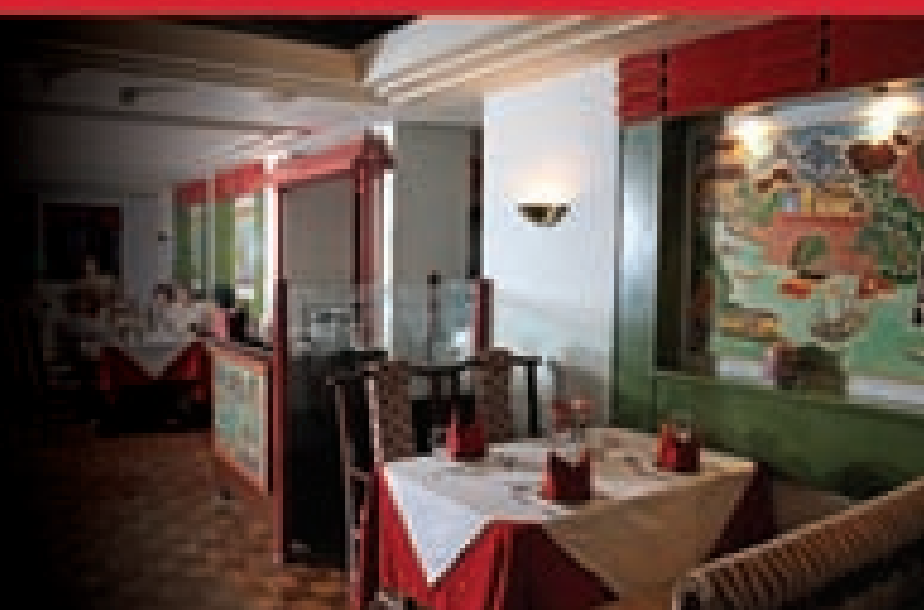
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Trekking is good for you!

Trekking is more about interacting and learning from your journey than about the mighty mountains that you tread on.

Text and Photos by ROBIN BOUSTEAD

Oh my God, it's simply unbelievable!" I first spoke these words when I trekked to Kanchenjunga in 1993 and I still speak them every time I venture back into the hills. But I'm still not quite sure what it is that so amazes and delights me every time I go trekking.

The greatest mountain scenery on the planet is a good start, but I know it is far, far more than that; it's something about the people I meet when I'm in the Himalaya. It may sound a bit corny, but I think the Himalaya is where I became a man. Not in the Man vs Wild way, but where I learnt respect, tolerance, how to be part of a team and how to lead when things get tough. Basically, I learnt the sort of things you can't learn in a classroom and that's why I believe the mountains are somewhere for everyone, somewhere anyone can become a better person.

One of the real beauties of the Himalaya is that you don't have to be a crazed mountain nut to enjoy them. The variety of places, people, terrain, seasons, ecology and history mean you can indulge almost any interest for as long or short as you like. Contrary to what many believe, there is always somewhere great

to visit in Nepal at any time of year. The concept of 'off and on-seasons' has baffled me for years, especially as I often find the 'off-season' a much better time to head outdoors than the 'on'. Yes, there are some activities that are somewhat season-specific but the timing and conditions of seasons varies a huge amount across Nepal, let alone the whole Himalaya. So, I find that first concentrating on the sort of experience I would like to have answers most questions about timing, destination, duration and difficulty.

I was sitting in a nomad's tent in Upper Dolpo in late November. It was cold outside and my guide and I hadn't eaten for many hours. Without talking the nomad lit some yak dung in a small brazier and placed a flat rock on top. As he began cooking buckwheat pancakes he smiled and said we looked hungry and that we should eat his pancakes with homemade chilli sauce. It was an experience I shall forever treasure, so simple and yet profound.

Whenever I have ventured beyond the tourist trails I immediately encounter an authenticity and hospitality that is beyond my comprehension. I would never be treated in the same tolerant,

accepting way by a stranger in Australia and it makes immersing myself in the Himalaya even more delightful. I believe the best way to enjoy life is through participation because it means you have to share something of yourself. Trekking and spending time in the hills inevitably means you'll be part of a stranger's life and embraced by a world beyond your own. For me, the variety and diversity of the mountains is another strong draw-card. That by crossing a ridge you can enter another world of language, culture, traditions and beliefs is a constant reminder that no one opinion is absolute, there is always something new to learn around the next bend.

FIRST STEPS

Everyone has to start somewhere and my first Himalayan forays were simple and short. I began with a 5-day trek along the Singalila Ridge to the south of Kanchenjunga, a trip that was to inspire my love of the Himalaya. Each year I sought out slightly longer or more challenging treks to the Annapurna, Langtang and Khumbu regions. Without realising it I was building my confidence on the trail and what I now call field-craft or trekking wisdom.

The weather had been bad for a couple of days, enclosing us in thick misty cloud. We stopped at the Nag Thali gompa on the Tamang Heritage Trail, the caretaker let us shelter beside his meagre fire. He made some tea and started playing haunting laments on a *dramyin* (Tibetan guitar). After sharing some boiled potatoes he helped erect our tents. The following morning he woke us as the sun glinted off the top of sunken cloud that filled the valleys below. He seemed proud to share his mountain-island-world with us. Each time I've returned to Nag Thali we enjoy a cup of tea and sometimes he sings.

My time in the hills has gradually changed me. As I spend more time with my crew and locals I have developed new interests and am beginning to ▶







That's why I think the concept of the GHT network is so powerful; anyone can design their own experience and level of challenge; there is no right or wrong...



understand different perspectives. Inspired by the crew, I have found inner strength and my resilience and persistence when under stress has improved. When it comes to life-skills I am not a particularly fast learner, so it took me some time to understand that my character was changing for the better. Now, as I look back, I realise that youth and outdoor organisations around the world, from corporate team building to the Scouts, use the same principles.

People of different abilities joined me on trips and it was a struggle at first to keep the group united. Sometimes the stronger walkers would disappear up the trail for hours at a time, or those with a cultural or religious interest would linger in villages and gompas. It took me a few attempts to teach people that by remaining together we ultimately get further and by enjoying the group experience we all benefit. When I then included both the trekking crew and the communities we were visiting in my overall group dynamic I began to see how responsible tourism really does work in the field. This has become one of the most important guiding principles of the Great Himalaya Trail, that often it's not the 'where' but the 'how you do things' that matters most.

RISING TO CHALLENGES

Teahouse trekking along the most popular trails is both comfy and convenient, but it limits your experience and I longed to visit places untouched by tourism. I began by going to remote-r areas, like Rara Lake, the Ganesh Himal and the far-west of Nepal. To my surprise, the walking wasn't any harder, and in many villages there were simple lodges and *dhabas* (eateries) that provided shelter and food as well as a more authentic feeling to my trips. They felt like the *real* Nepal I had been hoping to find.

In 2005, a wild trek between Upper Mugu and Upper Dolpo was far more physically challenging than I had bargained for but the extra effort and sense of accomplishment upon completion was amazing. Learning that we are normally only restricted by what we believe ourselves to be able to do and not what is actually possible has been the most fantastic discovery of my life... and it's something I know is true for anyone!

Researching and documenting the Great Himalaya Trail (GHT) has fulfilled many dreams and inspired many more. The physical difficulties have been considerable but maintaining motivation and a balanced perspective when the weather is against you or when the food runs out has been tougher. That's why I think the concept of the GHT network is so powerful; anyone can design their own experience and level of challenge; there is no right or wrong, just whatever best suits you.

Standing on the high passes between Makalu and Everest was a highlight of exhilaration and relief. The effort, skill and teamwork needed to succeed is the same as running a successful enterprise anywhere, and of course, you have to make some of your own luck along the way. When I descended to the relative safety of Baruntse Base Camp I was overwhelmed by emotion and gratitude towards the team with me, without whom the GHT would still be a dream for me. It was then I realised how far I had come in my personal journey in the Himalaya and how far I was yet to go.

The things I have learnt about myself while trekking have become an integral part of my day to day life: the confidence to tackle new projects, the humility to ask for advice and guidance, the strength to shoulder responsibility and the motivation to push through tough times. Perhaps that is what so amazes and delights about trekking? ►

How to plan a trek?



The Experience – First, consider the sort of trekking experience you would like to have. Do you want a personal challenge in the mountains, or to immerse yourself in cultures, enjoy a festival or does a specific activity appeal? When you have a goal it will be easier to identify specific treks.

Time of Year – Then, think about the best time to get that sort of experience in the various regions of the Himalaya. Remember that altitude is often a limiting factor so make sure you consider mid-hills options, especially in the winter months.

Trek Style – Many higher-altitude trekking regions are only accessible to camping trips, but in the Annapurna, Everest, Kanchenjunga, Manaslu, Helambu or Langtang regions teahouse-style treks are an attractive alternative. Local teahouses

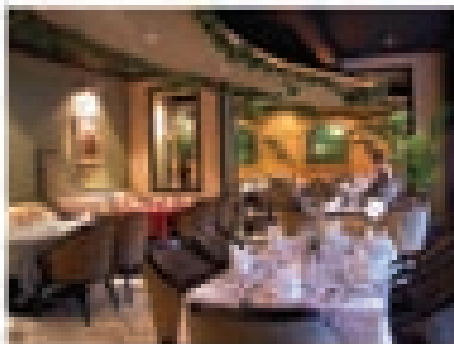
and *dhabas* are commonplace throughout lower altitude trips across the Himalaya. Trekking independently or with a guide and/or crew is an important consideration, see the table below for more information.

Trek Duration – The amount of time you can spend away from home is a major factor in deciding which trek to do; remember to leave yourself some buffer time before and after the trek in case of transport or weather delays.

Trek Grades – Finally, consider the trekking grades for your chosen region(s) and try to match your expectations of ‘life on the trail’ with the level of skill and commitment required. Make sure you consider the expectations and ability of everyone in your group, it’s never nice to drop people into the deep-end if they are just learning the ropes. ▶

	Independent trekking without a guide	Teahouse trekking with a guide	Trekking with a camping crew
Ideal destination	Annapurna, Everest, Helambu, Langtang.	Annapurna, Everest, Kanchenjunga, Langtang, Manaslu, Mustang.	Anywhere in Nepal.
Average number of days on the trail.	Up to a couple of weeks per trek	One to three weeks per trek	Two to four weeks per trek
Level of flexibility in your itinerary.	Good, you dictate your own pace.	Generally poor, but depends on group arrangements.	Generally poor, but depends on group arrangements.
Cost level	Low to Medium	Medium to High	Medium to High
Fitness/experience level	Need to be strong and fit to carry your gear. Prior experience advisable.	Training advisable but not with a heavy pack. Prior experience sometimes necessary.	Training and experience advisable depending on trek.
Amount of time to organise the trek in Kathmandu	Long – at least three days	Short – a few hours to 1 day	Medium – a couple of days

EPICUREAN DELIGHTS RESERVED FOR THE DESERVED



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Get trekking!

There are hundreds of trekking route permutations in Nepal and each has a distinctly different character as the seasons change. Here we provide an overview of some of the most popular introductory treks.

1. RARA LAKE AND KHAPTAD NATIONAL PARKS

In the far-west of Nepal are two of the country's smallest and most picturesque National Parks, Rara Lake and Khaptad. Both offer easy trails through an ideal mix of delightful villages and old-growth forests teeming with birdlife. For those with a little extra time join the two parks together by following an ancient trade route.

Best time to visit: all year round, but best views November to April
Environment: sub-tropical to mid-hills
Trek style: local lodges, teahouses, homestays or camping
Duration: 5-16 days
Difficulty: easy to moderate trekking
Guidebook: *Nepal: Trekking & the Great Himalaya Trail*, Trailblazer, 2011



2. PHOKSUMDO LAKE

Arguably the most stunningly beautiful lake in the Himalaya, Phoksumdo, lies on the border between Upper and Lower Dolpo. Combined with a trek over the Kagmara La and perhaps linking to Jumla, this whole region should be high on everyone's bucket list.

Best time to visit: all year round but views are best October to May
Environment: mid to high Himalaya
Trek style: local lodges, teahouses, homestays or camping
Duration: 8-18 days
Difficulty: easy to moderate trekking
Guidebook: *Nepal: Trekking & the Great Himalaya Trail*, Trailblazer, 2011

3. MUSTANG CIRCUIT

The 'Forbidden Kingdom' is a timeless place, where a vibrant traditional culture combines with the desolation of the Tibetan plateau. One of Nepal's most impressive mountain festivals, Teeji, is held in Lo Manthang, Mustang's capital on the 'Plane of Aspirations'.



Best time to visit: March to November, but Teeji is around the May-June full moon

Environment: high Himalaya

Trek style: local lodges, teahouses, homestays or camping

Duration: 10 days

Difficulty: easy to moderate trekking

Guidebook: *Nepal: Trekking & the Great Himalaya Trail*, Trailblazer, 2011

4. ANNAPURNA BASE CAMP AND KOPRA RIDGE

The trek to Annapurna Base Camp is along a classic trail that hasn't suffered from over-development, and when combined with a side trip to the Kopro ridge is the equal of any trek in Nepal. Community and private lodges make this one of the most comfy treks around.

Best time to visit: all year round, but views are best November to March

Environment: mid to high Himalaya

Trek style: local lodges, teahouses, homestays or camping

Duration: 10-18 days

Difficulty: easy to moderate trekking

Guidebook: *Nepal: Trekking & the Great Himalaya Trail*, Trailblazer, 2011

5. NAAR AND PHU

Get away from the crowds of the Annapurna Circuit by slipping between the near vertical gorge walls at Koto and into the valleys of Naar and Phu. You are guaranteed an authentic experience in these communities, which are proud of their traditions and heritage. Tackle the Kang La for unsurpassed Annapurna range views.

Best time to visit: March to December, best views October to December

Environment: mid to high Himalaya
Trek style: local lodges, teahouses, homestays or camping

Duration: 10-16 days

Difficulty: easy to moderate trekking

Guidebook: *Nepal: Trekking & the Great Himalaya Trail*, Trailblazer, 2011

6. GURUNG HERITAGE TRAIL

Pretty villages with wonderful views of the Annapurna ranges and enjoy some enchanting Gurung hospitality. The trail is little used by trekkers, so you will have

time to chat to the locals and hear tales of foreign service from the older fellows in town. Can connect with Annapurna Circuit or Base Camp trails.

Best time to visit: all year round, but best views in October to December

Environment: sub-tropical to mid-hills
Facilities: homestay, local lodges or teahouses

Duration: 4-5 days

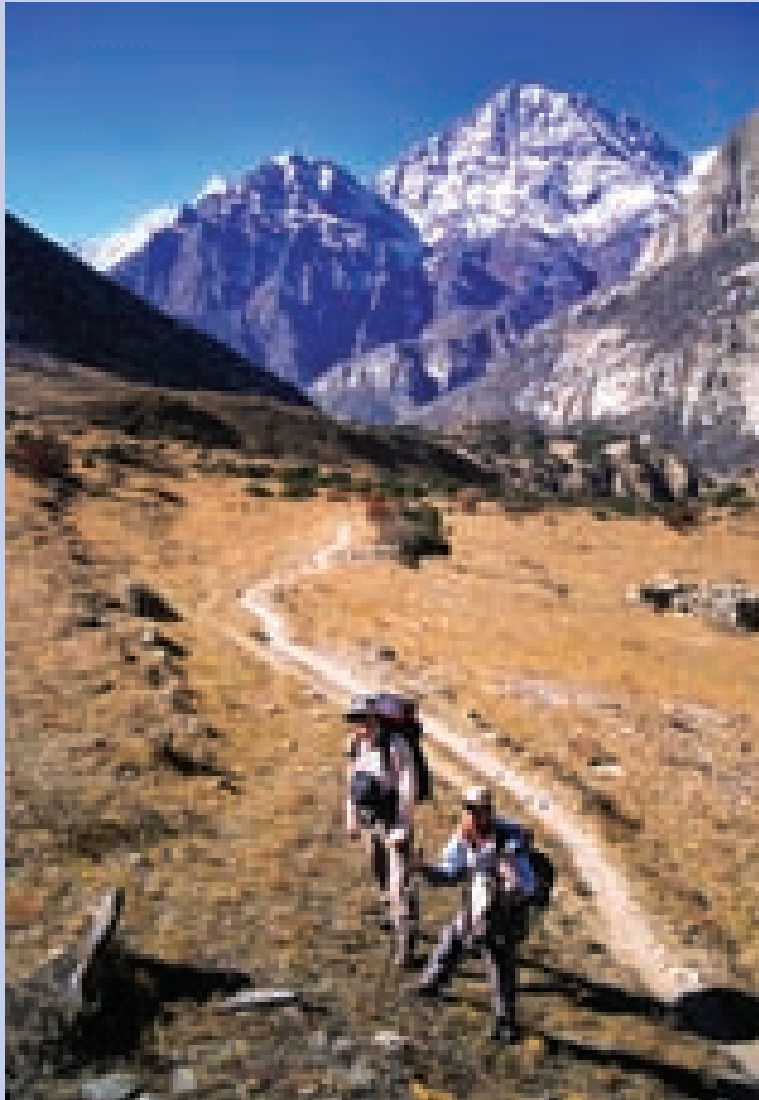
Difficulty: easy to moderate

Guidebook: *The Gurung Heritage Trail*, Himalaya Map House, 2011

7. MANASLU CIRCUIT AND TSUM VALLEY

Perhaps the best general trek in Nepal, the Manaslu Circuit has dramatically increased in popularity over the last three years. Take your time and include a side trip to the intriguing Tsum valley, which still sees precious few trekkers despite opening in 2004.

Best time to visit: March to January, but views are best November-December or visit when the flowers are out in May-June ▶



Environment: mid to high Himalaya

Trek style: local lodges, teahouses or camping

Duration: 10-20 days

Difficulty: easy to moderate trekking

Guidebook: *Nepal: Trekking & the Great Himalaya Trail*, Trailblazer, 2011

8. CHEPANG HILLS

This is a great trek if you want to get away from it all and experience some sub-tropical trekking. The Chepang were nomadic hunter-gatherers who have now taken up a more settled life. Combine it with a trip to nearby Chitwan National Park for wildlife spotting.

Best time to visit: cool season from October to February

Environment: sub-tropical to mid-hills

Facilities: teahouses or homestays

Duration: 4-7 days

Difficulty: easy

Guidebook: *The Chitwan Chepang Hills Trail*, Himalaya Map House, 2011

9. TAMANG HERITAGE TRAIL

Just over 6-hours drive from Kathmandu, the Tamang Heritage Trail offers wonderful views, plentiful spring flowers, a large hot springs and the welcoming Tamang people. The THT is also home to many birds and animals, and has far less trekkers than the adjoining Langtang and Gosainkund treks.

Best time to visit: all year round, but best views in October to April



Environment: mid to high hills
Trek style: local lodges, teahouses, homestays or camping
Duration: 5-8 days
Difficulty: easy to moderate trekking
Guidebook: *The Tamang Heritage Trail*, Himalaya Map House, 2011

10. GOSAINKUND TO LANGTANG VALLEY

Just to the north of the Kathmandu valley is the ancient pilgrimage route to Gosainkund lakes through the diverse Helambu region. The intermingling of Bhotia, Tamang, Brahmin, Newari and Chhetri people throughout the region is a wonderful example of Nepal's harmonious ethnic diversity.

Best time to visit: all year round, but views are best October to January
Environment: mid to high Himalaya
Trek style: local lodges, teahouses, homestays or camping
Duration: 5-16 days
Difficulty: easy to moderate trekking
Guidebook: *Nepal: Trekking & the Great Himalaya Trail*, Trailblazer, 2011

11. KATHMANDU VALLEY RIM

Excellent for short trips away from town, or when a bandha stops traffic. You can climb the Shivapuri Ridge for magnificent views of the valley below and the mountains beyond. Phulchowki and Shivapuri

have some magnificent flowers to enjoy, all just a short distance from the city.

Best time to visit: Any time of year, but best views in October to April
Environment: sub-tropical to mid-hills
Facilities: local lodges, teahouses, homestays or camping
Duration: 3-7 days
Difficulty: easy
Guidebook: *The Kathmandu Valley Rim and Beyond*, Himalaya Map House, 2011

12. BHAIRAV KUND

One of Nepal's stunningly beautiful sacred lakes, Bhairav Kund in the range above Kodari (Arniko Highway) is a must see! A pilgrimage site for both Hindus and Buddhists in monsoon, the reflection of Himalayan peaks touches the divine in all of us. Can be combined with a thrilling bungee jump as well!

Best time to visit: Any time of year, but views are clearest from November to May
Environment: mid-hills
Facilities: local lodges or camping
Duration: 4-6 days
Difficulty: moderate
Guidebook: *Nepal: Trekking & the Great Himalaya Trail*, Trailblazer, 2011

13. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TRAIL

This is a very culturally diverse trail that is rarely visited by any tourists.

Boasting broad views of the Greater Himalaya to the north and welcoming communities of the most endangered ethnic groups of Nepal. This trek is a must for anyone interested in ancient cultures.

Best time to visit: all year round, but best views in October to December
Environment: sub-tropical to high hills
Facilities: local lodges, teahouses, homestays or camping
Duration: 5-7 days
Difficulty: easy
Guidebook: *The Indigenous Peoples Trail*, Himalaya Map House, 2011

14. KANCHENJUNGA BASE CAMP

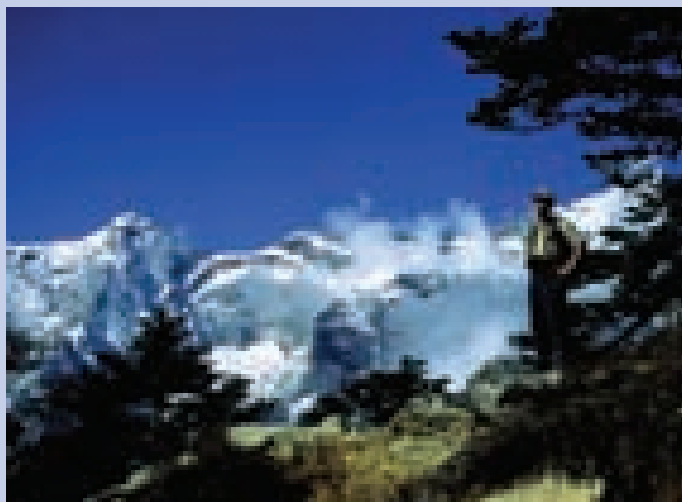
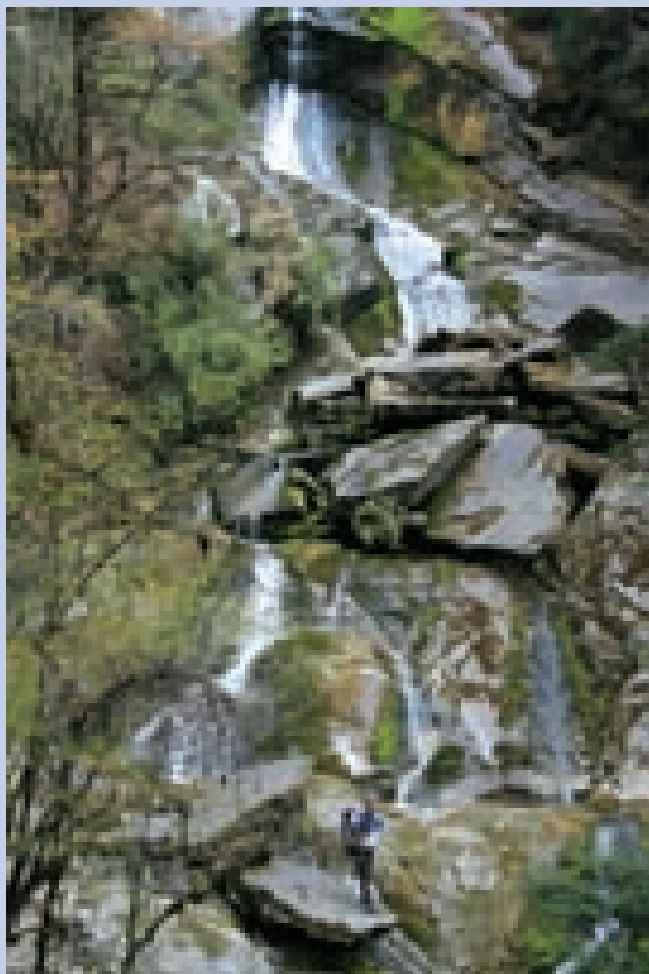
Untouched eastern Nepal is dominated by the third highest mountain in the world, Kanchenjunga. A vast rhododendron, oak and pine forest surround the massif where Limbu, Rai and Sherpa communities live in near idyllic valleys. Expect some trails to be rough since the earthquakes in 2011.

Best time to visit: March to December, but views are best October to December
Environment: mid to high Himalaya
Trek style: local lodges, teahouses, homestays or camping
Duration: 18-32 days
Difficulty: moderate trekking
Guidebook: *Nepal: Trekking & the Great Himalaya Trail*, Trailblazer, 2011 ▶





Code of Conduct for Trekkers



Community

RESPECT CULTURES AND TRADITIONS

Be a considerate guest, understand protocol, offer appropriate gifts when necessary, ask before taking a photo, do not show affection in public, and donations to *gompas* or shrines are appreciated.

BENEFIT LOCAL COMMUNITIES, COMMERCIALY AND SOCIALLY

Share skills and experience, teach when you can, offer a fair pay for services, participate in activities. Do not encourage begging, publicly argue, drink excessively or fight.

ADOPT NEW CUSTOMS

Do not wear tight or revealing clothing, do not enter someone's home unless invited, avoid touching people of the opposite sex, do not use your left hand to eat or pass objects and try to learn as much of the local language as possible.

Safety

BEWARE OF ALTITUDE SICKNESS

Use the buddy system to watch for symptoms of altitude sickness. Make sure everyone remains fully hydrated by drinking water throughout the day, everyday. Stay together along the trail, and communicate frequently with everyone.

BE SAFE

Carry an extensive first-aid kit and know how to use it. Have multiple plans for emergency evacuation and designate decision makers. Leave your itinerary details with someone responsible at home. Beware of yaks and other animals on narrow trails!

BE SELF-RELIANT

Don't assume you will receive help or assistance. Ensure your group has extensive field-craft and navigation skills. Research thoroughly, is your route appropriate for your party? Do you have the necessary skills, experience, resources and equipment?

Environment

TREAD SOFTLY

Stick to trails and recognised camping areas. Avoid creating new tracks, or damaging the environment in any way. Follow the adage: take only photos and leave only footprints.

PACK IT IN, PACK IT OUT

Avoid taking tins, glass, or plastic containers and bags unless you plan to carry them back to a major town. Wash away from water sources, and always use local toilet facilities when available. Bury all organic waste at least 30cm below the ground and ideally 50m away from water sources.

CONSERVE NATURAL RESOURCES

What few resources there are belong by right to the locals. Always ask permission before using anything along the trail. It is illegal to disturb wildlife, to remove animals or plants, or to buy wildlife products. ■

In the Beginning- Trekking Nepal

Someone once said (or should have) that life is one great, long trek, up and down, in fits and starts, up many valleys and over many ridgelines, with destinations looming on the horizon (often high atop the next hill!), destinations that when finally arrived at are often the inspiration or start of another trek.

Text By DON MESSERSCHMIDT, Photos By ROBIN BOUSTEAD



WHAT'S A 'TREK'?

The term 'trek' derives from the South African Boer (Dutch) word *'trekken'* meaning 'to pull' or 'to travel by ox-wagon'. Today, however, trekking has become a state of mind most commonly defined as a long, arduous journey or expedition, for adventure and enjoyment, on foot, in the mountains; especially in the Himalayas.

One of the first times I wrote about Himalayan trekking as a relatively 'new' adventure sport, almost half a century ago, I started with this lead:

*"Trek across Nepal to Everest base camp
Cut through the great Himalaya to the
threshold of Tibet*

*Drink salt-butter tea and yak milk
You might even see the Abominable Snow-
man!*

"Is this idle talk? ...Dreams? ...Maybe, but fully possible. You can do and see all these things and more (except, perhaps, the Snowman) trekking in Nepal. During the past [few] years, Nepal has opened to the outside world. Now, as never before, you can visit this landlocked kingdom of Hindus, Buddhist, Sherpas and fabulous mountains. You can trek, photograph, and camp in the heart of the Himalaya among the world's highest, most rugged peaks..." (*Summit magazine, March 1968*)

Although a bit naïve from today's perspective, those few lines from 1968 were among the first to encourage adventurers worldwide to consider visiting the Nepal Himalaya. The trekking industry has come a long ways since then.

I called my 1968 article 'How to trek in Nepal', the fourth in series of stories about Nepal published in *Summit: A Mountaineering Magazine* (USA). 'How to trek' gave advice about opportunities for hiking northwest of Pokhara, east to EBC (Everest Base Camp), and to a few other destinations.

Later in the year I led two commercial treks for Mountain Travel, Nepal's first trekking agency. One was to EBC and the other to Thak Khola in Mustang District. We tent-camped for most of a



month to EBC and back with 19 clients, all Americans, supported by several dozen porters. The Thak Khola trip was shorter, walking from Pokhara and back (there was no road and no airport to Jomsom then).

The decade of the 1960s was a time before today's big dollar trekking infrastructure was in place. Trekking agencies and guide services were in their infancy, and there were few of the hotels and tea shops that are now ubiquitous. Nor were there many of the 'comfort resources' that today's trekkers expect, like solar showers, soft drinks and bottled beer, fancy menus with European cuisine, and soft beds. It was also well before much of today's sophisticated gear was invented. Nobody trekked with carbon-cork-elliptical-spring-fitted-shock-absorbent trekking poles, nor with self-inflating sleeping mattresses, for example. With so little in the way of services and fancy (expensive) equipment, and given un-

improved trails and bad bridges, early trekkers in Nepal had to be 'tough'.

In the beginning, we lived off the land and either camped out in tents carried by porters (or "coolies" as they were sometimes called), or slept on house porches. Occasionally we found someone selling tea (coffee was unheard of). If we drank tea black without milk it was free. The earliest inns were called *'bhattis'*, small and temporary (in winter), serving good food and giving travelers a place on the floor to sleep out of the weather.

Food was inexpensive then (not now), but the choice was limited to *'daal-bhaat'* (lentils and rice) with a spicy veg curry. A complete meal in 1964 cost *'tin mohar'* (1½ rupees; about 20¢), and for another half rupee we got a meat curry, or an egg and a small glass of milk. It was well into the 1970s before trailside menus began featuring exotic fare like muesli, apple pancakes, lasagna and chocolate cake.

A popular drink in the inns was a mild millet wine called *'daru'*, served warm. It tastes like Japanese sake. Among the customers were Gurkha soldiers on leave, civil servants on assignment and, occasionally, foreigners on an adventure. A night's stay was free; we paid only for food and drink. Today, nothing is free on trek; everything has a price.

In the early 1960s I usually trekked alpine style, carrying my own gear, without porters. But when I needed one, the daily rate was *'saadbé saat rupiyaā, sukha'* (literally '7½ rupees, dry', meaning that the porter supplied his own food). That was the equivalent of \$1/day, already over three times what the early British trekkers paid their porters a decade earlier, but considerably less than you pay now when a porter's wage may go as high as a thousand rupees (about \$12 per day).

STRANGERS ON THE TRAILS

Back then, foreign trekkers were exotic strangers. We were often stared at, and sometimes deserved it. Stephen Bezruchka recalls his cultural insensitivity when he and his wife first came to Nepal ►

in 1969. “In the hot lowlands Lois would trek wearing really short shorts. I cringe thinking of a photo of her dressed that way eating Indian peanut butter out of a metal can, one of those treats we ‘sahib’s’ enjoyed...” The only other foreigners they met were missionary women in long skirts. “We even joked how funny they looked!”

That was then. He jokes no more. Bezruchka, a medical doctor, now advises foreigners to behave appropriately, dress modestly and trek safely in his comprehensive and popular *Trekking Nepal: A Traveler’s Guide*, now in its 8th edition.

When the British mountaineer Bill Tilman first trekked in Helambu, north of Kathmandu, he encountered villagers who simply could not refrain “from putting their heads inside my tent very soon after our arrival...” He wrote about it in his 1952 book, *Nepal Himalaya*. Another Brit, Showell Styles, in his book *The Moated Mountain* (1954), describes trekking from Trisuli to Gorkha across the mid-hills where he and his companions

soon became “accustomed to the sudden halt of an approaching [local] traveler, his dropped jaw and fixed stare as we passed, repeated a hundred times a day.”

The stranger-as-curiosity effect lasted well into the 1960s, when I first trekked in the central hills as a Peace Corps volunteer. In every village I was typically assailed by inquisitive youngsters, and when I stopped for the night I was inevitably overwhelmed by their infectious curiosity. They were typically wide-eyed with wonder when I told them that my soft sleeping bag was filled with “*hāns ko pūākā*” (duck down) and the pad with “*phāj*” (foam). That I spoke Nepali, however, didn’t faze them, for didn’t everyone? But that I spoke English; now that was something I could help them with. I remember drilling children to pronounce ‘school’ as ‘*skool*’, not ‘*ee-skool*’ or ‘*see-kool*’. The ‘sch’ consonant cluster stymied them!

THE FIRST MODERN BACKPACKS

When we early Peace Corps volunteers arrived in country we were issued a ‘Trapper Nelson’ wood-frame packboard with a stiff canvas bag — clumsy, uncomfortable and heavy (9 lbs., empty). Bill Tilman once described them as “massive structures of the Yukon type, built evidently for professional packers, old timers, ‘forty-niners’, and such like, men who could ‘take it’ in every sense.”

After a few months my Peace Corps buddy Bruce Morrison and I could ‘take it’ no longer, so we sent off for modern lightweight aluminum and nylon backpacks from a California outfitter named Dick Kelty. And soon, after bragging about our Keltys, the Peace Corps began ordering them for other volunteers.

Today there are many brands of backpacks on the market, but outdoor sport historians remind us that Dick

Kelty was the pioneer inventor. His innovative design dates to 1951 when he and a hiking companion decided to shift the weight of the back load from the shoulders to the hips. “In order to do this,” we are told, “they had to skid the ends of their pack boards into the rear pockets of their jeans. This was when both of them realized that this is a much easier and comfortable way of carrying a load.” Trying to stuff the wooden pack frames into back pockets inspired Kelty to invent a hip belt. Then he replaced the wood frame with light aluminum tubing, the canvas bag with rip-stop nylon, and the rest is history...

Dick Kelty once told me that he kept a photo under the glass on his office desk — of me with my Kelty Pack on trek in the Himalayas.

FLIMSY FOOTWEAR

In 1953 the British journalist Ralph Izzard, who worked in Asia and wrote for the *Daily Mail*, was assigned to accompany that year’s British Expedition to Mt Everest. In his 1954 book *An Innocent of Everest*, Izzard describes going shopping for suitable footwear in New Delhi. But because there were no mountaineering stores or trekking outfitters in India (or Nepal) in those days, he had a problem. “Climbing, or even stout walking boots were out of the question,” he wrote. “Being a large-footed man in a neat-footed nation I could find no boot or shoe to fit me in any shape or form except a single pair of sneakers or tennis shoes in a Bata store.” He bought them to wear around camp, “but in the end,” he says “I marched nearly 400 miles in them over the roughest possible going before finally throwing them away (they were retrieved by one of my coolies who is probably still wearing them).”



With so little in the way of services and fancy equipment, given unimproved trails and bad bridges, early trekkers in Nepal had to be ‘tough’.

A decade later when I needed trekking shoes, I went to the old Bata shoe store on New Road in downtown Kathmandu where I, too, encountered the problem of size. The best I could find was a small pair of light rubber and canvas Indian 'jungle boots'. To free up my cramped feet, I cut away some of the rubber toe cap, then wore the ugly green things for many miles like open-toed sandals.

When 'Vibram' soled boots became available, they were an instant hit for trekkers and mountaineers. "For rough walking," wrote Bill Tilman, who first used them in the early 1950s, "the 'Vibram' soled boot is more comfortable than the nailed. It is supreme for that everyday Himalayan pastime of boulder-hopping (provided the boulders are dry), and is generally suitable for climbing except on wet rock, wet ice, or fresh snow on rock. It is a matter of taste."

EARLY TREKS AND TREKKERS OF NOTE

Neither the early Peace Corps volunteers of the 1960s nor the British adventurers of the early 1950s were the first foreigners to trek in Nepal, of course. That distinction goes to others, like Joseph Dalton Hooker, the English botanist

They were typically wide-eyed with wonder when I told them that my soft sleeping bag was filled with "hāns ko pwākh" (duck down)...

who roamed the eastern hills in 1850; to the English adventurer Douglas Freshfield and the Italian photographer Vittorio Sella who were the first to circumambulate Kangchenjunga in 1899; and to the 14 Indians from the Survey of India who mapped virtually the whole of Nepal in 1924-1927 for the British colonials in Delhi.

Even earlier, in the late 1800s, other Indian surveyors, the so-called 'pundits' on special assignments, trekked through the Himalayas to Tibet as spies for the British in the 'Great Game' that pitted China, Russia and England against one another for control and influence in this part of Asia. Bill Tilman has described one of them, known only as 'M.H.', "who in 1885 traveled up the valley of the Dudh Kosi west of Everest to Tingri in Tibet, whence he returned to India by Kyerong and Trisuli valley, thus traversing Nepal twice." And before them, as early as 1628 AD, intrepid and stalwart Catholic missionaries trekked from Lha-

sa to Nepal, descended the dangerous track down the Bhoté Kosi to Kodari, then transited through Kathmandu on their way to India.

DEATH DROPS

Well before modern trail repairs and road-building, some of the original old bridges and riverside tracks were quite terrifying. While traveling from Kathmandu west to Pokhara in the early 1960s, a Gurkha Army officer named Duncan Forbes and his porter Manbahadur confronted a dangerous crossing in Gorkha District. Forbes wrote about it in his 1964 book *Johnny Gurkha*. Near Arughat bazaar they received "a shock" while crossing the Maudi Khola. The narrow gorge, he says, "was spanned by so crazy and dilapidated a bridge that I found Manbahadur, who was ahead of me for once, standing facing it like a horse refusing a jump." It was a cantilever bridge (common then, but only rarely seen today) locally built with "baulks of timber anchored with rocks at one end. Each level of timbers overlapped the course on which it rested and stretched out further towards the middle. The gap in the middle was spanned by more planks. The whole thing had slipped at one end and was twisted and leaning at such an angle that it look as though it might collapse at any ▶



The whole thing had slipped at one end and was twisted and leaning at such an angle that it look as though it might collapse at any moment.

moment. The flimsy wooden handrail was so loose that to hang on to it would have been fatal.”

“I looked below into the river bed,” Forbes wrote. “There, at the bottom of the death drop, people were unconcernedly washing themselves and their clothes. I looked across the gimcrack structure at the cliff on the other side, and balancing precariously I crept across. Manbahadur fatalistically followed.”

On the far side someone told them that a few weeks earlier a man had fallen off the broken bridge to his death.

Even more fearsome were tracks that crossed sheer cliff faces along some of Nepal’s wildest river gorges. When my companion Bruce and I came down the Marsiangdi river track from Manang to Lamjung District in 1964, we crossed several cliffs on narrow wooden planks laid atop posts driven horizontally into cracks in the rock face. Earlier, in 1950, after Bill Tilman had come up the gorge he wrote that “...the builders of the road had exercised boldness and ingenuity, stringing wooden galleries across the face. Such structures, known as ‘parri’..., were pretty frail, particularly the handrails which were better left alone or at the most touched rather than grasped. They were seldom wider than a single plank and were reached by a stone staircase or up-ended logs with footholds cut in them. When the river was low many of these cat-walks could be avoided by a little boulder-hopping in the river bed. In the rains the traveler has no choice. He must then mind his step...,” he concluded with understatement.

The Swiss geologist Toni Hagen, another early trek pioneer from the 1950s, encountered similar perilous crossings on cliffs along the Arun river gorge in eastern Nepal. So did the Tibetolo-

gist, David Snellgrove, out west on his seven-month 1954 trek through the high Himalayas.

NEPAL’S FIRST TREKKING AGENCY

In my 1968 ‘How to trek’ article I introduced readers to the group trekking services of Col. J.O.M. ‘Jimmy’ Roberts, Nepal’s trek agency pioneer. As a Gurkha officer in India, Roberts had plenty of experience rambling through the Indian Himalayas. Then, in 1950, he became one of the first modern Brits to trek and climb west of Kathmandu.

In those days mountaineering expeditions necessitated some very serious trekking. In June 1950, for example, while the French expedition led by Maurice Herzog was making history on Annapurna-I (8,091 m/26,545 ft), Bill Tilman, Jimmy Roberts and two other Brits were on their way up a nearby but lesser peak called Annapurna-IV (7,525 m) from the north, Manang side. Tilman



explained later in his dry style of humor why they failed to make the summit, attributing it simply to an “inability to reach the top.” Okay. But more to the point, to get there and back Tilman and his companions had to trek, hard, for weeks. While in Manang District, they were the first foreigners to Nar and Phu, and the first to trek much of what is now the well known Annapurna Circuit route.

Jimmy Roberts fell in love with Nepal on that trip, and returned often. For awhile, he served as Military Attaché at the British Embassy in Kathmandu. After retiring from the Gurkhas, he stayed on as a civilian, and in 1964 he founded Nepal’s first trekking agency: Mountain Travel. It was the start of a long walk to what has become a booming adventure travel industry. (The original Mountain Travel is now part of the Tiger Mountain group.)

“Beginnings were modest...,” Roberts wrote in a rambling, undated essay on ‘How it All Began’. He recalled “sketching out a plan to provide for no less than 8 trekkers in the field at one time. I would have 8 bags, 8 pads, 8 this, and 8 that. I wrote down 8 tents, scratched out the 8 and wrote 4 – let ‘em share...” He soon tossed out the whole idea of limiting group size to eight.

His initial advertisement in *Holiday* magazine brought only five inquiries, but it was a start. “My first clients came to do an Everest trek in the early spring of 1965,” he wrote. “There was a story in circulation a year or two later that these were ‘three American grandmothers.’ In fact, a more sporting trio of enthusiastic and appreciative ladies I have never since handled”.

Three years later when I led the two Mountain Travel treks, we stayed the first few nights in the old Royal Hotel on Kantipath (it now houses Election Commission). The Royal gave us a taste of historical panache. I remember Col. Roberts introducing the proprietor, jovial Boris Lissanevitch, who entertained us each evening with his stories and jokes



while mixing drinks and ‘rubbing elbows’ with the Kathmandu elite in the hotel’s rustic Yak-&-Yeti Bar.

Roberts’ approach to running treks was simple: “We try and give you all the ingredients of enjoyment, with Sherpas who look after you, but who do not intrude. The final, total experience remains yours to create, and to enjoy to full without organizational worries or distractions. Stated simply, I would say we are trying to show you the mountains of Nepal, its valleys and villages and people, under the best possible conditions, but without shielding you from reality.”

As business prospered Roberts hired Dawa Norbu Sherpa and another ex-Gurkha, Mike Cheney, to assist him, two names that “are inseparable with the story of the development of Mountain Travel,” he later said.

Mountain Travel promoted ‘expedition trekking’, a notion that Roberts never fully defined. Rusty Brennan, who operates a company called Ri Adventure Travel and knows the system well, is more explicit. Expedition trekking, he says, “is group travel, fully supported

and not dependent on local resources.” It’s a style of trekking that carries “all the resources needed to complete the journey and handle any kind of weather or trail condition.” In Jimmy Roberts’ day, since there were few places to stay in the hinterland, he outfitted his trips with enough gear – tents, stove, food, utensils, and fuel – and enough support staff and porters (or pack animals) to be independent; or as Brennan puts it, with enough staff “to go the distance.”

For guides, cooks and kitchen boys, Roberts favored employing Sherpas, the indigenous residents of the Mount Everest region. “Sherpas,” he said, “give trekking agents in Nepal a most unfair advantage over their counterparts in other parts of the Himalaya. I cannot hide the truth – I love them. And at times they drive me stark staring mad.”

Over time ‘Sherpa’ has taken on other meanings. Now any trip guide or porter may be called a Sherpa, whether he actually is one or not. And because Sherpas are world renowned for their skills in guiding clients to summits, it is no wonder that in some diplomatic and political circles (and based on a pun) someone who assists officials or delegates at ‘summit meetings’ and conferences is now known as a ‘Sherpa’.

The notion of ‘trekking’, itself, has also changed — it has “morphed into a travel experience that now uses resources along the travelers’ route and is no longer a self-supported near-wilderness activity,” says Bennan. Eventually, as guest houses and tea houses began to spring up on the main trails, ‘teahouse trekking’ became fashionable, alone or in a small group, with or without porters, following a popular route, and relying on trailside accommodations for meals and overnight stays. Both expedition and teahouse trekking remain immensely popular today. ■

The author is a contributing editor and frequent writer for ECS Nepal. He can be contacted at don.editor@gmail.com.

For this story he has borrowed stories, quotes and insights from many sources, including Tilman’s *‘Nepal Himalaya’* (1952), Styles’ *‘The Moated Mountain’* (1954), Izzard’s *‘An Innocent on Everest’* (1954), and Forbes’ *‘Johnny Gurkha’* (1964). On early treks (for comparative purposes) see Hooker’s *‘Himalayan Journals’* (1855), Freshfield’s *‘Round Kangchenjunga’* (1903), Snellgrove’s *‘Himalayan Pilgrimage’* (1961) and Hagen’s *‘Nepal Himalaya’* (1961). The list is by no means exhaustive.

The Jimmy Roberts/Mountain Travel story is best told in Roberts’ unpublished essay ‘How it all began’, quoted here. See also ‘Soul of a mountain man’ in ‘Action Asia’ (Oct/Nov 1999; www.actionasia.com). Dick Kelty’s role in the history of backpacking is told in ‘Backpack History – How and when did they come into being?’ online at www.fabric-and-handle.com (> Articles > Backpack History), posted September 13, 2011. For other insights on ‘trek-trekker-trekking’ the observations of Rusty Brennan (of riadventuretravel.com), Steve Bezruchka, Robin Marston and other correspondents and friends (and early trekkers) are acknowledged with thanks.

At the start of adventure trekking in 1952, Bill Tilman called Nepal “the largest inhabited country still unexplored by Europeans.” Now, after 60 years, Tilman’s “unknown Nepal” — unknown to outsiders, that is — is firmly ‘on the map’, so to speak, and there is very little of the Nepal Himalaya that has not been trekked by Nepalese and foreigners alike.

Mountain Tourism and the threat of Extreme Weather

*It's not the most immediate concern for Nepalese tourism yet,
but global warming is already making its presence felt.*

Text & Photos By KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA





The majesty of the Himalayas: to breathe its crisp air and stare at its imposing jagged silhouette against an infinite clear blue sky is nothing short of awe-inspiring. Getting there, however, has never been easy. Even today, with airport access and availability of modern amenities, the Himalayas remain a relatively difficult region to reach and navigate, demanding a mix of determination and passion, and time and commitment.

For Nepal, mountain tourism has been a steadily growing and significant economic sector for over half a century. The mountains themselves have become the national mascot for all things climate change, except perhaps in the context of tourism itself. And so, just how might climate change affect mountain tourism in Nepal?

While it is impossible to come up with a definite answer to that question, several possibilities can be outlined based on available scientific data. The

For tourists, concerns about accessibility and safety, and the time needed to travel could all be major factors to shape their decision of traveling to the Himalayas.

issue of the melting glaciers and snow-caps are naturally the first things that might come to mind. While those will have devastating implications in Nepal and beyond, how could this have a direct effect specifically in people's interest in visiting the region? Unlike mountain tourism in the west where snow is a prerequisite for its ski-oriented attractions, tourists are drawn to Nepal's mountains for its terrain, the adventure and the sheer size and scale of the Himalayas, as well as the culture of the region – with or without the snow.

The decision to visit the region, however, could be tested more by flight

delays that could grow more common and longer than they already are. A weeklong flight cancellation prompted by poor weather conditions in November 2011 created a massive international public relations disaster for Nepal's tourism. It also created a logistical and financial nightmare for the tourists who had to reschedule their international flights and miss work-days—not the kind of ending one looks for in a vacation. Considering the regularity with which these delays take place every season it would naturally be wise for any tourist to keep at least a couple of days open between one's visit to the Himalayas and the international flight back to their ▶



For tourists, concerns about accessibility and safety, and the time needed to travel could all be major factors to shape their decision of traveling to the Himalayas.

country of origin. Still, climate change induced growing extremities of weather will be no friend of tourism in Nepal in this particular context.

“A changing climate leads to changes in the frequency, intensity, spatial extent, duration, and timing of extreme weather and climate events, and can result in unprecedented extreme weather and climate events,” the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted in their paper ‘Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation’ last year.

The paper adds: “There is high confidence that changes in heat waves, glacial retreat and/or permafrost degradation will affect high mountain phenomena such as slope instabilities, movements of mass, and glacial lake outburst floods. There is also high confidence that changes in heavy precipitation will affect landslides in some regions.”

That latter analysis affects not just mountain tourism but also Nepal’s highway oriented trips to destinations like the Chitwan National Park or Pokhara and the regions around it, as well as river based tourism.

For tourists, concerns about accessibility (and evacuation), safety while in the region, and the time needed to travel could all be major factors that



will shape their decision of traveling to the Himalayas in Nepal. For business owners, they will probably see a rise in costs of running their businesses while experiencing a possible dip in tourist arrivals and cancellations of bookings related to weather issues.

It has been well established that Nepal is nowhere close to being responsible for global warming. However, in light of growing scientific information on the issue,

there can be little or no excuse for the lack of allotting immediate and massive investment in critical infrastructure development across the country. Failing to do so could cost the country dearly. The mountains may continue to stand, but the tourism sector could be severely crippled. ■

You can contact the author and photographer at kashish@350nepal.org and follow him on Twitter @kashishds.

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Meet the Everests

The descendants of George Everest trek to the Everest Base Camp

Text By LIZBETH LUCKSOM



ECS Media

Binoy and his 'Alps In Nepal' team were thrilled when they heard back from Ruth confirming their trip to Nepal. Nicholas Everest and his family were visiting Nepal for the first time. Now what would excite them so much about a trip they'd made a number of times before? Well, no doubt it's the last name that stands out so prominently and more so of the fact that

they are the descendants of the Welsh explorer and surveyor, George Everest. I met up with Nicholas Everest his wife Ruth, son Joshua and daughter Sophie Martin after they made their historic trip to Everest Base camp. I was rather curious to know about the family name they proudly carried and about their relationship to the famous British surveyor and geographer.

THE FAMILY TREE

The word 'Everest' is synonymous with the famous climb made by New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Mountaineer Tenzing Norgay. However, very few know the actual history behind the global name. While most of us would rather not delve into the nitty-gritty of things that happened hundreds of years ago, there are others who would think quite the contrary.

George Everest was the son of Tristram Everest of Gwerndale, Brecknockshire, and was born on the 4th of July 1790. He mapped the subcontinent from Cape Comorin in the South to the northern foothills of the Himalayas during the times when he was working on the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India. George had four daughters and two sons. Two of his daughters died very young while gave up their name after getting married. Of his two sons, only one had a son, and he didn't have any sons himself, so Everest's direct line came to an end. However, he had four brothers - John, Robert, Thomas and Charles and a sister. This is what Ruth had to say about their family line- "Nick's father said it was not through one of the brothers that our ancestry lies, but George's cousin who was called John Everest from Greenwich. There are about four family trees involved in the ancestry, and even with all four, it is almost impossible to follow the links.

Three other family names get involved through various marriages, for example Temple, Chevallier and Martin". Bina Elizabeth Martin, apparently Nicholas's father's second cousin, published a book named *Parsons and Prisons-Temple Chevallier Martin-1842-1933*. Ruth told me it took her approximately 20 years to research and compile the book, which was published for private circulation amongst their family members. When I enquired about Nicholas's forefathers looking at the family tree spread out over nearly three pages, Ruth tried her best to re-trace those lines that linked them to the Everest clan, even though it was really difficult with so many family names and hundreds of years in between.

Ruth is married to the family and has always been fascinated by their family name and the fact that the world's most spectacular mountain was named after Nicholas's own ancestor was something she could not fathom. She always dreamt of visiting Nepal and making it to base camp. Finally, sitting in a roof top cafe in Kathmandu in November 2009, decided she would turn her dream into reality. She returned to Taipei where she is working at Taipei European School and started planning for her trip to Nepal seriously.

NAMESAKE

Eve rest, in two syllables is the exact pronunciation used by George Everest and not the one that is more common to

Finally, sitting in a roof top cafe in Kathmandu in November 2009, decided she would turn her dream into reality.





Before it got its actual name, Everest was otherwise known as Sagarmatha, and by it's official name given by the Nepalese government, Chomolungma.

us. The fact that George Everest never actually saw the tallest mountain was confirmed by the the family. Nicholas feels that the reason could be because of

the lack of good equipment during those times. The equipment used in those days was heavy and clumsy even though George Everest was undoubtedly in-

strumental in redesigning the equipment when he was working as a surveyor in India. Before it got its actual name, Everest was otherwise known as Sagarmatha, and by it's official name given by the Nepalese government, Chomolungma. The latter is recognized by Tibetans while the British were comfortable with Peak XV. It was officially christened by the Royal Geographical Society in the year 1865 when it's height of 29,002 ft (8,840 m) was first published. Andrew Waugh, the then British Surveyor General of India recommended this name in honour of his predecessor George Everest. The former chief apparently never wanted his name to be incorporated as the name of the world's highest and most captivating mountain. His plea seemed to have fallen on deaf ears as that name has now become a household word among nations as Waugh hoped it would be.

After more than a century, the descendants of George Everest visited Nepal and although they couldn't make it to the actual summit, they made it to the

base camp which was quite an achievement for them because they didn't seem like the typical adventurous lot. Prior to their arrival, Ruth had done quite a bit of research on Kathmandu, unlike her kids who were a bit apprehensive about the trip. "We knew so little about the Himalayas before the trip, so we also found it fascinating, finding out about the culture and the way the people live their lives. Living a culture is always the best way to find out about it, and we all enjoyed this very much," added Ruth. When her dream was finally realised, she had a personal, tearful moment of her own at the base camp. She had been successful in trying to unite the family through this trip. "We've always been a close family, but it was nice being together for two weeks sharing such a fantastic experience. One of the things that stuck to our minds was waking up in Namche Bazaar. We arrived in heavy rain and cloud, but when we woke in the morning and pulled back our bedroom curtains, we all went 'wow' - how amazing is this scenery. We continued to say 'wow' about the stunning surroundings for the rest of the trip. Seeing Mount Everest for the first time was also amazing". Josh reiterates, "With the crisp blue sky and a massive mountain in front of us, everyday was wow". For Nicholas it was more of a 'laughter trip' where they had a fun time with the family, sharing jokes during those long tiring walks or sipping a cup of tea in cosy hotel cafes. Binoy and his team went over the top, designing a banner and a T-shirt for them. The banner was unveiled at the base camp, which read- "To Everest with the Everests". The



We arrived in heavy rain and cloud, but when we woke in the morning and pulled back our bedroom curtains, we all went 'wow' - how amazing is this scenery.

Everest family were simply overwhelmed and overjoyed at the kind of services they received during their brief stay in Nepal. Their visit according to them exceeded all expectations and whatever reservations they had had before they arrived in Nepal, totally changed by the end of the journey and they hoped to make a second trip in the near future.

MEMORY REMAINS

The base camp was the final destination for the Everests but even at that height and just a glimpse of the peak changed everything for them. No matter how hard Ruth tries to unravel the ancestry linkage and despite the age old debate

about what the name could-have-been or should-have-been, the sight of the mountain still takes the breath away of all trekkers who travel halfway around the world just to experience that 'wow' factor. The Everests are likely back to their daily lives now, but I bet their trip to Nepal and the trek to the base camp is something that they will cherish for the rest of their lives and and that this story will be handed down for generations to come. ■

Binoy Rai is the Managing Director of Alps in Nepal Trekking Pvt.Ltd, Golfutar and can be reached at 9841541355/4374908, email- travel@alpsinnepal.com

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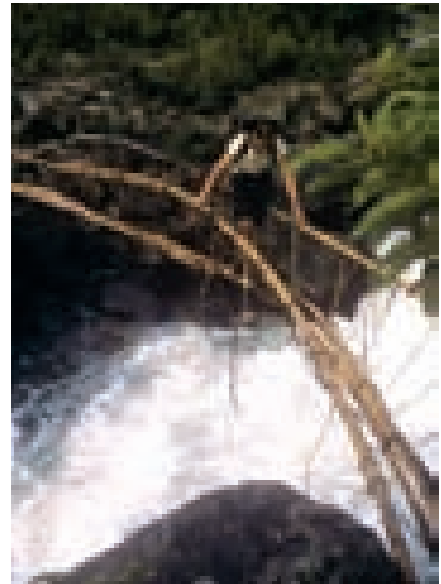
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Excerpts from Nepal Journal, 1964

TREKKING IN EAST NEPAL

This story takes place along the Arun River just south of Tumlingtar. We were trekking the road [a foot track or trail] from Dingla in the northern part of our district to Chainpur.

Text By LARRY DALOZ



SEPTEMBER, 1964

We spent the night on a large, flat part of the Arun flood plain. Walking to get water that evening, I suddenly became aware of a curious feeling, familiar, but almost forgotten. It was in my feet, the way they seemed almost to slap the ground. I realized with a jolt that this was the first time I had walked any distance on level ground for over two weeks. It had been a long time!

The next morning we were off for the ghat [river bank] several miles upstream where we would be able to take a dugout canoe across the river. The road, we were assured, was easy, running along the river bank all the way.

So there we were, gaily chugging along, ducking huge spiderwebs and slapping their giant architects from our faces, when all at once the trail was gone. Just petered out into so many cow paths. By the time these faded out, we were plunging pack-laden and headfirst through the jungle along a steep riverbank broken only by the occasional tributary and paddy. No road anywhere. We kept on, knowing at least our direction by the river on our right. We knew that eventually we'd have to hit the main road coming down from Dingla to the ghat. From time to time a path would materialize, then fade away again. The whole business, climbing up and down little cliffs covered with brush, slashing through jungle, plodding through paddies was, to put it mildly, ugly.

Finally, we found what seemed at least a temporary path, though it seemed no more than a cow path. Before long

...we'd had very little to eat the night before and were clearly in the advanced stages of starvation.

it was joined by another, then another. But to our consternation, they all led back up the mountainside. Perhaps we could find a house and ask? For now there was nothing for it but to head up the Dingla hill. The road climbed mercilessly upward for over an hour and still no house. We had hoped we might get all the way to Chainpur that day but clearly that was not to be. Moreover, we'd had very little to eat the night before and were clearly in the advanced stages of starvation. Where the road was taking us was anybody's guess. We know only that it was leading in exactly the wrong direction and we were as stuck on it as a bum on an express freight. There was no bailing out. Finally, after another exhausting hour of climbing, a house appeared ahead. The ghar patti ama was good to us and sold us enough cornmeal to revive us.

"Ama," we asked, "Satya ghatko bato, kboi?"

"Ghat, ni?" she asked. Then answered herself, jutting her chin back down the way we had come, "U tala. Tapaike aieko batoma, ta!"

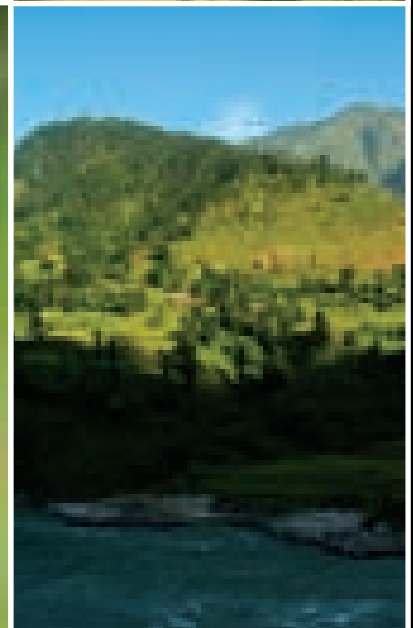
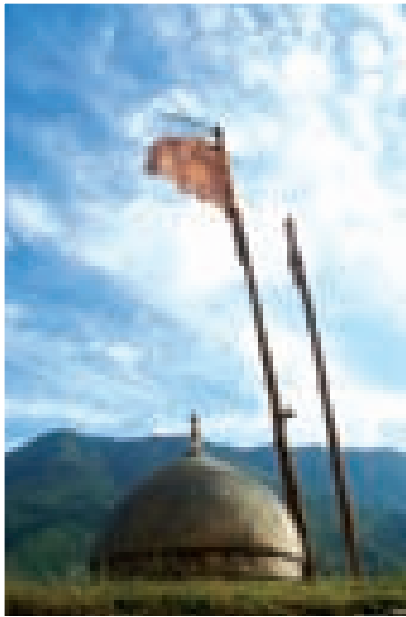
We'd been in Nepal for long enough by this time; there was no mistaking what she was telling us: back the way you came, boys. It seemed one of those cow paths we had scorned led to the ghat after all.

Hours later, exhausted and starving, we finally stumbled out onto the riverbank and the ghat. Amazingly, the ferry man was there and on our side of

the river. We paid our paisa and before long were climbing back up the opposite bank heading for Chainpur, a day late. As it grew dark, two Kamis [Blacksmiths] met us and invited us to stay in their house just above. They promised they'd feed us royally. When we took them up on it, they were stunned. It had been a formality only, it seemed, but they were willing to go ahead with it, and we were in no condition to refuse. Their house was pretty stark, the meal was mostly millet, sticky and barely palatable, but the location was extraordinary—set against the steep hillside high on the ridge above the river. And as the sun set, the far off clouds parted just enough to give us a glimpse of a jagged, white peak, a great fang, far above where anything solid ever had a right to be. ■

Laurent A. (Larry) Daloz was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Nepal in 1963-65, doing rural development in the eastern hills. During his time in Nepal Larry kept a detailed journal, much of which is now archived in the Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston, Massachusetts (USA). This short article is an excerpt from his 'Nepal Journal'.

After Peace Corps, Larry went on to become an adult educator, Associate Director of the Whidbey Institute, and author of several books including *Mentor: Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners* (1999) and *Effective Teaching and Mentoring: Realizing the Transformational Power of Adult Learning Experiences* (1986). Larry Daloz can be contacted at ldaloz@whidbey.com.



When the road breaks down

Text & Photos by PAT KAUBA

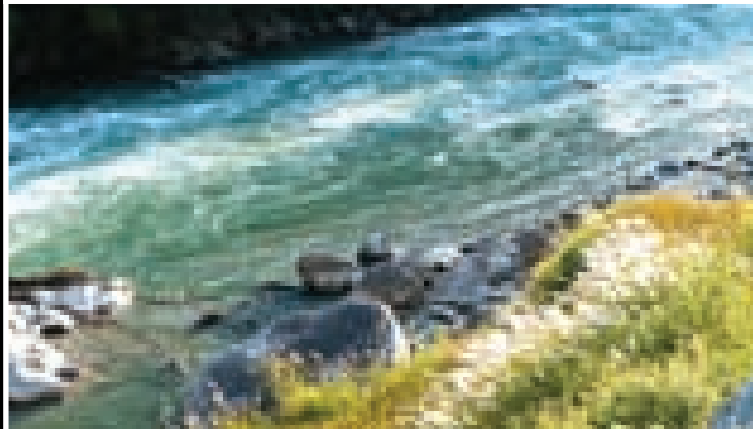
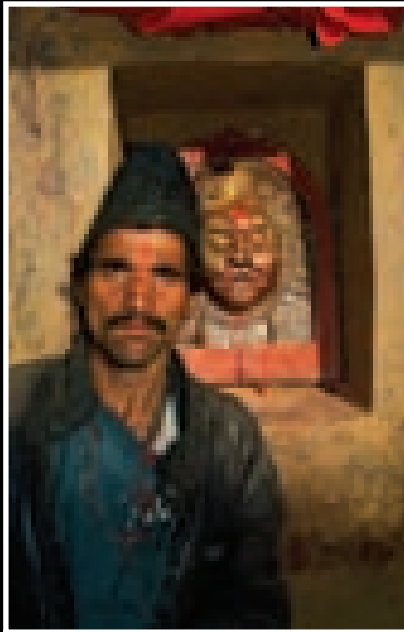
For those of us from the west, the road is not a new idea, the last millennia has spun out countless roads to nameless places. Today the concept has spread out across every inch of our planet. But what happens when the road breaks down, when you have to get out of the vehicle and walk?

Last autumn it happened to my friend Amir and I, we were in far-western Nepal and had a mission to accomplish, hunting for Nepali *jadibuti* or medicinal herbs. So when the road broke down, due to the monsoon

season's damage, we had no choice but to walk the 100km to our destination of Jumla Bazaar. Ironically, Jumla is the start of the ancient pilgrimage road to holy Mount Kailash in Tibet—and it was three districts away!

At first with apprehension we moved on, but soon we were mesmerized by the host of wonderful treats to spy, tiny objects and little moments that would have been lost to us, if we had hurtled along the mountain road by bus.

patkauba@gmail.com







A portrayal of faith and devotion

Text by NIRAJ KARKI



Photo by Niraj Karri

For those who go beyond the ‘ultimate stoner’ image, there is an aura associated with Lord Shiva, something mysterious, unknown but nevertheless acknowledged. In the month of Falgun, the fourteenth day of the waning moon marks a day that throughout time has remained unchanged in its spirit. The day -Shivaratri, or MahaShivaratri, which simply means ‘*the night of Shiva*’ is one of Nepal’s most celebrated and unique festivals.

It happens in the temple of Pashupati. The queues start from around midnight ***the night before*** with tens of thousands of devotees who wait for hours to enter the most sacred temple in Nepal. Many people fast the whole day and wash themselves in the river. Women following ‘Paravati’, pray for the well being of their husbands and sons while unmarried women pray for a husband like Shiva, considered the ideal husband.

The time of Shivaratri also sees the much-anticipated arrival of ‘*sadhus*’ that are easily spotted with

stashs of marijuana (known also as ‘Shiva’s prasad which means religious gift), rolling joints and smoking openly, and sometimes, very often with the thousands of people who become intense devotees of Shiva for a day.

Away from the vicinity of Pashupati the infectious spirit of Shivaratri is seen in the countless bonfires scattered across town. During the day children put up temporary roadblocks collecting tolls to buy firewood and other goodies saying ‘*Shiva Parvati lai jado bhayo*’ (Shiva and Parvati feel cold).

Regardless of reasons, Pashupati at Shivaratri is magical. Crowd counts cross a hundred thousand. It is a powerful event to witness, an intense portrayal of faith and devotion at the same time coupled with untold ‘trippy’ quirks that make the festival unique, special and anticipated in a country where many traditions are slowly being lost. ■



PICTURE PERFECT



Photo by Wallace Woon



Photo by Wallace Woon

Photo by Wallace Woon



Photo by Niraj Karki





Photo by Nirraj Karki

PICTURE PERFECT



The Nepali Way

An ECS NEPAL photo competition

People

A place is what its people make it. Rural or urban, developed or left behind, the identity, character and mood of a place is defined by its people.

Nepal's wayward villages, teeming cities and everywhere in between is special because of the colourful personalities that populate these places.

The Nepali way is therefore most visible as it's towering mountains and mighty rivers but in essence is about the Nepali people. ■



First

Andree Mathieu

Dongol Residence, Prasanti coloni marg, Sanepa

Elders and local youth enjoying the afternoon sun and good conversation in Kathmandu Durbar Square, a World Heritage Site in the older part of the capital.

Second

Frances Klatzel

PO Box 21415, Kathmandu

The gods among us: Local devotees and locals dressed up as mythical deities at a cultural event.



Third

Dr Sumit Bidari

Kuleshwor Kathmandu

A woman from Ghasa carries her goat to a veterinarian in Baglung, the nearest town.

CONSOLATION

Krishna Khadka

Jyamirgadhi - 3, Jhapa

Timeless Play: children enjoying the drive on dry banana leaf in Jhapa



CONSOLATION

Susan Lee

Jhamsikhel-2, Patan

Climbing mountains: Local children scale a towering wall to reach flowers blooming on the other side of the wall.



Abishek Shrestha

SCC Kuponole

A young, Nepali, music loving crowd puts their hands together at a musical program.



Nagina Shrestha

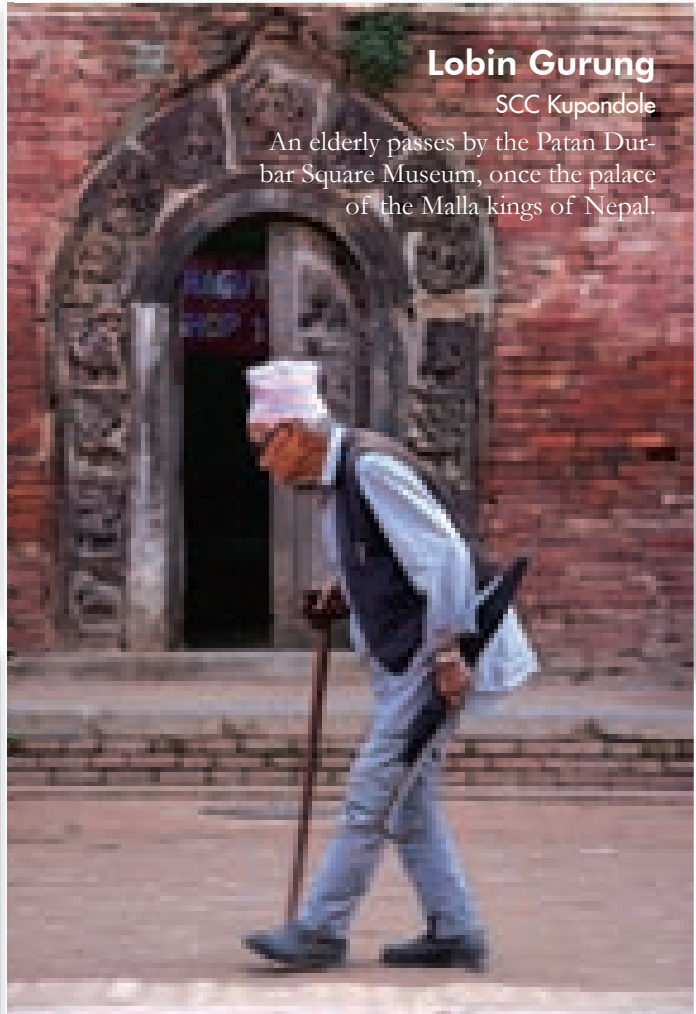
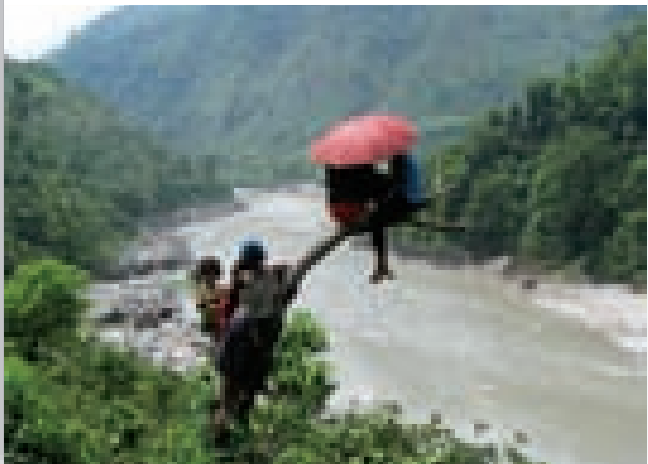
SCC Kuponole

A candid moment between an unidentified mother and her daughter in Ason.

Gautam Bir Singh Tamrakar

Tahachal Marg, Kathmandu

Local girls enjoying a view of a relatively serene Trishuli river while their livestock graze nearby on the lush hills.



Lobin Gurung

SCC Kuponole

An elderly passes by the Patan Durbar Square Museum, once the palace of the Malla kings of Nepal.



Dr Sumit Bidari

Kuleshwor Kathmandu

Women and children tend to their crops in the arid land of Upper Mustang, previously known as the kingdom of Lo.

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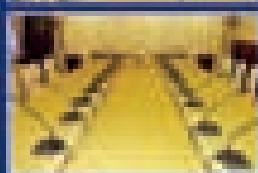
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Beni	Janakpur	Tandi	Damak
Putalibazar	Jaleswore	Parsa	Dhulabari
Galyan	Sindhulimadhi	Sauraha	Pathri
Waling	Chandranigahpur	Mugling	Letang
Tansen	Nijardh	Khanikhola	Umlabari
Gaidakot	Malangwa*	Naubise	Biratnagar
Kawasoti	Charikot	Galchhi	Inaruwa
Arun Khola	Jiri*	Gajuri	Itahari
Bardaghat	Nagarkot	Kurintar	Dharan
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Bhairahawa	Birgunj	Gorkha	
Sandhikharka*		Dumre	

* Upcoming Sites

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CRAFT

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92 ART SHOP: Newa Chhen

Photo by Niraj Karki

Australian Ambassador's visit to Janakpur

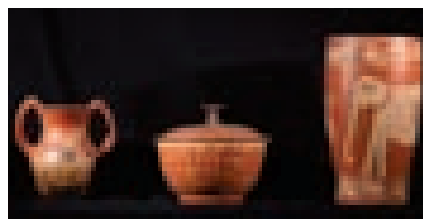
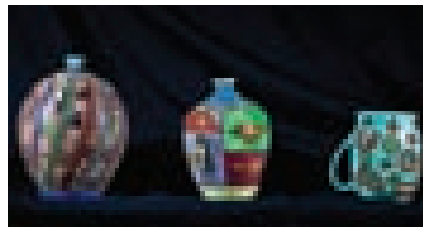
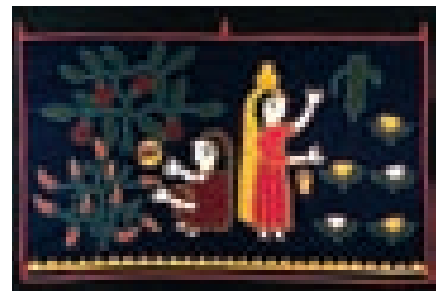
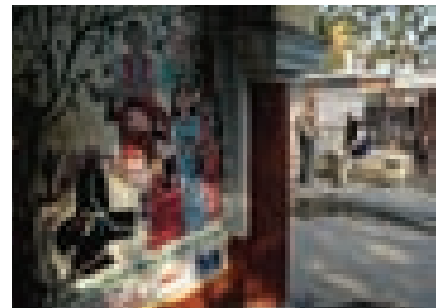
There is a story in the village of Kuwa in Janakpur – one that tells many other stories. Just 3 kilometers south of the town is an office where the 39 women who work there really enjoy going to. It is not however the serenity of the place that draws them there - even though the complex really is serene - but what the office, the Janakpur Women's Development Centre (JWDC) has stood for and enabled the women there to do.

JWDC was started in 1989 as the Jankpur Women's Art Project by Claire Burkert. Later in 1992, it was established as the JWDC after the Australian Embassy purchased the land and constructed the artistic building where the women work. The Australian embassy is still supporting the project and has donated AUD 27,000 this year alone for the project. The Australian Ambassador to Nepal Susan Grace visits the place regularly supporting and encouraging the women.

The Maithii form of art is an integral part of the lifestyle of the Maithili people. Passed down from one generation to the next, mothers to daughters, the women have always drawn stories and religious signs for occasions. Through the JWDC, the art form is now expressed as beautiful and intricately drawn paintings on mediums of Nepali paper while previously the art forms were drawn on walls alone. The women have now extended their range of mediums to beautiful works

of pottery, papier-mâché, mirrors, screen-printed fabrics and even t-shirts and bags.

There is a lot to the story of JWDC – it has touched and changed the lives of many women and their families for the better. It began with the purpose of empowering women through the practice of their traditional art and it has done that quite well, enabling women to stand as earning family members in a society where women who cycled were shunned. The women of JWDC today have done so much more, some of them having travelled abroad exhibiting their work in USA, UK, Belgium and Germany. For those heading anywhere towards Janakpur, the JWDC is a must-visit, as is Janakpur itself. For those that sadly are not, there are places in Kathmandu such as Sana Hastakala and Mahaguthi where their works of art are available. (Niraj Karki)



Chitwan witnessed Ratnanagar Festival 2012

Ratnanagar Chamber of Commerce and Industries (RCCI) in collaboration with Ratnanagar Municipality organized 'Ratnanagar Festival 2012' in Chitwan from 11 January to 19 January focusing on Chitwan's economic possibilities, commercial agriculture, traditional and historic monuments.

The festival was held in Tikaulichaur of Ratnanagar Municipality-7 with more

than 400 stalls. Local art and culture, locally produced handicrafts and electronic products were exhibited at the stalls.

RCCI and Ratnanagar Municipality have been organizing the Ratnanagar Festival every two years since 2001 with government and private support. Rs. 30 was charged for the entry for the locals while students were given a 50% discount on the entry fee.

Decline in handicraft exports this fiscal year

Handicraft exports from Nepal have posted a significant decline of 41.7 percent during the initial three-month period of the current Nepali financial year that began on 16 July 2011. According to the data released by the Trade and Export Promotion Centre, Nepal exported handicrafts worth NPR 83 million during the first three months of 2011-2012, as against its exports of NPR 143.53 million recorded during the corresponding period of last fiscal year. Hand-knotted carpets, pashmina, ready-made garments and leather products were among the major export items to



India, Bangladesh, Japan, China, Vietnam, Germany, France, Italy, Canada, UAE, UK, and the US.

Mid-western Trade Fair in Nepalgunj

Nepalgunj hosted the Mid-western Trade Fair from 10 February to 21 February organized by Nepalgunj Chamber of Commerce and Industries alongside Banke Tourism Fair-2068.

With 300 stalls displaying industrial, tourist, agricultural and handicrafts items, the fair also featured promotional stalls of financial institutions. According to the organizers the event carried out transactions of around Rs. 40-45 million.

MoCS to recognize metal crafts among major exportables

The Ministry of Commerce and Supplies (MoCS) listed metal craft and garments made of natural fibers among the country's major exportable items by forming a cell to study the issue and adding these two products to the list in response to discontent that they have not been included in the Nepal Trade Integration Strategy (NTIS) 2010 as priority export items.

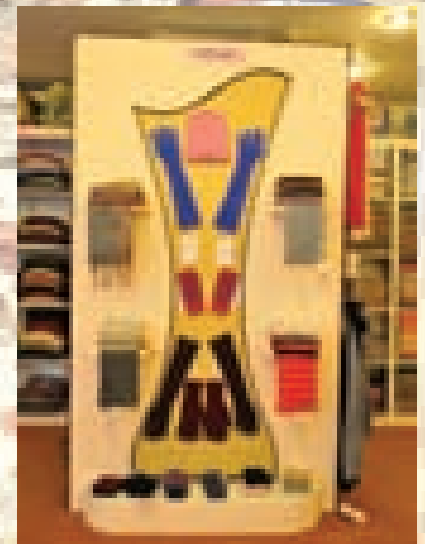
The NTIS cell in its preliminary draft has included metal craft and garments in the list of exportable items. According to the Federation of Handicrafts Associations of Nepal (FHAN), the

cell prepared the preliminary draft including metals craft and garments from other natural fibers which are not currently in the list of the NTIS.

Among the 19 exportable items in the NTIS list, four products are from the handicraft sector — silver jewelry, handmade paper, wool products and pashmina. According to FHAN statistics for the first quarter, goods made of fibres like felt, silk, cotton and hemp accounted for over 20 percent of handicraft export earnings. Metal craft accounted for 18.55 percent of the total export earnings of Rs 1.18 billion.

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The fabric of history

Natural fibers are not a new thing to Nepal but its usage is finding a renaissance.

Text By PAT KAUBA

People are becoming aware of the clothes they wear and how they're produced. Statistics for 2009 show that the world used 20% of its pesticides to protect cotton crops, which only produced 25% of the world's fabric. The same year synthetic fabrics accounted for 70% and natural fibers came in at just 5%.

Natural fibers like cotton, hemp, bamboo and stinging nettle are not new ideas; European royalty were wearing fine cloths of nettle yarn in the 12th century. Cotton has been produced for over 3000 years and hemp over 5000 years. The Kulang-Rai of east Nepal have been using nettle fabric since records began; tying the umbilical cords of newborn babies and making the clothes on their backs, says Mr. Ram Sharan Neupane, Managing Director of Natural Fibers Pvt. Ltd, in Thamel's Sagarmatha Bazaar.

Mr. Neupane has been inciting a new way of thinking in Nepal, that wearing and producing natural clothing is good for the environment, the body and the overall stresses on the food chain. Natural Fibers has been producing and promoting Nepalese made natural clothing, especially stinging nettle fabrics for usage both domestically

and internationally. It's a big dream for Mr. Neupane as he sees the potential as massive.

Already his nettle-fabrics and clothes are exported to Spain, Korea and China. Collection is done from jungles not farms, meaning there is no loss of farming land. Due to lack of infrastructure in Nepal, all the yarn is spun outside, but weaving, dying and producing the clothes happens locally.

Visiting the Natural Fibers outlet and showroom becomes an education in all things alternative. On display are samples of clothes, fabrics and yarns of: bamboo from China (the world's only producer), organic cotton from India, stinging nettle from Nepal, along with fabrics from the unique cotton flower tree, soyabean, yak wool, silk and many more. Feeling the cloths on sale will transform your concept of the word soft, taking your senses on a short ride, helping you understand what it really means to have breathable eco-friendly clothes.



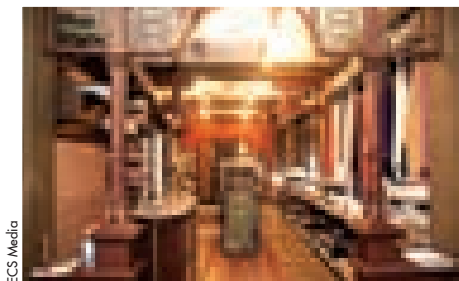
ECS Media

For Mr. Neupane his interest in working with nature began in his school days when educated by ECCA (Environmental Campaign for Conservation Awareness). Since the last ten years, he has been producing and selling natural clothing, starting from his home, selling pieces in Basantapur between college and working in a restaurant. Today, his dream is to create a market for stinging nettle cloths in Nepal for all Nepalese; showing that organic natural cloths are not just for the elite.

The Natural Fibers client base reflects the growing interest in natural clothing with many being Nepalese who have returned from abroad and those still abroad sending friends to collect items to send to them. Others include the diplomatic, expatriate and NGO/INGO communities of Nepal.

With more people like those from Natural Fiber, who are conscious of what we wear, how we live and the pressures exacted on our environment, we may yet reach a more natural way of life in the near distant future. And, look good in the process. ■

Pat Kauba is a freelance writer and photographer with a love for nature's feel. Contact him at patkauba@gmail.com.



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The humble candle

Man has been illuminating his way long before science. As our loadshedding peaks, I find myself impressed with people banishing darkness, in basic ways.

Text By PAT KAUBA

TAKING THE INITIATIVE

Last year I had had enough of spending a fortune to light my home; purchasing candles that spat, more than illuminated. I took a trip to Ason Chowk, the centre of all things illuminating, in Kathmandu. I bought the iron cast for making ten rupee candles, twine for wicks, some paraffin-wax and beeswax. I selected my oldest pot and metal jug for the melting and before I knew it, I was illuminating my life—myself. Spending half the cost to get double the quality.

Taking 30 minutes to make a dozen candles, soon I began pondering how to improve my humble friend. Someone suggested adding children's wax crayons to the paraffin-wax for color—quickly I'd numerous tones.

My heart warmed the most to the beeswax. Sure it's expensive, but its glow, smokeless and elegant makes you think, how could I ever live without you? The cost is offset by the fact that beeswax burns much longer than paraffin-wax.

When mosquitoes began their advance, I added scented oils such as citronella—keeping tormentors at bay.

WHAT AND HOW

Paraffin wax costs 150 to 200 rupees per kilo and quality Himalayan beeswax is 400 plus rupees per kilo. For one kilo you can produce the equivalent of 33, ten rupee candles. The cast is about 1,800 rupees, depending on size. Twine is 50 rupees a bundle, loads for one's needs.

So you have bought your pieces, now what? First, start with your wick. Depending on the size of candle, you

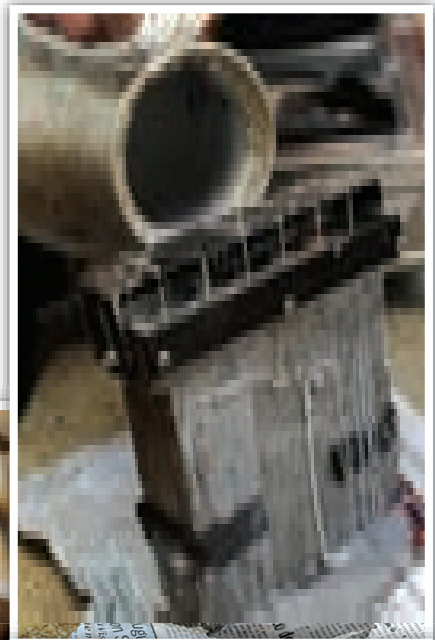


may want only one strand or maybe double. When doubling, it's best to twist them as one. If doubting what size is best, look into a shop; usually two strands is plentiful.

Next open your cast, and use a piece of cloth to wipe the inside ruts with a little cooking oil. This is to stop the wax from sticking to the cast. Following the holes, wind on your wick and close using clamps provided when purchased.

Put a pot with water onto the stove and your wax into a metal jug and into the pot. This is the best way to melt, direct flames are quick and dangerous—remember, wax is highly flammable! While melting, you can add the crayons. When adding essence, wait until the wax melts and the flame is off—so as to not cook-out the scent.

With cloth in hand, remembering everything is *hot*, pour slowly into the cast to avoid trapping air, then wait. When cooled, slowly open the cast, cut wicks and remove candles. Light and enjoy.



PLAY WITH IT

Make multicolor candles by pouring in stages, giving two-tones, three, four... Another older method of candlemaking is to fill a deep pot with wax, with wick in hand (adding a weight like a bolt) dip in and out. As you repeat, the candle gets fatter. Extra wax is required for regular topping-up.

Look online, read about it, watch videos on YouTube. Candlemaking is ancient; the information endless, even mind-blowing. Always remember that wax is flammable and above all, have fun with the humble candle. ■

Pat Kauba is a freelance writer and photographer who loves light. Contact at patkauba@gmail.com.

*If there is a greater joy than
in Giving a Gift,
It is in crafting one.*

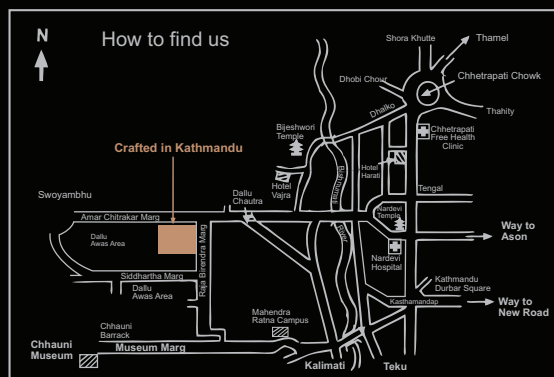


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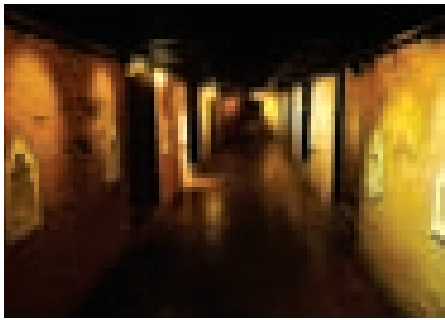
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Newa Chhen

A home in the truest sense, Newa Chhen defies the norm to stand out as a proud Nepali heritage site.

Text By ANUBHUTI POUDYAL



Photos by ECS Media

Imagine walking a little beyond Patan Durbar Square to find a place representative of Newari culture that Kathmandu is so proud of. Now imagine entering a 17th century building that was once the home of a commoner, preserved with much of its originality intact. In a city that is itself a heritage, Newa Chhen is one of those rarities with historical significance that did not belong to royalty.

Newa Chhen ('Chh' pronounced with a 'ts' sound) means 'a Newari home'. You enter the place and the low door reminds you of any traditional Nepali home. The low ceiling and wooden windows and doors lead to a spacious courtyard-garden that helps you leave the din of city life outside the premises. Built around the 17th century during the Malla period, the building has been passed on from many generations to its present residents. In 2000, by the joint effort of UNESCO and Patan Tourism Development Organization (PTDO), renovation work started on the house, ending in 2006. While it would have been forgivable for the current residents to continue living in the house, the residents decided to launch a Bed & Breakfast, where interested visitors can merely rent a room to enjoy the ambience of a bygone era.

Built around the 17th century, the building has been passed on from many generations to its present residents

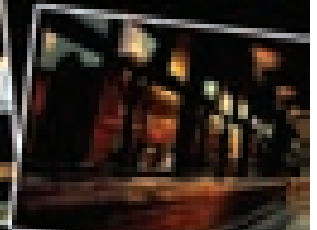
Living in a 17th century room has its charms. Each of the eight rooms in Newa Chhen is named after the Astha Mandala, the eight auspicious symbols prominent in Buddhist teachings. The rooms are an interesting mix of traditional and modern amenities. The low beds and carved wooden windows go well with the low ceiling while the sparse decoration – comprising of traditional Newari items – helps keep the focus on the architecture. The best thing about the place however, is that these are not hotel rooms; there are rooms that are part of a home. The whole place is one big home instead, complete with a common yard where seasonal flowers grow, a place where people can sit down and talk.

The attic here serves a special purpose: to act as a sort of display room holding every day Newari items from kitchen utensils to prayer apparatus. Many of these items still find use in households today, although they struggle to hold on to their significance amidst

modern wares. Huge grinders made up of wood, large storage pots, Panas and hookah are some of the items on display. Many such items also adorn the walls and display alcoves throughout the place.

The restoration of an almost 400-year old house was just the beginning. Its conversion into a homely place where guests can come and enjoy a typical Newari environment was the turning point. Conservation, restoration and the eventual recognition of the place as one of the assets of Patan have all been integral. The future includes assisting the conservation of lesser-known or neglected items of cultural significance collected at the Newa Chhen. A brilliant example of conservation work with a practical side, Newa Chhen is a site with a motive of sharing its splendor with people outside the Newari community so that they too can appreciate what once was and still is a heritage of Patan. ■

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Photo by Robin Boustead

Visit Lumbini Year 2012 promoted in Paris

The Embassy of Nepal in Paris organized a function in the French capital on the last week of January and urged diplomats from around the world to visit Nepal marking Visit Lumbini Year- 2012.

According to the Nepali Embassy in Paris, guests from the French Foreign Ministry, ambassadors of India, Myanmar, Macedonia, Montenegro

and Tanzania, senior diplomats from other missions, French dignitaries from different walks of life, including former ambassadors to Nepal attended the program. Similarly, consul general, professors, representatives of travel agencies, UNESCO professionals and long-term Nepali residents in France were also present at the event.



Growth in air passengers in 2011

According to the Flight Permission Section at Tribhuvan International Airport Civil Aviation Office, the number of incoming international flights to Nepal increased by 17.2% to 9,316 in the first 10 months of 2011 from 7,949 for the same period in 2010. Within the same period, the number of passengers increased by 13% to 1,060,949 from 938,551 last year.

Qatar Airways recorded the highest number of both flight and passenger movements, operating a total of 943 flights to Nepal and bringing in 114,557 passengers in the first 10 months of 2011. Jet Airways operated 913 flights with 109,581 passengers, while Air India Airlines stood third with 718 incoming

flights carrying 61,874 passengers. National flag carrier NAC carried out 680 flights bringing in a total of 84,412 passengers. Interglobe Aviation (INDIGO) recorded only five flights and 691 passengers.

However, the total revenue collected in the first 10 months decreased by Rs. 15 million as compared to the same period in 2010. In the first 10 months of 2011, this sector contributed revenue of Rs. 587 million against Rs. 602 million last year. Qatar Airways contributed Rs. 63.39 million to the government in 2010 compared to Rs. 92.86 million last year. NAC's revenue contribution till October 2011 stood at Rs. 63.90 million while it contributed Rs. 69.12 million in 2010.

Government to revise member selection for Nepal Tourism Board

Representatives from tourist associations-HAN, NATTA, NATO, TAAN, NMA, PATA Nepal Chapter, HRA, NARA and Reban insisted Minister Lokendra Bista Magar to reshuffle the existing board members on 29 January.

The tourist entrepreneurs proposed that two representatives from the private sectors be included in the selection committee and the representatives be

selected by the entrepreneurs instead of the government. NTB consists of 11 board members, five each from the private and public sectors, as it was established under a public partnership model. The members from the government are the permanent ones while the members from private sector will have 3 years term.

The dispute delayed NTB's chief executive selection process.

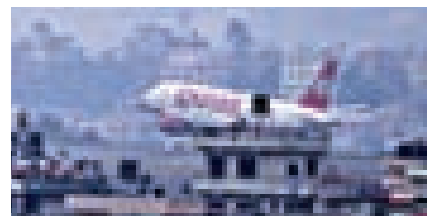
Siddhipur Mahotsav observed

A 3-day 'Siddhipur Mahotsav', was organized by the Siddhipur Mahotsav committee on February 18 to boost the flow of tourists in the historical village of Lalitpur. The organizers planned to bring in about 1 million people through the event that featured informative stalls, shows highlighting traditional culture, music, art and live concerts.

Siddhipur, a village 3.2 km away from Patan and 7 km away from Kathmandu, has a mix of different cultures. The famous "Nhegaanya Jatra" is celebrated at Siddhipur beginning on the last day of Chaitra to the 4th day of Baisakh next year. The village with the seven ponds is also popular for its straw mat weaving, locally known as "sukul".

RAK Airways starts flights to Kathmandu

RAK (Ras Al Khaimah) Airways initiated flights to Kathmandu from mid February. The national carrier of UAE flies to Kathmandu three times a week now. With the permit from Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal and Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation the carrier started the operation of flights between Ras Al Khaimah and Kathmandu.

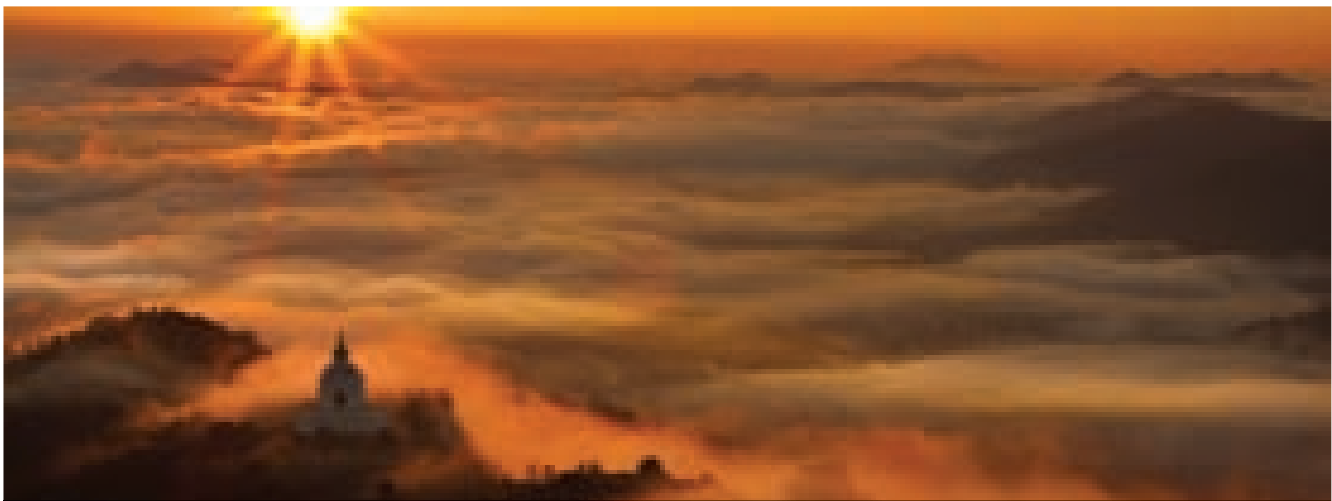


Buddha Air starts flights to Varanasi from March

Buddha Air started its Kathmandu-Varanasi flight from 1 March and will be operating flights to Kolkata from September. Buddha Air has started weekly four flights to Varanasi, on Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at three in the afternoon with opening airfare of Rs. 5,031 targeting both Nepali and Indian tourists willing to visit religious places of both the countries.

Buddha Air has however suspended its flight to Lucknow in India currently due to off-season while it is operating charter flights to Paro in Bhutan. The airline requested for route permission for Lucknow from Pokhara and the flights are scheduled to operate soon.

Buddha Air operates ATR-42 (47 seater) and ATR-72 (70 seater) to Varanasi depending upon the number of passengers while it operates Beech 1900 D (18 seater) for domestic flights.



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Yeti Mountain Homes

Rugged days and luxurious nights high up in the Nepali Himalayas

Text & Photos By KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA



Dusk in Khumbu, the most popular mountain destination for tourists in Nepal. Stars begin to appear in the deep blue sky and suddenly Mount Everest and other peaks in the horizon appear to be standing in front of a studded, deep blue, celestial wallpaper. Below, the warmer lights of Namche and Khumjung dot the landscape. To add to it all, the snow peaks are awash in the near full moon's silver glow. Suddenly, the six and half-hour uphill hike through a blizzard seems more than worth it. This is the view as seen from the back patio of Yeti Mountain Home Kongde at 4250m, named highest lodge in the world by *Travel+Leisure* magazine in 2008.

Yeti Mountain Home Kongde is the last stop in the YMH chain that charts a trail designed for those who want to enjoy the Himalayan region in leisurely hikes and end the day in pure comfort. It begins in Lukla (2840m), followed by Phakding (2610m), Monjo (2840m), Namche (3440m), Thame (3800m) and

finally Kongde (4250m). The walk-time between most resorts conveniently ranges within four hours. Up until Thame, the only part that is challenging is perhaps the hike to Namche: that walk's last leg includes a non-stop uphill climb for at least an hour for fast hikers, but there really is no rush if you leave Monjo after breakfast and plan to get to Namche for lunch. And there are morning flights between Lukla and Namche too.

By no means is YMH the only option in the six locations where they operate, including Kongde where there is one other alternative. What is immediately noticeable however is that the lodges are always at the start or the end of the area they are in, thoughtfully away from the other lodges and businesses while ensuring amazing views. What is equally noticeable is the consistent quality of service, and luxury, in all of the six YMHs. Expect to be welcomed with warm towels and a choice of warm beverages to freshen up with. The meals are three course with baked goods

(cakes, bread) made in-house, and lot of the vegetables grown in their own yard. Coffee, tea, and hot lemon supplies are endless. Hot showers are not a problem in the afternoons and evenings. Downtime includes complimentary 'Happy Hour.' The blankets and duvets are warm while the beds are electrically heated (with a remote control) and the staff will also give you hot water bottles for the night. The windows are large and almost all the rooms offer stunning views. And yes, you will be able to plug in your battery chargers too.

While the YMH route is most definitely designed as a hiking trail and not a trekking tour, the last stretch to Kongde might not be for everyone. The terrain is fairly rough but gorgeous, covered by natural canopy (trees, bamboos) and the walk is largely an uphill climb that lasts seven to eight hours on average. Trails run about a foot wide for extended periods with deep falls on one side – slipping or stumbling are not good ideas (although the Everest Marathon route

runs through it). The real dangerous part of the trail, however, is the approximately 150m climb on a thin ledge angled at what feels like 45 degrees. This part of the climb is broken down into several short strips with sharp turns at the end of each one. While there is a metal rope one can hold on to for safety on one side, the other side is a several hundred feet drop. Guides and locals along the way will tell you that this is the most precarious part of the trip, naturally, and might advise you to not look down as it could easily cause vertigo. Of course, once you reach the resort the hike feels absolutely worth the effort and the staffs go out of their way to make sure it is this way. There is an alternate route – an eight-hour hike straight from Phakding. There is also a short cut: a 2-minute helicopter ride from Luka to Kongde for a 45-minute breakfast trip with one of the most stunning view of the Himalayas. This is the same trip that fashion designer Prabal Gurung went on and wrote about for Vogue in 2010. There is also an extended 30-45-minute helicopter ride to Kongde that takes you as high as 23,000ft, bringing you face-to-face with some of the tallest mountains in the world.

As new hotels and lodges come up in the region and tourists seem to arrive almost year-around, many establishments

are expanding their services. Modestly comfortable options are definitely more common now than even just a few years ago. At Yeti Mountain Homes, the comfort is far from modest. After all, there is no golden rule that says mountain experiences have to be rugged at night too. The walking, however, is still yours to do.

BEST TIME TO GO:

Mid-March to late-May and September to late-November. Weekend getaways possible most times.

BEST ITINERARY:

A night at each YMH from Lukla to Thame. Add Kongde for adventurers and experienced hikers.

FOR BEGINNERS:

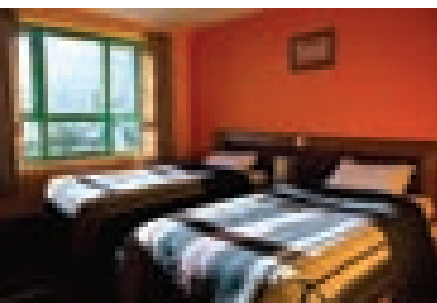
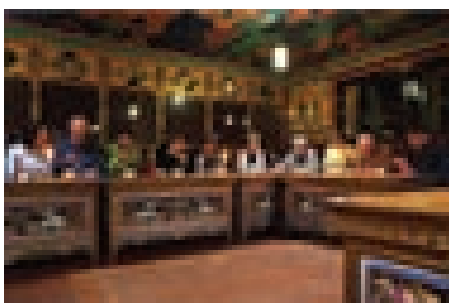
A night in Lukla or Phakding + Monjo. Two nights recommended at Namche as the weather there can get very foggy without warning and you would want to make sure you catch the views of Everest, Ama Dablan and other mountains as seen from the grounds of Sagarmatha National Park Head Quarter, just few minutes away from YMH Namche. Also there: Sherpa Culture Museum, the popular Tibetan market, Namche Gumba, and what feels like a piece of Thamel.

ONE-NIGHT GETAWAY:

A Saturday afternoon and night in Lukla itself is an easy escape from Kathmandu. Since the airport is in Lukla, it makes it an ideal and quick mountain getaway for families (even with children), couples, corporate retreats, or even solo travelers. The 10-minute walk from the airport to YMH Lukla essentially takes you through the entire bazaar. At YMH the garden or the sunroom with stunning views of Lukla Ri and Kongde are perfect for long conversations, catching up on reading and writing, or simply tuning out from everything. For explorers, there are several things to do after lunch: the Kemgon Monastery and the Thangka painting school are short walks away while slightly further from the bazaar is the Pasang Lhamu-Nicole Niquille Hospital which visitors frequent to see some great community work being done as well as the view of Lukla from there. Feel free to join locals in a game of table tennis/ping-pong in the bazaar. Starbucks Lukla (no relation to Starbucks the corporation) is possibly the best spot for coffee (Nepal grown) and fast WiFi. At the Mera Lodge, it is worth trying to persuade the hostess to serve you Alu-Roti (potato crepe eaten with butter and freshly made green chili paste) and Shyakpa (stew), delicious traditional Sherpa meals – but keep in mind that the 3-course dinner at YMH is quite sumptuous. For Happy Hour, drinks at the popular Wave Pub in Mera Lodge come with classic rock and reggae music by the pool table. Over at YMH, it is a laid-back affair by the fire, with drinks and snacks being served by the staff. Fly back to KTM on Sunday. Weekend Extension: an additional night in Phakding, about 3 hours away from Lukla. Once there, you could brave an hour hike up to the 500-year old Pema Choling monastery.

For additional details: Yeti Mountain Homes, www.yetimountainhome.com, Phone: +977 1 4000711)

You can contact the author and photographer at kashish@350nepal.org and follow him on Twitter @kashishds.

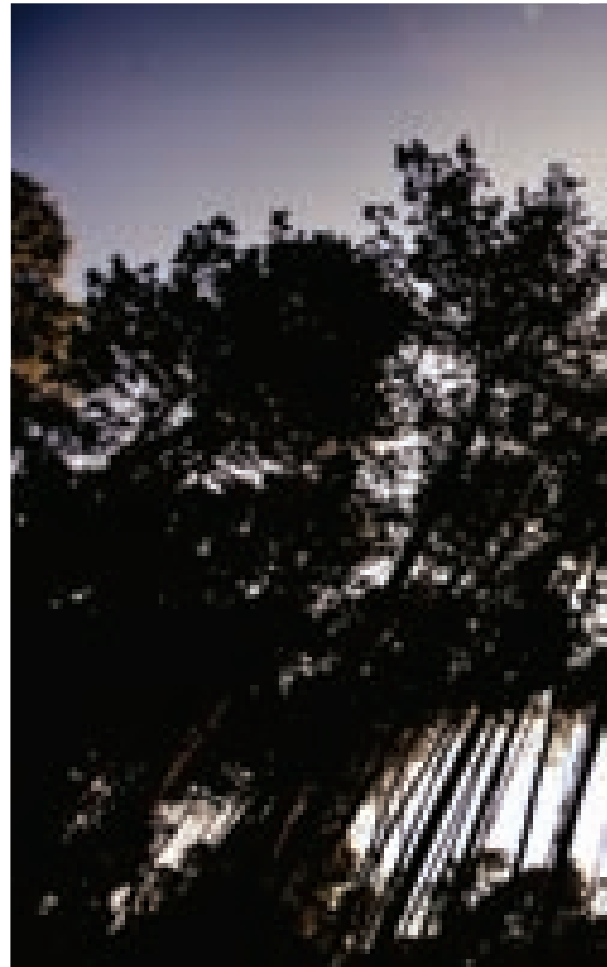
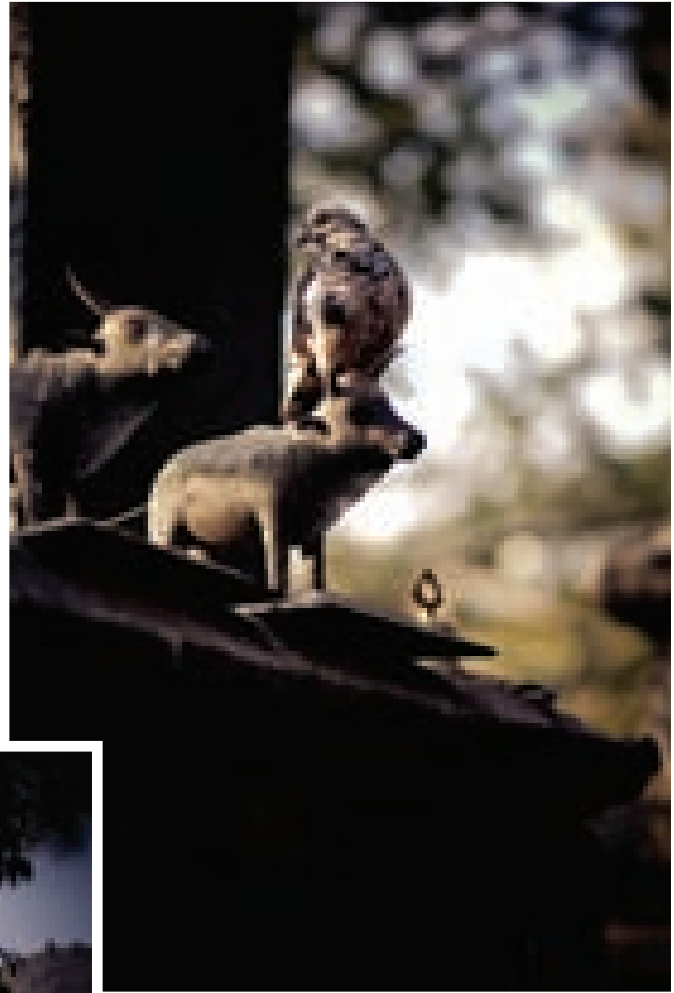


Jiri

Hiking to and around Charikot and Jiri make for a great escape from the din of city life.

Text By **RICHA SHAKYA**, Photos By **SURAJ RATNA SHAKYA**

A trip to Jiri and Charikot was a perfect end to my 2011. Charikot had beautiful mornings with a wide range of snow-covered mountains to acknowledge my presence as I sipped my morning tea. The other interesting thing Charikot had to offer was a historical temple that appeared as we paced along the narrow, stone-paved roads of Charikot. After the beautiful views and some memorable pictures, we moved up to Jiri. Small talk with children I met on the way made me realize





the hardships of village life. I found myself respecting these hardy villagers who manage to send their children to school despite their many problems.

Nibbling on the famous Jiri cheese at Hotel Jirel Gabila where we were treated more like family than customers, I got tips from the hotel owner about the must-visit places. We visited the Alpaca shelter, where there were only five of them. According to the locals, these adorable animals are a cross between a sheep and a giraffe. About the next place, a farm, the hotel owner joked and said that no one missed a visit, as if it were their in-laws. The head of the farm told us an interesting story about how the farm used to be a wetland. With the help of an underground drainage system built by the Swiss government, they drained all the water out and initiated a farm for breeding pigs and cows.

Small interesting stories and incidents are what complete a journey, but the people we travel with make the memories worthwhile. Each turn we took and the scenic beauty of the place made us realize how good it felt to travel by road than by air. What fun would it be to travel without the roadside fare, the fresh air, the smell of the forest, the sound of the rivers and getting to see the lifestyle of the people as you pass by. So if you're planning to take a trip this year, you might just want to rethink that plane ticket. 🍷

Less is more

A ship in the harbour is safe, but that's not why ships were built – William Shedd.

Text By NIRAJ KARKI THAPA

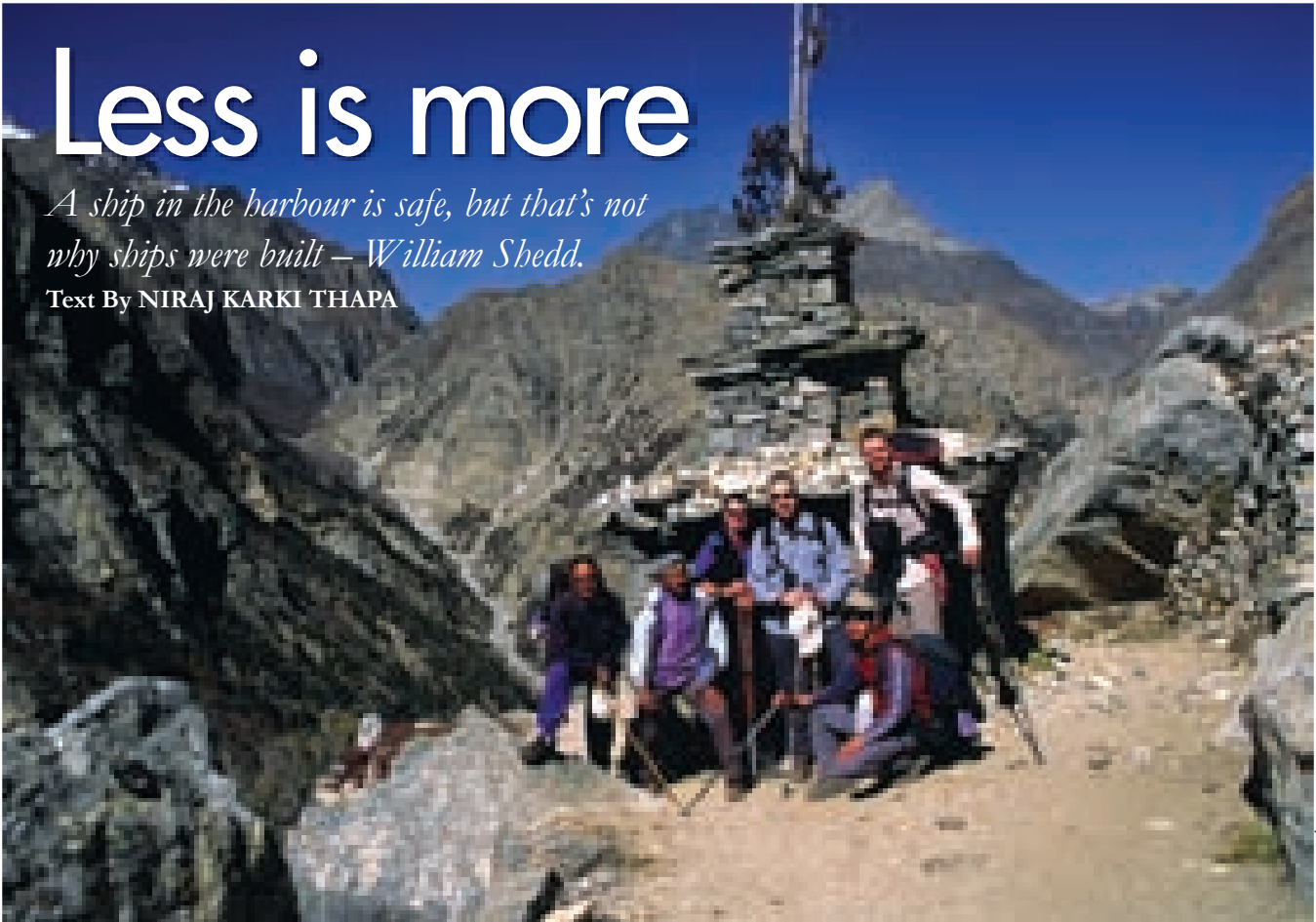


Photo by Robin Houston

We all travel, to learn and grow, the thirst of new places, people and experiences driving us. We are all meant to travel, for there is always much to learn about the world and ourselves. Despite all the good that travel is, the constraints of time and finances often bind the will to travel.

Travel need not be luxurious though; the experience of just being on a journey is often rewarding enough and for those that plan properly and act smartly, travelling can be done on a budget too.

1 Get into shape and stay in shape.

The better your physical condition, the less confining 'budget' becomes. If you can do a 10-day trip in eight, that's two days of expenses saved. It's much more than that though – a fit body means you're not going to be grumpy about small setbacks that you might end up spending money unnecessarily over. Also, if you pack light, you can do a lot of trekking without hiring a porter, which again saves you money.

2 Do your homework – research!

Buy a map, look up travel blogs online, *ask* your friends. Travel is always about learning, sometimes even small things such as which places to avoid.

3 Travel off peak, and to new places.

Nepal has some treks – the problem is everyone goes where everyone goes. Travelling during off-season means you can travel for less and often see more of the place. Unfrequented places (depending on how desolate) usually turn out cheaper than busy routes.

4 Travel in a group.

Travelling in a group of two or three is not only safer, but you can save on costs. Rooms with two and three beds work out cheaper than a single room, which over the course of a trip will save you lots. A group also means you can share carrying more supplies. Better together, as Jack Johnson sings – it's simple as that.

5 Pack light, but pack sensibly

The traveller's rucksack is a world of its own. Pack smart, pack light. Buy a good water bottle and water purification tablets. The Nepali made 'Piyush' (water purifying drops) works quite well. You save money and the environment. Certain trekking areas are plastic free so do your bit by not using avoidable plastics.

6 Eat local, shop local.

Daal bhat - there is nothing wrong with it – it tastes good and is nutritious, has everything your body needs and is cheaper than most things on the menu. Also, if you really care about being green, it has less food miles than most things on the menu. Eating meat is expensive (and sometimes risky). Avoiding it will make a huge difference in your food expenses. On a side note, ordering the same thing for everyone in your group makes it easier for the teahouses/restaurants by saving time and energy. (Being nice to your host improves the chances of getting a discount)

7 Pack small treats.

Want. It's a terrible thing. It is the single thing that can cripple budget travel. It's a mind game – pack small rewards, chocolates, jerky and the likes. 🍫

Raniban Retreat

Text By NIMMA ADHIKARI

The panorama is indisputably one of the most spectacular things about the Raniban Retreat, a resort erected on a hilltop at Pumdi Bhumdi VDC, 1492m above sea level. Just a few miles away from the lake city of Pokhara, yet suitably isolated, the resort introduces its guests to new heights of nature's magnificence.

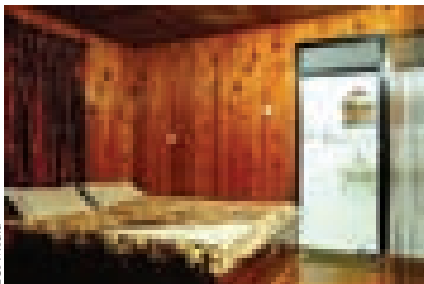
Right above the World Peace Pagoda, the sun rises to mark a new day with the closest encounter with the Himalayas for people who have been living in the city area for too long. The ridges of Dhaulagiri, the Annapurna range and Machhapuchhre steals away all the glory and praise and so does Lake Fewa. The illusion of a picturesque floating Himalaya range amidst the clouds and the lake at the bottom is a view to die for. The otherwise plain valley except for a few scattered smaller hills protruding from the ground looks otherworldly.

The resort is a free Wi-Fi zone and has 4 deluxe rooms and 12 tents barred with bamboo walls, each complemented with



ECS Media

The restaurant in the resort serves Nepali, Indian, Chinese, Continental and Italian cuisines along with local and imported drinks. Apart from lodging and eateries, Raniban Retreat also offers meeting halls for seminars.



ECS Media



ECS Media

a beautiful landscape in front of it. Solar power from Gham Power has been installed to light the CFLs. A 10.5 km pipeline for drinking water has been brought from Bhedikharka with the effort of the resort itself while it has also managed a separate water source for the resort that has also been distributed to the entire village.

A vegetable garden at the Raniban Retreat offers nutritious greens to its guests. Plans for poultry farming and rearing livestock are in process to ensure that guests are provided the best. The restaurant in the resort serves Nepali, Indian, Chinese, Continental and Italian cuisines along with local and imported drinks. Apart from lodging and eateries, Raniban Retreat also offers meeting halls for seminars. It also arranges hiking tours, village walks and bike rides on request.

Guests can drive in from Chhorepatan or Kalimati and then walk 5-10 minutes through the stone steps through the hillock forest leading to the breathtaking beauty of the Himalayas. An alternative way is to take a boat, cross the Barahi Devi Mandir and hike uphill to the World Peace Pagoda and then to the Raniban Resort. ■

For more info: www.raniban.com



ECS COURSES

In order to improve the skills and knowledge of your household staff, ECS offers the following courses this month. Please let us know if you are interested in enrolling your staff for these courses.

Phone: 442.6439, 98510.07.900

Email: ecs@infoclub.com.np or services@ecs.com.np to book a place.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

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 a 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, 1 p.m. to 5 p.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

BAKING COURSE

Participants will be able to bake the following items.

1. Heart cocoa cake
2. Buche de noel
3. Strawberry mango cobbler
4. Vegetable pizza

DATE: 25th March 2012

TIME: 1.00 pm to 5.00 pm

VENUE: Maharajgunj

FEE: Rs. 1,200

THAI COOKING COURSE

Participants will be able to cook the following items.

1. Fried chicken with satay sauce
2. Baked fish chili sauce
3. Chiang thai noodle soup
4. Bean curd veg curry
5. Cucumber salad

DATE: 29th April 2012

TIME: 1.00 pm to 5.00 pm

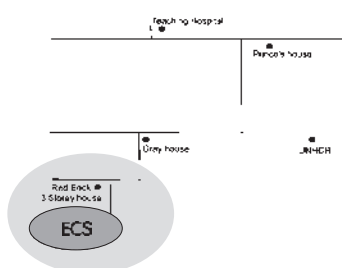
VENUE: Maharajgunj

FEE: Rs. 1,200



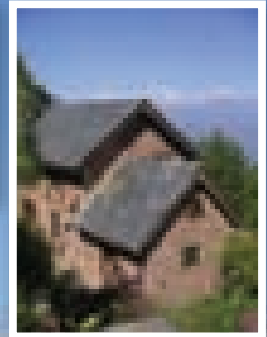
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Maharajgunj, Kathmandu
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Office Hour:
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ECS Services offers staff employment services (cooks, watchmen, gardeners, housemaids and drivers); courses 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.

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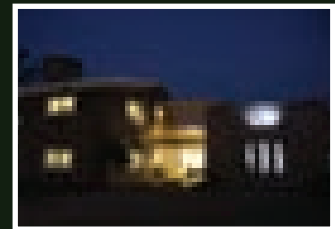
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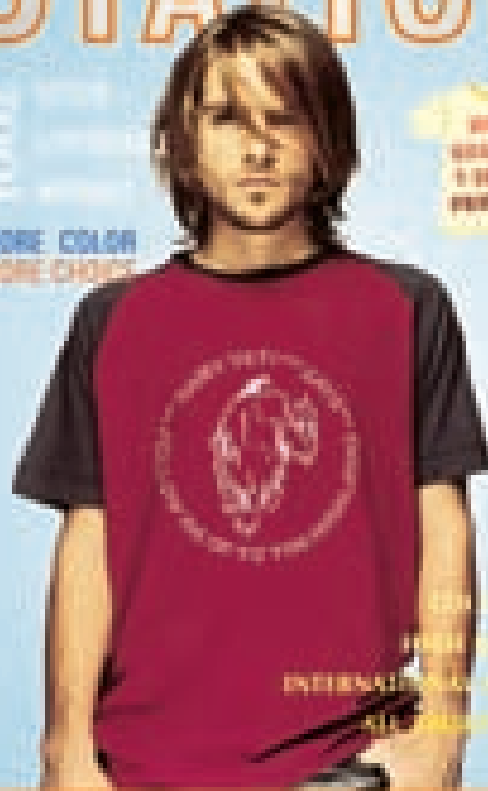


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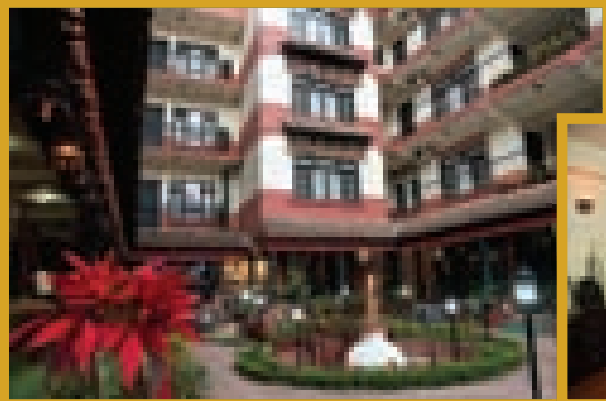
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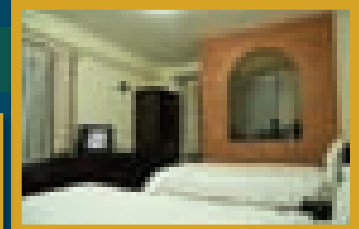
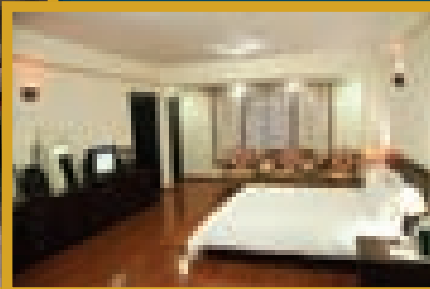
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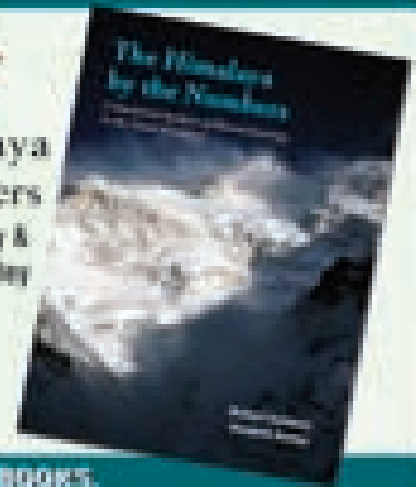
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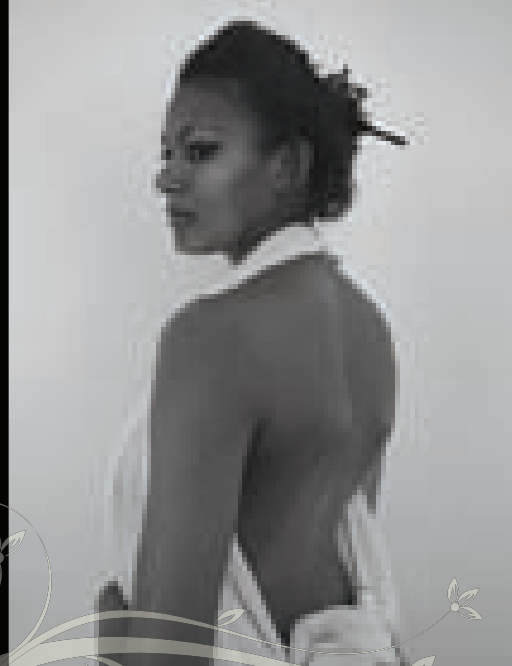
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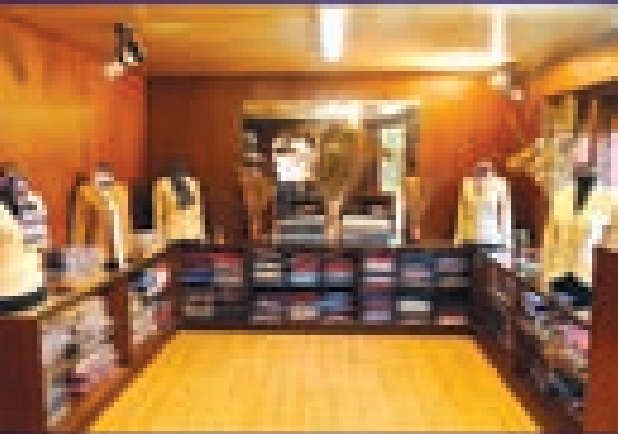
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SPILLED INK

Imperfect Trekkers?

Text By GUSTAV SCHREIBER, GUEST ESSAYIST

After Tom Rachman published his debut novel 'The Imperfectionists' (2010), it was described as "not a novel in the conventional sense," but "a series of short stories, slice-of-life accounts of dysfunctional journalists working on an international English-language daily in Rome." By the end of the book the reader knows a lot about a team of fictional journalists and their dysfunctional lives. Rachman is good at bringing his characters to life around their work, their private lives, and the headline stories they chase.

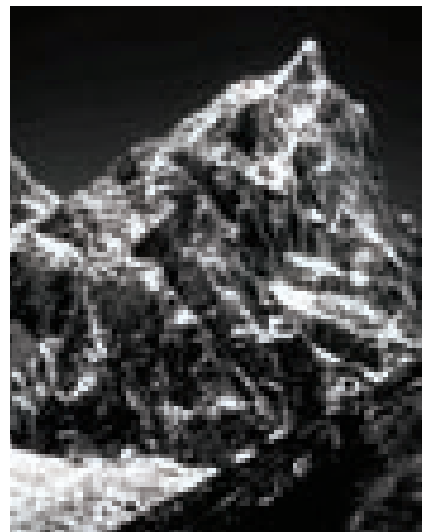
One evening while at dinner with some Western trekkers recently, I wondered if there was potential for a similar book about characters I have met on trek. "What-the-hay," I told myself, "give it a whirl," and began jotting notes. It was a start. Novelizing them could come later, I thought.

For starters, take 'Mary', an obsessive individualist who obstinately refused to stay with the rest of the group and single-mindedly charged off each day to be first into camp miles and hours ahead of everyone else. And, 'Ralph', an absent-minded scientist, slow and consistently last into camp. He was also an obsessive chocoholic who salivated at the sound of candy bars being ripped open for a quick energy snack. Yes, he'd forgotten to bring his own. And, yes, the rest of us hid ours' from him.

A 'foodie' named 'Phil' was a hoarder. This tall, gangly misfit, a retired physics professor, was typically first to the lunch stop spread out by our Sherpas beside the trail where, when no one was looking, he would fill ('Phil!') his daypack with more cheese and crackers than he could possibly eat, leaving little for the stragglers who arrived late. Guards were posted.

Then there was an elderly 'crack-head' named 'Carl', who had clearly blown his mind on drugs years before during his hippie days. His reality was all too often at odds and ours', and his weird and wonderful proclamations and incessant and untimely 'off-the-wall' (bizarre) questions challenged our collective patience.

By the way, to avoid any 'defamation-of-character' lawsuits, the true identities of these stranger-than-life personalities shall remain undisclosed. Except for 'John'. That's his real name, but since it's one of the most common

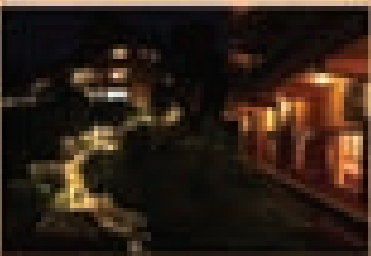
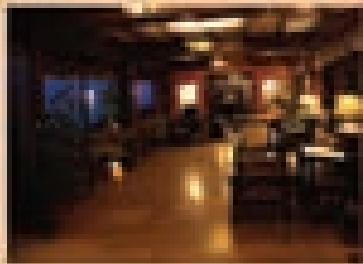
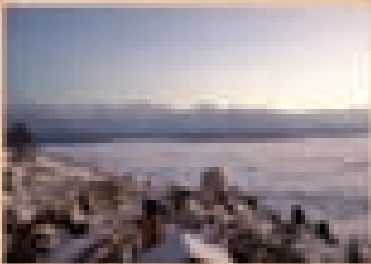


in the English language and he'd be over 110 years old now if still living (unlikely), I'll use it. I could not invent a better moniker to match his behavior, obsessed as he was with his daily business 'on the john'. For trek that year our agent gave us the option of having tables with fancy cutlery and, if we liked, a plastic toilet seat on folding aluminum legs for our personal comfort... The other trekkers refused them all. They could sit on the ground to eat, they said, and they knew how to squat in the woods. But not John, who insisted on having the collapsible commode.

It puzzled the Sherpas that John was the only one to use it. When they heard that American slang for toilet is 'john' they laughed uproariously. But John's 'johning' behavior wasn't funny. While he assiduously avoided voiding in view of us, he had no compunction against unfolding the contraption for a bare-bottom sit-down out in an open field in full view of the locals.

I led that trek, and when I discovered his public misdeeds I was furious and let him know that his actions were unacceptable! Enter 'Betty' who at the height of my indignation poured a tumbler full of Scotch and ordered: "Drink it, Gus! - You need it!" Bless her soul. I downed the elixir in a gulp, while dear John folded the commode contraption and retreated meekly (sort of) to his tent.

Now who among the porters do you suppose carried the portable potty pew? The kitchen boy, of course, on top of all of the camp's other plastic and aluminum gear—the cooking pots. To everyone's dismay. ■



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Questioning Culture

Text By ANIL CHITRAKAR



ECS Media

Nepal is going through a difficult period in its history and many try hard to figure out how we got where we are today. One reason, and a very strong one, is because we do not have a questioning culture. Questioning and challenging ideas of people with power and authority, and suggesting better ways ahead or alternatives is still not culturally accepted. This happens across age barriers, ethnic barriers, language barriers and even geographic barriers. A young member of the family does not question the older member. It is very difficult to get people to question those who joined the office a few months earlier than them, even in corporate Nepali culture. The vision of a “merit based Nepal” is far behind due to this inherent culture.

At the eastern end of the ‘six lane’ highway to Bhaktapur, paid for by the Japanese tax payer, where the road suddenly narrows, is a very popular and really beautiful heritage site - Surya Binayak. The local belief is that the rulers of Bhaktapur asked the astrologers to find an auspicious site where the rays of the sun would hit the valley

floor first thing in the morning. ‘Artists’ were then commissioned to design and build a temple dedicated to Ganesh – the remover of obstacles, so that the sun could continue its journey “across the sky” unhindered. Such a beautiful concept and one would think the solar industry would adopt this site as their “patron” as they expand their business. Right now, the temple complex is very popular for weddings, and big family events; but the main reason why many Kathmandu valley residents visit the site and pay homage and perform rituals is to make sure that their children have a clear “power of speech”. Ganesh will make sure that the young sibling will not have any speaking difficulties.

The problem with society, generally, is that once the child does begin to speak and ask questions, we tell them to “shut up”. We remind them of their “rightful” place in the home, playground, and society; and why they should not ask too many questions.

Many readers will recall that there was a clean mass transit system – the electric trolley buses, paid for by the Chinese that used to take the people

from Tripureshwor all the way to the foothills of Surya Binayak. The entire system is gone without a trace because we did not question the corruption and mismanagement. Perhaps we were just too busy “speaking” eloquently about the depletion of foreign currency reserves due to diesel import for public transportation. Whatever the past, it is never too late to begin to question and challenge the “wrongs” in our society. The Japanese have paid for us to have an “obstacle free” ride up to Surya Binayak.

The temple complex itself consists of a shikhara style structure with the statue of the Ganesh decorated with a set of beautifully repousse and gilded *toranas*. Pilgrims and devotees have offered the temple a lot over the years and some of them have even put up statues of themselves. The presence of a British style water hydrant as part of the décor, is quite unique and confusing and worth finding out more about. The Ganesh, as we all know, has an elephant head and if traditional wisdom is to be believed, an elephant never forgets. This is another key attribute to removing our numerous obstacles. ■

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