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NOVEMBER 2016



## EXHIBITING THE BEST OF NEPAL

pg. 32

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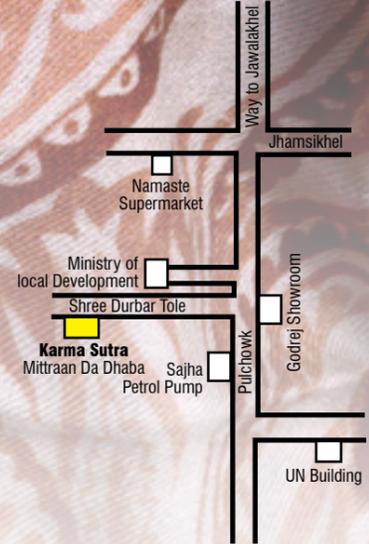
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# Editorial

NOVEMBER 2016 • Issue 180



## Time for a luxurious break

There was a time when I used to love going to parties at hotels. As a child, their magnificent interiors and exteriors plunged me into a magical world, one that made me fantasize about the luxurious comforts a princess could get. And my favorite part was the grand buffets dinners.

Every so often, when we had gatherings or weddings, we would attend parties in these lovely hotels that made the host, who would be glowing under the elaborate sparkling lights, very proud indeed.

When we started planning for this issue, my senior asked me, "What do you think of hotels?" I couldn't say much more than the fact that hotels are one of the mainstays of our tourism. He, however, was of the opinion that, "hotels, besides improving tourism, are what uplifts a society; they are the ideal life that people want to believe in and want to be a part of; they are the inspiration to the classic life."

And they are.

Today, hotels like Dwarika's are a pride to all Nepalis, as they preserve our heritage within their premises. The efforts of the late Dwarika Das Shres-

tha to protect the ancient carved pillars of Kathmandu has been an example that many have learnt to emulate. Hotels like Soaltee, Annapurna, Yak & Yeti, Radisson, Shanker, and many more impress us with their sophisticated facilities, and the high standard of service provided by well-trained Nepali professionals.

Recognizing their contribution and achievements, ECS NEPAL is back with a hotel issue that coincides with the Golden Jubilee of Hotel Association Nepal (HAN). We are delighted to celebrate the journey of our great hotels that give us an oomph when saying, 'Come and holiday in Nepal.'

Let the idea of holidays liberate your mind, as they are occasional days when you can sit back and relax. When you can casually slick into your chssildish pants and get crazy with life. Pamper yourself with ECS NEPAL's luxurious holiday package.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue.

**Srizu Bajracharya**  
Sub-editor

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Every time I visit the hills or jungles of Nepal, I wonder why do we sell ourselves so cheaply today, when we have such peerless tourism attractions?





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**The Thriving Resort Town of Pokhara**

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# ECS NEPAL

THE NEPALI WAY

[ NOVEMBER 2016 ]

**When:** November, 1-3  
**Where:** Patan  
**What's happening:** Photo Kathmandu Exhibition  
 Nepal's only international photography festival, second edition to be held between 21 October – 3 November 2016.

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

**When:** November, 5  
**Where :** Kathmandu  
**What's happening :** National Speaking Championship 2016 Empowerment Academy is organizing National Speaking Championship in collaboration with Debate Network Nepal (DNN) Co-organized by Live and Lead International

**When:** November, 14-16  
**Where:** The Everest region  
**What's happening :** Mani Rimdu Festival  
 Mani Rimdu is a series of sacred ceremonies and rituals, culminating in a 3-day public festival.

**When:** November, 6  
**Where :** Terai  
**What's happening :** Chhath Parva  
 Chhath Parva, is a festival which is celebrated by the natives of Mithila region to worship the Sun.

**When:** Sunday November 20  
**Where:** Tangalwood, Gahana Pokhari Marg, Kathmandu  
**What's happening :** Maya, An Evening in Kathmandu  
 A musical evening with the popular singer Bipul Chettri.

**When:** November, 18-22  
**Where:** Bhrikuti Mandap Exhibition Hall, Kathmandu  
**What's happening :** Electro Tech 2016  
 8th Electro Tech 2016 is an exclusive event organized by Federation of Electrical Entrepreneurs of Nepal (FEEN) on electrical/electronic goods and services.

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### Lulled Into Luxury

Nepal is favorite amongst foreign tourists, and slowly the locals are following in their footsteps in exploring every nook and corner possible. A hotbed of potential for adventure sports and activities, there are equally luxurious activities available to those who seek. Following is a list of adventurous and luxurious activities one can indulge in.



**Coffee in Jomsom**

Perhaps there isn't a better place where coffee would be appreciated. This Himalayan Java outlet in Jomsom is a recent one, and enjoys great popularity amongst the visitors and trekkers. And why not? Mustang is an exotic place,

and the visitors' happiness knows no bounds to be welcomed at one of the best known coffee houses. Undoubtedly, it is a mark of how good they are at what they do, and proof of how the people have showered this coffee franchise with immense love.



**Snowman**

Snowman is a café which gives the impression of being familiar but also mysterious. Their cakes have been baked to perfection from over the past four decades, and even now its popularity hasn't waned with the youth of Kathmandu from its once hippie heydays. It's

the chocolate love cake, apple crumble, coconut cake, and the many varieties that makes you want to keep on going back. The wall paintings and murals only add to its mystique. If you haven't already gone and tasted their cakes, along with a cup of your favorite drink, then we're compelled to say you're missing out!



**Try the traditional Yomari in Village Cafe, or dine at Nepali Chulo**

Talk about revamping the traditional food items and making you fall in love with the delicacies all over again! The ladies at Village Café in Pulchowk have left no stone unturned when it comes to serving lip-smacking Newari food items. Besides that, the flawless yomaris and chatamaris have met everyone's expectations. This is definitely something you should not miss out on.

Good food, music, dances, and architecture—Nepali Chulo in Lazimpat is not just a place to dine, but where you can experience the richness of Nepali culture. You can't help but be overwhelmed and pleased at the service, ambience, and overall feeling you get when you get here.



**Spend your weekend at Barahi Resort**

This will be a fun-filled weekend, because they offer many things to keep you occupied, especially the jungle activities. What's not there to like about elephant rides, nature walks, canoeing, bird watching, and jeep safari, among others? If that's not enough, lounge in the grand swimming pool. The way to the resort might be bumpy, but the staff are known to more than make up for it by providing excellent hospitality. So, don't think twice about going there. Save all of it for the various fun activities that will greet you there.



MATT GARDENER

**Ride to Mustang with Hearts and Tears**  
 You, a few essentials, a bike, and the road. Sounds like perfect ingredients to concoct an unforgettable adventure. Bike rides have always enjoyed that infamous reputation among the youth as a brewer of great stories. Hearts and Tears is a one-of-a-kind tour company that provides an opportunity

for riders to explore the land on vintage motorcycles. They offer travel packs in groups, but there are also arrangements for solo rides. Hearts and Tears start their tours between September to December and February to June. Make sure you book in advance to ensure a place for your gang. It'll be something different.



**Tea-Time**

Tea is synonymous to everything Nepal. Tea from Ilam is much sought after, and in the valley and elsewhere, you will find quite a few shops selling a variety of teas. Whether they are small shops selling masala tea or oolong tea, you have not tasted anything if you haven't had a sweet cup concocted from those beauties. But, a cup at a local tea vendor's is equally pleasing! There are so many tea shops that you'll find one that speaks to you in a spiritual level eventually. Looking for a tea shop that you really like is nothing less than an adventure.



GOKARNA FOREST RESORT

**Pamper yourself with luxurious spas**  
 There is no better way to tell your body you love it than treating it to a day of spa. Whether you're a visitor on the way to a different destination or a local who has to battle the hustle and bustle of the city, a day at a spa will undoubtedly leave you

fresh and stress-free. We'll go so far as to say that you deserve such pampering every once in a while to function. It's a great outlet to keep yourself calm and get rid of mental tension. Kathmandu offers a great line of luxury spas that will leave you impressed and relaxed.



EXPLORE HIMALAYA

**Skydiving**

Skydiving is one of the most adventurous activities that will have your adrenaline kicking and bucking. This one gives you more than bragging rights—the 40-45 seconds of freefall thousands of feet above the ground will no doubt change the way you see life. It is an adventure of a lifetime. Currently,

thrill-seekers can engage in this amazing activity in Pokhara and Everest. You don't need a particular experience to check this one off your bucket list, as there are tandem instructors who provide you proper training and instructions. Skydiving, for now, is organized once a year around the time of October-November.

### **Sunrise in Dhulikhel**

Dhulikhel is always a great place for a quick getaway from the dust bowl that seems to be the valley. Aside from the fresh air, its scenic beauty is alluring and relaxing. Dhulikhel hosts panoramic views of more than 20 Himalayan peaks, making it an instant favorite to witness the sunrise any given cloudless day. It's not more than 30 km away from Kathmandu, so getting there would be no problem at all. Enjoy great breakfast at the many hotels, along with the view, and it's going to be a definite starter to a good day ahead.





**Breakfast at Everest**

It's said, morning shows the day. What if you started your morning with a surreal heli-ride to Everest, taking in the enchanting snow-covered peaks of the Himalayas and the surrounding? 'Breakfast with Everest' offers an exciting chance to start your day with the highest peak in the world. What makes it allur-

ing is the fact that you directly board an aircraft from Kathmandu in the earliest hour, which takes you to Kwange in the Everest region. There, you spend some time sharing your first meal of the day with the mountains. It is a package that exceeds not more than 3 to 4 hours, making it extremely time-efficient for such an intense experience.



**Book the special rooms of Fishtail Lodge**

Many claim this is one of the best places to enjoy the Annapurna skyline, it's a great place to stow away some time for yourself and retreat into peace and tranquility. It has interesting

room choices for the visitors, and meets all requirements of a good hotel. It's situated close to the beautiful Phewa Lake, so much so, that you have to cross it to be there. It'd be a great place for a family holiday, or with friends.

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# Food Winter Solace

The bone chilling winter isn't a season everyone looks forward to, but even those who swear on their lives to hate winter know that the season brings the best of food.

AKRITI SHILPAKAR



There is already a nip in the air. The mornings are calling for a light sweater, and evenings seem to come early. One can smell the chill in the air. And, while there are countless things to anticipate with the onset of winter in this city, food is definitely on the top of that list. Winter welcomes many and wonderful food delights that otherwise would have been missing from our already rich menu. Here are our top five picks:

**Kwati:** A warm soupy goodness of 12-beans broth, kwati is a mandatory dish to prepare and consume during winter. It is said that this special consommé restores and reenergizes our body to fight the ills

that the cold season brings. Regardless of whether kwati actually helps fight diseases, one cannot argue with the fact that it is super delicious, and only a bowl of it is just not enough. Each kitchen may make a different version of the same 12-beans broth, but they all are undoubtedly fulfilling.

**Ghyu and Chaku:** As winter ensues, two of the most sought after ingredients in the market are the best quality ghyu and chaku. Proven to keep the body warm, ghyu-chaku is a must-have on the 1st day of the Nepali month of Magh. However, it is not limited to the auspicious day. Ghyu-chaku is ritually taken together with each serving of daal-bhaat throughout the winter season.

And while they can be consumed separately, keeping them apart would be as cruel as killing Jay at the end of Sholay, and keeping Veeru alive.

**Takha-Nyakhuna:** The mere name of the dish is enough to get me salivating. In the old days, both jelly-textured meats—takha made of buff protein, and nyakhuna made from fish and lemon—were made only during winter. Today, one may find either of the dish in the summer, too, because it is convenient to set them in the freezer. However, the fun and excitement of devouring these two dishes, whether at home or in the company of friends and relatives during feasts, is distinct in the nipping cold of winter.

**Thukpa:** This Tibetan dish doesn't need a cold winter to be relished. Just a little down-pour on a summer afternoon is enough invitation for a thukpa

party. The soupy noodle dish can be adjusted to your taste and liking by adding to it a bit of soy sauce, a chilli vinegar concoction, and garlic oil. A serving of this steaming hot soup will keep you warm through and through, and can even heal you from the pestering common cold.

**Bhogate Sandeko:** The mighty treat of a dish that is bhogate sandeko needs no introduction amongst the Nepali denizens. A winter afternoon, soon after Tihar, calls for the entire family to lounge on the sunny terrace and enjoy this stupendous dish. Bhogate or pomelo, a neither tarty, neither sweet fruit is marinated in yogurt and some regular spices. And while you relish every mouthful of it, you will also find yourself squeezing on its flesh and playing a little game of which-direction-will-your-spouse-come-from.



Feature

# EXHIBITING THE BEST OF NEPAL

AMAR B. SHRESTHA

*1966 was a watershed year in the history of Nepal tourism, it being the year when both Hotel Association Nepal (HAN) and Nepal Association of Travel Agents (NATA) were born. It was also the year when the country's second 5-star hotel, Hotel Soaltee, opened its doors. All this signified that Nepal tourism was taking off in a big way, and the future looked rosy.*

*A year earlier, in 1965, another 5-star property, Hotel de l'Annapurna, had already started welcoming guests, a few of the ever growing number of tourists visiting this erstwhile Shangri-La. But, much before these two 5-star hotels came into being, an enterprising Newar businessman, Dwarika Das Shrestha, and an intrepid Russian émigré, Boris Lisanevich, had already lay their claim to fame as the first to open Western style hotels in the country, Paras Hotel (1952) and Hotel Royal (1953), respectively. Snow View Hotel (1954) and Coronation Hotel (1956) followed. Today, there are a large number of star and tourist standard hotels across the length and breadth of the country, including eight 5-star hotels in Kathmandu and two in Pokhara.*





Hotel Annapurna

#### Hotel Annapurna

Established in 1965, Hotel Annapurna (then Hotel de l'Annapurna) has the singular distinction of being the first 5-star hotel in Nepal. Another aspect that makes it stand out is its location on Durbar Marg, Kathmandu, an upscale commercial center, and just a stone's throw from the old royal palace. This hotel has had its fair share of the rich and the famous as its guests, and still does, in fact. And, like most other establishments, it has also gone through changes since the time it first opened its doors, including its name, from Hotel de l'Annapurna to simply, Hotel Annapurna.

Today, the hotel has a total of 151 guestrooms that have been recently refurbished. These include two Executive, one Regency, and one Deluxe suites, along with 64 Heritage, 30 Deluxe, 23 Corporate Deluxe, and 28 Club rooms. The hotel's Ghar-e-Kabab restaurant is reputed for its Mughlai Indian cuisine, while its Coffee Shop is a regular hangout for many urbanites. Similarly, the Araniko Room offers delicious oriental fare and the Juneli Bar a nice place to relax. The Arch Room, Banquet Hall, and Kumari Hall, are popular venues for events, banquets, and such, while the Meeting Room I and the Meeting Room II offers excellent conference facilities. The 11,000 sq ft Poolside Garden is also a wonderful venue for holding events and banquets.

#### Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu

Among the 5-star hotels of Kathmandu, Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu has undoubtedly, the most distinguished history. Recalling the initial years, its Chairman Emeritus, Mr. Prabhakar SJB Rana, reminisces, "The second part of the first five years of Hotel Soaltee's establishment were very good years for business. We used to receive a lot of excellent tourists from the U.S. and Europe, and our rooms were priced at \$70 then, which is more or less similar to what it is now, even after all these years!"

Soaltee is set upon 12 acres of landscaped grounds in a convenient location close to the capital's city center. Through the years, it has become the preferred hotel for visiting heads of state and international celebrities, and has hosted numerous international events. In fact, a separate section was built during the time of the SAARC summit in Kathmandu to house the heads of state of the member countries. The hotel has 16 luxurious suites, and 131 Deluxe, 102 Executive, and 33 Club rooms, along with four restaurants and a bar, Alfresco (Italian cuisine), Kakori (Indian cuisine), Garden Terrace (all day long restaurant), China Garden (Chinese cuisine), and Rodi Bar. Conferences, banquets, and so on are regular features of the hotel due to its excellent venues, namely, Rose Garden, Megha Malhar, Malshree, Marva, and Himalchuli, with capacity ranging from 40 to 2,500 guests.

#### Hotel Yak & Yeti

This hotel, too, has quite a history. Its origins lie in The Chimney restaurant that Boris Lissanevich established in Lal Durbar near Durbar Marg in Kathmandu. An outstanding example of Rana period architecture, this durbar was built in A.D. 1885 by Maharaja Bir Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana. The Chimney soon became a favorite watering hole for people of substance, and encouraged by its success, a 120-room hotel with 5-star amenities was completed in the year 1977. About 2 years later, an extension of 150 deluxe rooms and suites were built. Along with the construction of the new wing, a brand new porte-cochere, lobby, a new lobby bar, shopping arcade, an atrium, a second swimming pool, and two tennis courts were also constructed.

The hotel combines modern day sophistication with cultural heritage, and although it offers all modern facilities, efforts were made to preserve some of the traditional Nepali architectural features, such as carved windows that are more than 200 years old. The me-



Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu



Hotel Yak & Yeti

ticulously restored durbar now houses two historic restaurants, banquet rooms, and a grand ballroom. The hotel has 19 suites, and 100 Deluxe, 105 Standard, and 21 Club rooms, along with two restaurants, Sunrise Café (international cuisine) and Chimney Restaurant (Russian and Continental). Conference, banquet and other facilities are available at eight venues, Regal, Durbar, Dynasty, Regency, Crysta, Viceroy, Senate, and Balcony, ranging capacity from 15 to 800 guests.

#### Hotel Hyatt Regency Kathmandu

Located near the famous Boudhnath Stupa, a world heritage site monument zone of Kathmandu, Hyatt Regency is set on 37 acres of meticulously landscaped grounds. The architecture of the hotel has been based on traditional Nepali architecture, with its vast lobby embellished with large stone chaityas (stupas) and dhunga dharas (stone spouts) that immediately gives visitors the feeling of Nepal. The hotel has 280 rooms and suites, which include eight suites and seven S-Deluxe, 192 Standard, 38

Stupa View, and 35 Regency Club rooms. Doubtless, one can assume that the Stupa View rooms are much in demand.

As for restaurants, The Café serves international cuisine, Rox is the hotel's signature outlet and features a show-kitchen with wood-fired oven, and serves southern European cuisine. Rox Bar features an island bar and offers a wide selection of beverages. The Lounge is a convenient and comfortable meeting venue and serves specialty beverages, light meals, and an afternoon tea selection. The Terrace serves light food, healthy meals, salads, juices and refreshing cocktails. The hotel offers over 10,100 sq ft of impressive meeting space, providing unparalleled business services to meet the needs of the individual business traveler, whilst catering to the diverse requirements of the customer. In addition to the meeting space, there are numerous outdoor venues available within the hotel grounds. The hotel's Club Oasis features a fitness center, health and beauty spa, outdoor swimming pools, whirlpool, tennis courts, and a 1.6 km jogging track.

Hotel Hyatt Regency Kathmandu





Radisson Hotel Kathmandu

**Hotel Shangri-La**

Shangri-La Hotel was established in 1979-1980 in Lazimpat, Kathmandu, and was more of a boutique hotel than a star-hotel for many years. Its founder chairman Mr. Shyam Bahadur Panday's vision was to create a sort of 'promised land' with a relaxing and welcoming environment. According to him, "The original main entrance was designed to symbolize a pass that travelers have to cross enter to reach enchanting valleys in the high mountains." In due time, he came in touch with Desmond Doig, an individual well-known for his creative abilities, who wanted to design a garden on the hotel premises.

This garden, named Shambala Garden, became, and still is, one of the hotel's special features. It has even won a prestigious international award. The hotel has undergone a number of renovations and refurbishments since its establishment, and currently has 24 Executive Club suites, two Deluxe suites, five Jr. suites, and 69 Deluxe rooms. Its two restaurants, Saffron and Shambala Garden Café, offer specialty Indian and multi-cuisine, respectively, while The Lost Horizon offers a wide variety of drinks and snacks. Four venues, Sammelan Hall, Baithak Hall, Desmond Doig Room, and Garden Pavilion, with capacity ranging from 20 to 300, offer excellent settings for conferences, events, and banquets.

**Radisson Hotel Kathmandu**

Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, which was established in November 1998 in Lazimpat, Kathmandu, had an extremely difficult beginning. "The Maoist insurgency began around the same time that we started," recalls Executive Chairman Mr. Govind Das Shrestha. "Tourist arrivals reduced drastically, and it was a most challenging time to keep ourselves afloat." According to the venerable chairman, his interest in the hospitality industry was aroused because of the great success of another of his ventures, namely, Himalayan Travels, a leading travel agency of the time.

Today the hotel offers 260 spacious, well-facilitated guest rooms, including 15 suites, and 96 Premium, 107 Standard, 20 Deluxe, and 22 Business Class rooms. The eight-storied hotel has six restaurants, namely, The Fun Café, Olive Garden, The Comer Bar, Pastry Shop, Splash Bar & Grill, and The Terrace Garden, offering a wide array of international cuisine, including Mediterranean, a specialty of the Olive Garden. The Nepa Dhuku Hall, Begnas Hall, Rara Hall, and Gosainkund Hall provide well-equipped facilities for holding conferences, banquets, and other events. Its Clark Hatch Fitness Centre is very popular with fitness enthusiasts of the city, as is its rooftop swimming pool.

**The Malla Hotel**

The Malla Hotel is built in Euro-Nepal architectural style, and is located in between the erstwhile royal palace and the tourist hub of Thamel in Kathmandu. It has 10 suites and 35 Deluxe and 53 Standard rooms, along with four restaurants: Rendezvous, Tara, Imperial Pavilion, and Coffee Shop, serving Continental, Indian, Szechuan and Cantonese, Nepali, French, and Italian cuisine. Its two halls, Malla Plaza and Business Lounge, with capacity ranging from 40 to 300 guests, offer excellent venues for events, banquets, and conferences. The beauty of the hotel is further enhanced by its award-winning garden and shimmering swimming pool.

**The Everest Hotel**

The Everest Hotel is located in the commercial area of New Baneswor in Kathmandu. It has five suites, one Executive suite, and 60 Deluxe, 84 Standard, and 10 Club rooms. Its four restaurants, Bugles & Tiger, Mandarin, Far Pavilion, and The Café, offer Chinese, Indian, and multi-cuisine. The Grande Ballroom, the Lotus Hall, and Namche Hall provide well-equipped facilities for holding conferences, banquets, and other events with capacities ranging from 15 to 1,000 guests.

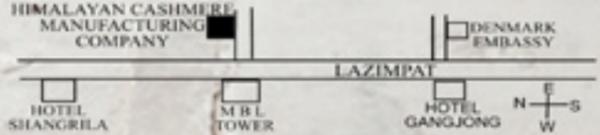
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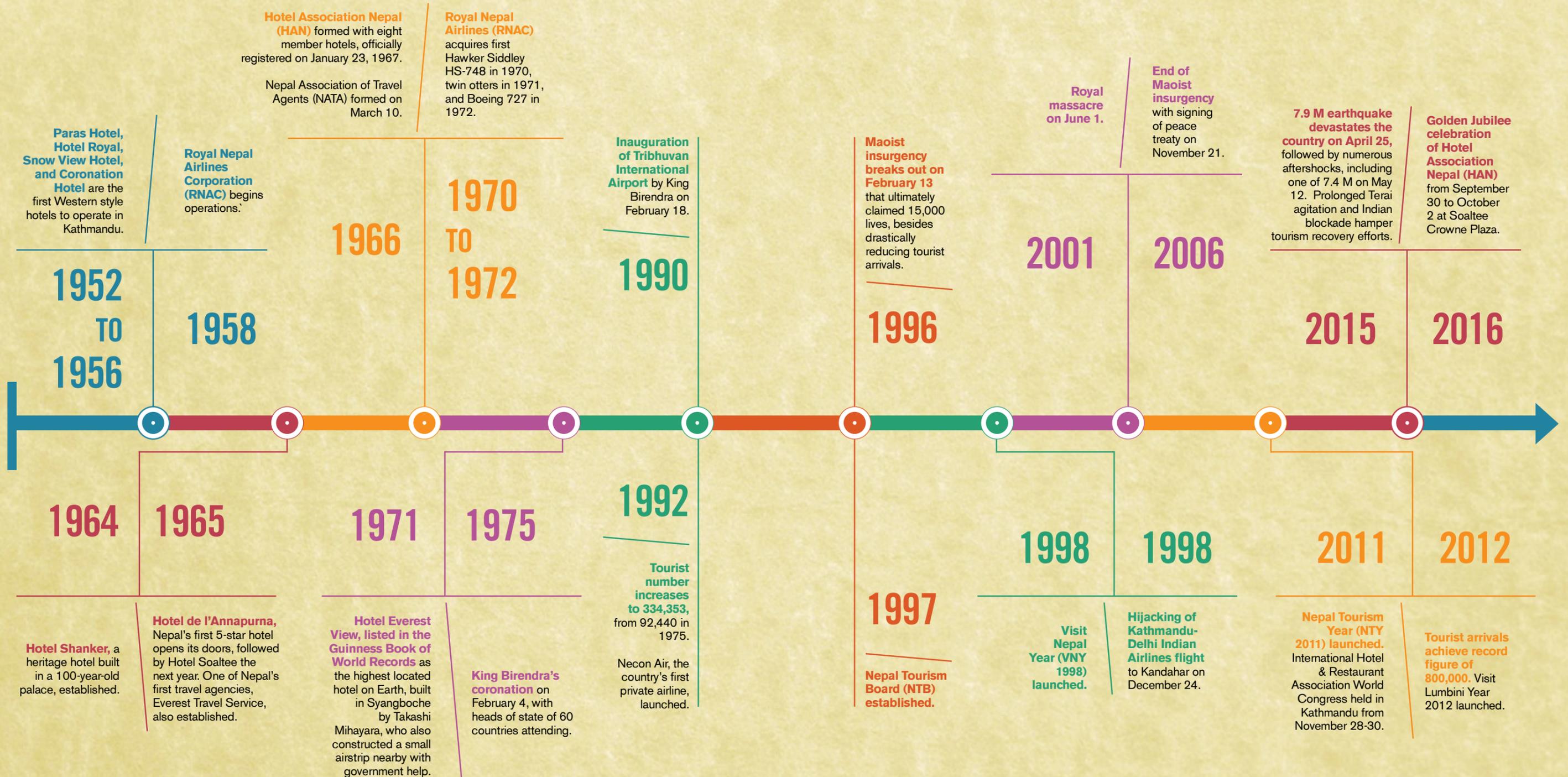




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# MILESTONES OF NEPAL TOURISM

Hotel Association Nepal (HAN) celebrated its Golden Jubilee from September 30 to October 2 this year. Coincidentally, this is also the Golden Jubilee year of Nepal Association of Tour & Travel Agents (NATTA). Indeed, 1966 was a milestone in the long journey of Nepal's tourism sector, one that has been marked at times by soaring hope, huge success, and many uncertainties.





Soaltee Hotel was built to fill in the void of a true international hotel with enough dignity to host international conferences and receive foreign dignitaries and top rank visitors.

## PLAYING ITS PART IN THE NATION'S HISTORY

# SOALTEE HOTEL

**NAMOTI NEMBANG**

**S**oaltee Hotel opened its doors on November 25, 1966. Built by late Prince Himalaya Bir Bikram Shah Dev and late Princess Princep Rajya Laxmi Devi Shah, the iconic hotel is touted as the most elite luxury hotel in Nepal.

At the time it was launched, the tourism industry was just beginning to evolve, but there were few, if any, large hotels in Kathmandu. "Though there was Hotel Royal. It was a personal enterprise," says Mr. Prabhakar SJB Rana, Chairman Emeritus of Soaltee Crowne Plaza. "However, when people ask me, I still say Boris Lissanevich, who opened Hotel Royal, is the father of tourism and hotel industry of Nepal."

"So, Soaltee Hotel was built to fill in the void of a true international hotel with enough dignity to host international conferences and receive foreign dignitaries and top rank visitors," he adds. "Besides the royals, the public too had felt the need for a five-star hotel. In fact, Hotel de l' Annapurna was opened 8-9 months prior to Soaltee Hotel."

He emphasizes that a business cannot become an industry as long as it is personal. "For me,

anything becomes an industry when the business grows into a corporation, and it starts borrowing from the bank." He says that Soaltee Hotel was perhaps the first customer of Nepal Investment Development Corporation Ltd. (NIDC). According to him, NIDC was a recent establishment when Soaltee was launched.

Throughout its 50-year history, Soaltee Hotel has played host to many well-known personalities and VIPs from around the world. Mr. Rana fondly remembers the time when the hotel had enjoyed the patronage of royalty and heads of state when they came to attend the coronation of the late King Birendra in 1975. "The distinguished guests included the Prince of Wales, Lord Mountbatten, and Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester, representing Britain; the current emperor of Japan; heads of state of Sri Lanka and Pakistan; and the governor general of Australia, vice-presidents of India, China, and Russia," the now 81-year-old says with a gleam in his eyes.

He continues, "They were all lodged in the Princep Wing. The foundation of the Himalaya Wing had just been dug, and we had to hide the site from the guests." Of

the two hotel wings, the Princep Wing, with 104 rooms, was built in 1966, and the Himalayan Wing Block, with additional 180 guestrooms, was added in 1981.

Talking about the brands, he says Soaltee Hotel has relationships with only two international brands so far. In 1969, the hotel was incorporated as a private limited company. The same year, Oberoi Hotels (India), with its investment in share capital of the company, was entrusted with the operational management of Soaltee Hotel, and the brand name was changed to "Hotel Soaltee Oberoi."

In 1975, the company was converted into a public limited company, with an investment in the share capital of the company by Soaltee Enterprises Pvt. Ltd., Nepal Investment Development Corporation, International Finance Corporation, Oberoi Hotels (India) Pvt. Ltd., Nepal Airlines Corporation, and the public. "It was associated with the Oberoi group for 25 years. When the term was over, we changed the brand and entered with Crowne Plaza brand."

Soaltee Hotel was renamed Soaltee Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza Kathmandu in 1994, and operated by Holiday Inns China

Limited, a fully owned subsidiary of the world famous Intercontinental Hotels Group (IHG). In 1998, Soaltee Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza was rebranded as Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu.

He says that the Himalayan Wing was the first project of International Finance Corporation (IFC), a private sector of the World Bank, in Nepal. "They came both as an equity shareholder as well as a creditor. The IFC could sell its shares once the company started making profits. Currently, they don't hold any shares in the company."

According to him, the company decided to go public once IFC decided to come in, as the corporation could only fund public businesses. "We also waited until we were making continuous profit, because a public venture will not be appreciated if the public don't get a regular return."

The Chairman Emeritus says that, back in the days, public sector investment was not looked upon favorably. But with the success of Soaltee, public sector is growing in every other field, not just hotel business. He says that any company, except trading business, should go public. "This is my personal opinion that until the companies become public and go into manufacturing there will be no industrial growth." He says that there will not be any growth through the service industry. "This is the problem in Nepal, we hardly have any manufacturing. Until you

## People



manufacture, how do you balance trade?" he asks.

In its five-decade-long history, NIDC and IFC have been the main financiers of Soaltee. "In the first stage, NIDC was the main financier, but IFC is leading now. One of the reasons we brought in IFC was after we realized that NIDC would not be able to finance us," he adds.

The hotel has seven VVIP Deluxe Regal Suite complexes that were built in 1987 for the delegates of the third SAARC Summit in Kathmandu. He says that the late King Birendra had insisted that the suites be built and look exactly the same. "Though I had my reservations regarding seven regal suites in one hotel, he had his point, too. The government provided us soft loans for the complexes. Otherwise, as a business proposition, it was not possible." He says that all SAARC pre-ministerial and secretarial meetings were held in the banquet hall known as Rose Room. The Himalayan Wing was yet to be built at that time.

Mr. Rana had been associated with Soaltee long before the hotel was founded in 1965. He started at Soaltee as a purchase and personnel manager. Before the hotel was even completed, he rose to the post of assistant manager. "Then, the chief executive director got me involved in NIDC loan negotiations, and when IFC came in, I was already the managing director," he says. But, until the company was a private entity, he assumed the position of Operational Director. He became chairman only after the company went public. According

to him, when the company was private, royal family members were appointed as chairman of the hotel. Even former King Gyanendra was the chairman for sometime.

Delving into the glorious days of Soaltee, he says that the best decade for tourism was around late 1970s. "That was the time when we began to get group tourists. We had agreements with some of the top American companies. They used to have their customers on a-la-carte basis, not a fixed menu. At that time, our room rates were much higher than what we get today. The rates for these companies were about \$120-\$130."

Soaltee is celebrating its 50th anniversary on November 25 next month. "I remember the date very clearly, because my birthday falls on the next day," he says with a chuckle. He says that the celebration will be held in a muted way. "We will celebrate, since it is our landmark year, but it will be very low-key. We have yet to come out of the trauma. The heritage sites are yet to be rebuilt. Tourists don't come to Nepal to see five-star hotels. So, we should all work to bring those monuments and heritage sites back to life first."

Currently, the company is constructing a four-star hotel in Nepalgunj. The 55 crore rupees project will have 81 rooms, and is scheduled for a soft launch in March-April 2017. They have further procured land at Khapaundi, Pokhara, to build a resort. Both projects will carry the brand name of Soaltee.



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Feature

# THE THRIVING RESORT TOWN OF POKHARA

PRAMITA SHRESTHA

*When speaking of Pokhara, people mostly shout out about the Fewa Lake, the majestic Machhapuchhare, and the adventures she offers, like paragliding, zip lining, sky diving, bungee jumping, boating, and so on. One never runs out of reasons to celebrate the beauty and ambience of Pokhara, a thriving town of hotels and resorts that allow travelers to relax and enjoy. She owes her popularity to her hotels and resorts to quite an extent.*



## 5 STAR

### Pokhara Grande

The Pokhara Grande, located at Birauta-17 Pokhara, stands for its blend of service, luxury, and tranquil setting, just a walk or bicycle ride away to the sights and market. This hotel has 4 suites and 136 deluxe rooms, and is listed among the 10 best hotels in Nepal. Guests can also enjoy both local and international cuisine and drinks in the hotel's restaurant. Pokhara Grande is also an ideal choice for people looking for the best level of service for hosting conferences and events.

### The Fulbari Resort and Spa

The Fulbari Resort and Spa is the only deluxe 5 star resort in Nepal that offers all amenities of an international standard resort with the touch of ancient Newari culture in its architecture. Situated at Dhunge Sagu, the Fulbari Resort and Spa offers majestic panoramas of the Annapurna mountain ranges and Seti River gorges. This resort has 13 suites, and 62 deluxe, 76 S-deluxe, and 13 Royal Executive

rooms with culinary highlights in the restaurants and bars. The resort also offers panoramic views of Fishtail and Annapurna, making it a remarkable resort in an idyllic setting.

## 3 STAR

### Hotel Barahi

Hotel Barahi is located at Barahi Path, beside Fewa Lake; set in the heart of the Pokhara valley, and surrounded by the mighty Annapurna range. Hotel Barahi is a homely retreat with 76 air-conditioned deluxe and 6 standard rooms, with private balconies offering great views of the Fishtail Mountain and Annapurna range. One feels at home with sumptuous complimentary breakfast, and takes back a little part of Nepali culture after the cultural program the hotel hosts every night.

## Tourist Class

### Waterfront Resort Hotel

Waterfront Resort Hotel, located at Sedi-6, is just a 10-minute ride from the airport, and a 15-minute





## Feature



walk from the tourist hub. This resort hotel offers 58 deluxe rooms, most with lake view balconies. This is a well facilitated resort hotel with free WIFI, flat screen TV, and tea/ coffee making equipment, and some rooms even have mini bars. There are two informal restaurants and terrace dining, plus a coffee bar. Also, the hotel has an outdoor swimming pool, delightful dining options, and conference halls. The resort's other attraction is the free shuttle service that it provides to its guests to lakeside throughout the day.

### Hotel Landmark Pokhara

Hotel Landmark is a landmark hotel that urges the preservation of heritage and environment and the role of tourism in it. The greatest attraction of Hotel Landmark Pokhara is the construction of the building with handmade Nepali bricks, and the use of carved wood in the entire hotel premises. The hotel has 60 deluxe rooms, a hall with capacity for 130 guests, and a restaurant, bar, and café offering a variety of cuisine.

### Vardan Resorts N' Apartment

Vardan Resorts N' Apartment, located at Pahari Marga, has hygienic wooden boutique cottages and apartments with tiled floors. This resort is a perfect combination of Nepali architecture and modern amenities. With one suite, and six deluxe and six S-deluxe rooms, this resort is decorated with finely selected craft and sculpture that gives you a peek into the Nepali culture.

### Resorts

#### Fishtail Lodge

Fishtail Lodge is situated on a peninsula across Fewa Lake in Pokhara. Shuttle-floats or boats transport you across to the resort. With the lake on one side and a forest hill on the other, the views are spectacular. The panorama of Annapurna range and Machhapuchre (Fish Tail), and their reflection on the lake soothe your soul and refresh your spirit. Here you can enjoy a break far from the maddening crowd. This lodge





## Feature



surpasses tranquility, facing one of the most beautiful, breathtaking views in the world, which is why the lodge features in the bestselling book “1000 Places to See before You Die” by Patricia Schultz. The hotel has facilities for soothing treatments at the spa to relax and rejuvenate, and serves a wide variety of Nepali, Chinese, Indian, and Western cuisine at its restaurant, while drinks can be enjoyed at the cozy bar.

### Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge

Perched 1,000 feet above the Pokhara valley, with a spectacular Himalayan backdrop, Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge welcomes its guests with the essence of tranquility. The lodge is ideal for pre- and post-trek guests, or for those wishing to take day walks exploring local communities, bird-watching, gentle exercise, or just to relax in a typical Nepalese rural setting. Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge is a member of Secret Retreats, a select group of some of the world’s most special experiences. Built of hand-cut stone, the cottage rooms provide welcoming, understated seclusion with cool slate and parquet floors, rich Tibetan rugs, handmade wood furniture, and original artwork.

Large windows and glass double doors maximize the glorious views of the amazing location. From the lodge gardens you can enjoy the majestic peaks. The hotel has a bar that provides a full range of international and local drinks, and remains open until the last guest retires. From elegant dining to children’s favorites, the kitchen uses fresh, local, organic produce for its range of Nepali and Western meals.

### The Pavilions Himalaya

Far removed from everyday life, The Pavilions Himalaya boutique resort is nestled in a valley near Fewa Lake, Pokhara. Surrounded by farmland, forested hills, and a mountain-fed river, there are 15 luxurious, eco-friendly villas spread over organic farmland. The resort respects the natural elements, showcasing village life in Nepal, and has Classic, Grand, and Chalet Villas, with views of the tranquil natural landscape beyond, which can be enjoyed from a private terrace. The villas are designed with a traditional touch, contemporary floors and furnishings bringing the rustic feel, and topped with modern comforts.





People

# STANDING TALL

**My family has endured extreme times, which pushed us to the brink of quitting. It would have definitely saved us from mental, financial, and emotional turmoil. But, we chose otherwise.**

**SRIJANA RANA**

*Have I earned my stripes? I certainly have.*

Nothing comes easy in life. And not all get everything served in a silver platter, without having to earn it. I count myself exceptionally fortunate. I was raised by a single mother with all values essential for any girl from my community, but she gave me the freedom to think like a man and charter my own course in life. In a society that is still patriarchal, I was blessed to have married into a family where my husband opened the doors to the hospitality industry for me with my grandmother-in-law's blessings. This was Hotel Annapurna.

As a girl walking into hotels like Hotel Annapurna or Soaltee was such a glamorous affair. The magnificent environment allured me into the hotel industry. I began my career in this mesmerizing industry with Welcome Group, ITC. Little did I know then that my seven years of experience with them was going to open doors to head one of the five stars I had walked into as a girl with awe. My husband entrusted me with the responsibility of looking into the standards and philanthropic aspect of Hotel Annapurna. And thus began my journey as an hotelier.

My grandmother-in-law (a visionary woman hotel entrepreneur, and my inspiration)

established Hotel Annapurna. Her vision was to provide the guest the experience of a "home away from home". She picked staff members, and treated them as family. Thus, my husband and I were left with the immense responsibility of this heritage, and to live up to the sentiments behind it. Hotel Annapurna has completed 50 years. The journey has definitely not been easy. My family has endured extreme times, which pushed us to the brink of quitting. It would have definitely saved us from mental, financial, and emotional turmoil. But, we chose otherwise. We chose to stay put and fight all odds as true Nepali citizens with dignity. I guess one of the reasons gluing us to our inheritance had to be the responsibility of taking forward this heritage and the many employees under our care, who reciprocated our genuine sentiments towards them.

The most challenging period for Hotel Annapurna and us has to be the period of insurgency. It seemed overnight that things changed. As if the environment of civil war was not enough, we had to think of taking care of the many employees who relied on us, with the tourism sector all crippled. All we could think of then was survival. The property had to survive, for many lives depended on it. Today, when I look back at the challenges,

I feel immense gratitude towards all my employees, who patiently stuck by us. It was their love and loyalty towards the company that sailed us through rough waters.

I may sound a bit obnoxious, but I must state, despite all odds, Hotel Annapurna is spoken highly for its hospitality. The employees have been groomed to be at par with any professional in this industry. I have made it a point not to compromise on standards and the quality of services we provide, without letting go of the tradition of Hotel Annapurna to reciprocate loyalty for loyalty. Over the years, times have changed, so have I, and so has the system in my hotel, but with founding sentiments the same. My older generation employees are the rock solid foundation of my hotel, with younger generation employees welcomed generously. I pride in the synergy of dynamic young energy and the years of experience of the older employees of my hotel. This culture just makes our property ever more stronger.

When earlier I said "I had earned my stripes", I meant it literally. Being a women hotelier running a property with 500 plus employees, in a country still patriarchal with unstable governance, was no cakewalk for me. I faced, and still do, challenges working with the majority of my employees with practically no professional



degree in hospitality. Every day I have to sit and think with my team on how to empower this lot to maintain and upgrade standards of my property to compete with international standards. It has taken me a while to comprehend the language and system of our bureaucrats due to my affiliation and association with the hospitality and tourism industry.

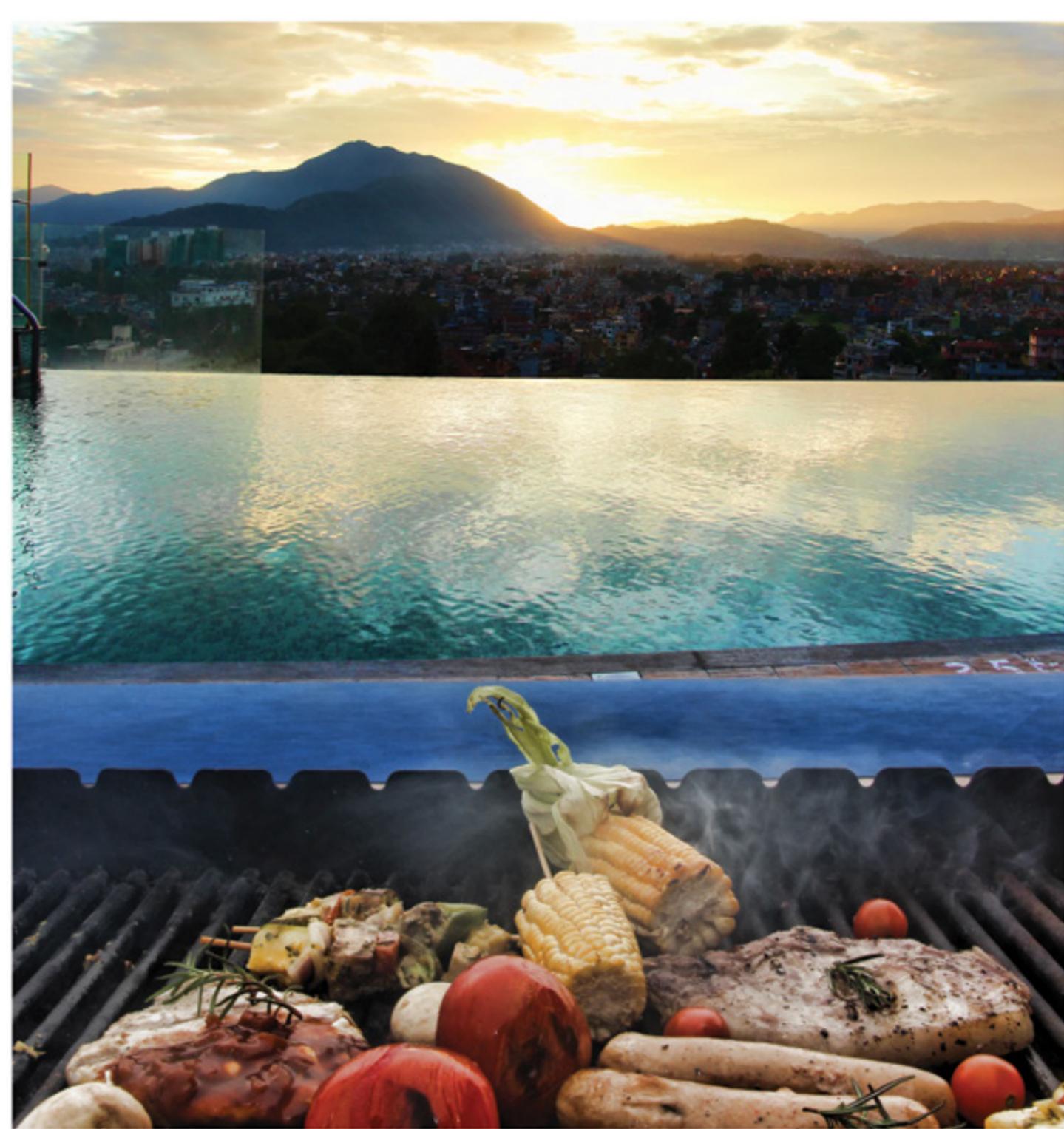
Currently, I am in more constant tete-a-tete with government bodies due to my position as the first Vice President of Hotel Association Nepal (HAN) and Tourism Convener for Nepal India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NICCI). I had to sweat through my teeth to overcome the many biases to make myself

heard and stand tall amongst the crowd. It surely did not happen overnight. Believe me, it took extreme perseverance to be the only woman in the HAN Executive Board. Taking the easy way and quitting is NOT ME. I guess persistence and perseverance does pay off.

Sometimes, I sit to ponder and hope I have done justice to my responsibility. I hope, just as my husband and I are carrying forward a heritage, we are able to establish and leave behind a heritage of our own that our children will take great pride in and carry forward with love. At the same time, I pray and wish that when our future generation take over from us, the working environment in our country will have changed

for the better. The industry today is so generously welcoming towards the younger generation, as they bring with them fresh dynamic perspective to enhance the environment of the hospitality industry. It's unfortunate that we are unable to retain such younger generation, who seek opportunity outside the country. Much is due to instability that we bear witness to with our government. I hope our government will empathize with our problems and ensure investment security and protection against unwarranted malign to all members of the hospitality and tourism industry, which should curb brain drain too.

As a staunch believer in God and karma, I will do my bit, and let Karma do the rest!



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Established in 1965, Hotel Annapurna then Hotel de l'Annapurna has the singular distinction of being the first 5-star hotel in Nepal.

In conversation with Binayak Shah, one of those rare individuals who plunged into the hotel industry leaving behind a career in the government services. Here he talks about the evolution of the hotel industry from the Inns to the 5 star hotels and the growing role of Hotel Association of Nepal.

# YESTERDAY, TODAY & People TOMORROW BINAYAK SHAH

 SAMBID BILAS PANT

**A**t a time when it was difficult to even spot a teashop in the area surrounding the country's only international airport, Mr. Binayak Shah envisioned an airport hotel with a revolving restaurant at the top. After working for 16 years in government service, he began his career in the hotel business in 2011 with the establishment of the Airport Hotel. Now in its 6th year, the hotel is quite popular among short stay tourists. Mr. Shah is also the current Secretary General of the Hotel Association Nepal (HAN).

#### **How did the idea of Airport Hotel emerge?**

I was more into organizing trade fairs and world expos in the early years. There were no cafes or restaurants around the area, so one couldn't even have a cup of tea. I thought of building a place where the layover passengers could have good accommodation and quality food services. The planes land very late in the night. When the flights are delayed, or cancelled due to bad weather or technical issues, the passengers and crew can come to our hotel. A series of cafes, restaurants, and hotels have opened up in the area after we launched Airport Hotel. So, the hotel can take some credit for the development of the area.

From the perspective of 50 years of HAN—looking back on that time, and looking at where it is now—what is your

sense of where the hotel industry is today? Nepal's hotel industry and HAN began almost at the same time. Before the ideas of hotels emerged, tourists took shelters in dharmashalas or home stays. Then, in 1951, Himalayan Inn was built in the New Road area followed by Paras Hotel, but the hotel industry truly began with the Royal Hotel. It had limited number of visitors, more notably people from the embassies, diplomats, and government representatives from abroad. The majority of Nepal's tourists consisted of those from India who came to visit Pashupatinath during festivals such as Shiva Ratri. Nepal's hotel industry picked up with the launch of the country's first 5-star hotel, Soaltee Hotel in 1966, the same year HAN was established. HAN has consistently worked for the growth and development of the industry by meeting the demands of modern day tourists and the changing times.

#### **What are the major achievements of HAN?**

HAN has been extensively working to solve the problems of its members. It has been mediating with the government regarding various issues. It is also educating and training hotel staffs regarding the modern technologies, communication, online bookings, and so on. There are 12 chapters of HAN in different parts of the country. It has successfully collaborated with the stakeholders and the tourism fraternity to boost the industry. HAN has been working



closely with the likes of National Association of Travel and Tour Agents (NATTA), Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal (TAAN), Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA), Nepal Association of Travel Operators (NATO), and the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB)

Indian and Chinese tourists are considered the major tourists for the hotel market. What can be done to target tourists from other countries? Nepal has attracted diverse tourists in different time frames. It was an overland for the hippies in the sixties, as they roamed freely in Freak Street. People from the West were mesmerized by the idea of Shangri-La. With improved roads and air connectivity, the country attracted more tourists, particularly from the neighboring countries India and China. They consider Nepal as a cheap destination that is easily accessible to them. It's about time Nepal attracted tourists from all over the globe. It is estimated that, by A.D. 2020, 4000 new star-grade rooms will be available for tourists, with the number of new hotels being close to thirty. International hotels such as Meridian, Sheraton, and Hilton are willing to invest and link up with Nepali hotels, which will help the industry to reach the next level.

**How did the Maoist insurgency affect the hotel business?**

It was testing times, as the number of tourists plummeted drastically. During the peak of the armed conflict (2002-2003) only 1.5 lakh tourists visited Nepal, and rooms were sold at as low as 20 dollars a night. The agreement with the Maoist leaders led to the increment in the number of tourists.

**What kind of impact did the earthquake have?**

Only 5.38 lakh tourists visited Nepal in the year 2015 because of the April 25 earthquake and the unofficial blockade that followed. Although many residential structures were damaged, 95% of hotels were considered safe. It was the excessive negative portrayal in the international media that led to people believing that Nepal wasn't safe. The government should have taken the initiative to show that we were open for business.

**What is your perspective on the closing of the casinos?**

Casinos are great attractions all over the world. Just look at Vegas. It is not a bad concept. There is a problem of management. The hotel owners don't run the casinos. The management is entirely different. There are unpaid workers, which re-

sults in conflict between the hotel owners and trade unions.

**In what ways can the hotel industry help in the development of society and the overall economy of the country?**

Hotels are not simply economic investments. Establishment of a hotel in a particular region has a positive impact on the overall development of that place. Let's take Nagarkot, for example. It was a small village 20 years ago, before the launch of different hotels such as Club Himalaya and Chautari transformed it into a tourist hub. Hotels generate employment opportunities, improve infrastructure, and road connectivity. Not just Nagarkot, look at Durbar Marg (Kings Way) after Hotel Annapurna was built there, Tahachal after Hotel Soaltee. There are numerous examples even outside the capital, such as Bandipur, Chitwan, Pokhara, and so forth. The food and the hospitality and tradition of Nepal can be promoted through the services that the hotels provide.

What are your views on the labor law that prevents the employees from being sacked? Hotel industry is a labor intensive industry. Every employee working at the hotel is a hotel ambassador, from the watchman to the managing director. If they do not perform to the standard of the hotels, they shouldn't be working there.

**What are the measures that need to be taken by the government to promote hotel business/industry?**

Nepal's diverse cultures and the number of festivals are the major reasons tourists are attracted to Nepal. People are deeply rooted to culture. The previous government was eager to launch Visit Nepal Year 2018. It could be used as a platform for promoting 12 different festivals in 12 months. The government should also come up with plans to promote tourism in the federal system. The proposed 7 provinces can be promoted based on the cultural heritages and the natural resources they possess.

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**Projects Undertaken**

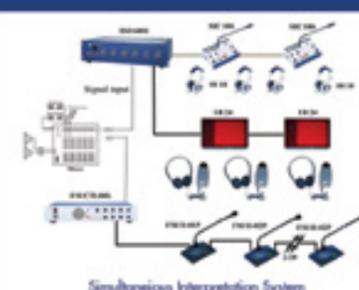
INTERPOL, Nepal Police 10th Regional Conference	1988
UNEP (UNEP Third Inter Governmental Meeting (IGM))	1992
Third LDC Ministerial Symposium Sustainable	1994
IV Int'l Surgical Conference of Society of Surgeons (ISSA)	1997
34th Civil Aviation Director General Meeting	1998
11th SAARC Summit Kathmandu	2001
Weapons of Mass Destruction Awareness Conference (USA)	2003
International Resources Group (USA)	2005
Samhuda Nepal	2006
Friends for Peace	2006
GACF (Global Alliance of Community Forest)	2006
AFD Inc. (Rule of Law project USAID Nepal)	2006
CECS (Canadian Center for Int'l Studies & Co-operation)	2007
MS Nepal (DANIDA)	2007
SLC (Slovak Development Co-operation)	2007
International Labour Organisation (ILO)	2007
Asian Development Bank (PPTA 4972-NEP)	2008
ICMDO	2009
UNICEF/UNFPA	2009
International Land Coalition (IFAD Italy)	2009
JICA / GEMSP	2015
Sarvika Foundation	2015
ILO	2015
British Council Nepal	2008 - 2015
World Bank Nepal	1998 - 2015
United Nations Office of The High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Nepal	2008 - 2015
UNICEF	2008 - 2015
DANIDA HUGOBU	2015 - 2015
ICI Nepal	2015 - 2015
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The magnificent view from Airport Hotel. A series of cafés, restaurants, and hotels have opened up in the area since the launch of Airport Hotel. The hotel can surely take some credit for the development of the area.

# Great Restaurants at Classic Hotels Food

Get a taste of the outstanding cuisines of Kathmandu's classic hotels.

EVANGELINE NEVE



## The Fun Café, Radisson Hotel: A Dessert Lover's Delight

Those in Kathmandu with a sweet tooth are, in all likelihood, already familiar with the Radisson's cakes, pastries, and desserts—their café and pastry shop are well known, and for good reason.

Executive Pastry Chef Ram Prasad Sapkota has been working at the Radisson for the 16 years it has been open. He first trained at the Soaltee, and moved from there to venues abroad, including the U.S., before returning to Kathmandu and taking up the pastry reins at the Radisson. With his many years' experience, he has learned a lot about what different ages and nationalities love when it comes to sweets, and he puts that to good use daily. The Fun Café serves lunch and dinner buffets, and sports an extensive selection of sweets and goodies of all sorts. It's almost enough to make you want to skip the

savory items and just eat a meal full of dessert!

Another good thing is that they are served in small, bite size portions, so that you can, indeed, try as many as possible. Of the ones I was lucky to sample, I have to give top marks to the Chocolate Nemesis, a flourless cake that somehow still managed to be light and creamy, with a rich, deep chocolaty flavor. The consistency was just amazing. The Cheese Mousse Cup was also a delight, with hints of boozy coffee scattered throughout its multiple layers. And I loved the Strawberry Mousse, which was both visually appealing and a fresh, fruity, tasty delight to eat.

Because many of the hotel guests spend several consecutive nights at the hotel, Chef Sapkota and his team have the challenging job of making sure that the many delectable items on the dessert counter are different at each meal—if they just



repeat dishes, customers might become bored, but fortunately, there's no chance of that here. I have no idea how they come up with so many changeable, creative ideas for their rotation, but it's lucky for all of us that they do, as it ensures that dessert time at the Radisson will always be a delight.

The Fun Café is open all day from 6:30 a.m. to 11 p.m.; lunch and dinner buffets include dessert selection; cakes and pastries can also be ordered from The Pastry Shop, open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.. Tel no: 01-4411818

## Krishnarpan, Dwarika's Hotel: Nepali Fine Dining

Dwarika's has several different restaurants scattered around its attractive buildings and courtyard, including Japanese, multi-cuisine, and the Nepali Krishnarpan.

It was my first time eating here, and I didn't know what to expect. Dwarika's Hotel is famed for its artistic touches, use of Nepali traditional crafts, and attention to detail, and all of this was on show in their Nepali restaurant. The restaurant is decorated primarily in red and

black, and the rooms are filled with lovingly restored decorative windows and old jugs and other traditional vessels. Everything on the tables have also been chosen with care: brass cups, ceramic dishes customized for the various courses, and beautifully wrought cutlery with handles designed to resemble branches. Everywhere you look, there is something new and interesting to observe.

The food, too, is prepared with care, and mostly sourced from Dwarika's own organic farms. We enjoyed a six-course dinner that took us from Newari items to mo:mo, and finally daal-bhaat. The meal was delicious, and I was especially impressed by the fine, flavorful pumpkin soup course. The dishes are both locally and seasonally rotated, and while some might find certain courses less spiced than usual, it's a great way to introduce foreigners to the delights of Nepali cuisine.

And, it's impossible not to mention the attentive, helpful staff, all attractively attired in the traditional clothing of various local ethnic groups. Krishnarpan is a complete cultural experience in more ways than one.



Open evenings only, 6 p.m. onwards; prior reservations necessary. Tel no: 01-4479488

**Arniko Room, Annapurna Hotel: Historical Chinese**

Did you know that Arniko Chinese Room in the Annapurna Hotel is one of the oldest Chinese restaurants in the valley? I've visited this cozy place several times, but was unaware of its long history.

Opened in 1978, several chefs have been part of its history. Chef Peter Lee from Singapore, and others from Shanghai and Calcutta. The combination of all these who have passed on their culinary expertise and trained Arniko's staff in the art of Chinese cuisine is just one of the reasons the food here is so consistently good.

This time around, I was delighted to sample one of Arniko's signature dishes, as well as one of their most popular: Ginger Prawns. This dish is so beloved by regular patrons that even those eating at one of the hotel's other restaurants, Ghar-e-Kabab, ask if they can have this dish sent over from Arniko. With the customer's happiness paramount, staff are always more than happy to comply.

I was surprised when I heard this story, and couldn't wait to try it for myself to see what all the fuss was about. I wasn't disappointed. The dish was impressive looking—these are top quality big, fat prawns—and the serving was large and appetizing. As you take a bite, the outside coating is fried to a delicious crispy crunch, and through that, heaven! Succulent, juicy prawns, cooked to the perfect level of doneness—I just couldn't stop eating them! The bit of ginger and spice they are tossed with complements the seafood's natural flavours without overwhelming them, and the overall effect is very, very good.

We also enjoyed a spicy, crunchy dish of Congee Lamb, paneer-filled Cigar Rolls, and Date Pancake with ice cream. And while all of these were very tasty, the Ginger Prawn was, without a doubt, the star of the show.



*Arniko Chinese Room opens at 1 p.m., with last orders at 10:45 p.m.. Tel no: 01-4221711*

**Kakori Restaurant, Soaltee Hotel: Authentic Indian Delights**

The Soaltee Hotel is home to multiple restaurants that feature many of the world's great cuisines, but possibly one of the most popular is their Kakori Restaurant, serving high-end Indian food. In addition to a solid year-round menu, Kakori also regularly holds delectable food promotions, featuring specially prepared items from around India. From curries and kebabs to parathas and biryanis, there's something here from every corner of this varied country, and something to meet every taste, too. Executive Chef Yuba Raj Pokhrel and his team have extensive experience, and make a real effort to ensure that all the items offered are as authentically prepared as possible, including sourcing specialized ingredients from out of Nepal, as needed.

Kakori Kebabs are one of the restaurant's signature menu items; these are delicious and delicately prepared dishes hailing from the Lucknow tradition of cooking. Finely ground, delicately seasoned meat roasted over coals on long skewers, and served with an assortment of amazing chutneys, of which the cooling minty one is always a highlight when I visit: it goes well with everything, and could practically be eaten on its own! But, of course, you would never need to have it on its own, but rather opt for one of Kakori's tasty selection of naans, some of which you won't often find on other menus, such as those with coriander and onion seeds. Delicious!

*Kakori Restaurant at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal, opens at 7 p.m.; last order 10:45. Tel no: 01-4273999*





People

# Back to the 70's

Ever wondered why that one street off Basantapur is called “Freak Street”? We sit down with Mr. Shyam Kakshyapati, owner of the Nanglo chain of restaurants, who grew up in the midst of the hippy craze in Nepal, to find out how Jhochhen acquired its unique name.

SHREESHA NANKHWA

The seventies were a magical time in Nepal. There were few vehicles, no pollution, no over population. Everything was cheap, and the city still seemed untouched by time. It was all these factors that first attracted the weary flower children of the 60's and 70's to Kathmandu city.

The whole hippy movement started off in the 60's with youngsters who were sick of the constant war and power struggle going on in the greater world and wanted an escape. All they sought was peace and quiet, and maybe a time machine back to simpler times. And, late in the 60's, many of them found this and more in a little known city called Kathmandu.

According to Mr. Kakshyapati, before the hippy movement, the only foreigners who came to Nepal were mountaineers and diplomats. Tourism was virtually non-existent. There were no hotels or restaurants. But, once Nepal was discovered by the wider world, travel vans filled with hippies started pouring into the valley.

“Most of these tourists were over-landers. They would drive all across Europe and Asia for weeks and weeks and come to Nepal through India in their travel vans and buses. Rarely did they come by flight. I remember that area used to be filled to the brim with tourist vehicles,” he recalls, pointing at the open space now filled with crafts-ware stalls in Basantapur, right outside of Himalayan Java.

“Back in '68, Jhochhen was nothing. There were no hotels, no restaurants,” adds Mr. Kakshyapati, who grew up right in the middle of Freak Street.

“It was around '68 that a guy called Ravi from India opened up the first restaurant in Jhochhen. It was called Ravi's Spot.” It was after the restaurant opened, that the first tourists started coming in, and as a result, some more restaurants started opening up as well.

“It was in the year '69 that the first lodge started in Jhochhen. It was called Oriental Lodge.” And as the movement of tourists kept on increasing, more lodges and restaurants started popping up in the Jhochhen area. “I remember, after Oriental, more lodges like Annapurna Lodge, Juicy Lodge, etc. also opened up. And as more lodges opened up, more tourists started coming in.” By the year '70, there were many, many, lodges and restaurants in Jhochhen.

But it was not just the untouched appeal of Kathmandu city that attracted these flower children. “Back in those days, marijuana and hashish were legal in Nepal. You could get a license and just open up a shop. Even restaurants had menus with items like ganja cake and hashish cake, and drinks with weed in them, because they so appealed to these tourists.”

“During that time, many of the hippies came here because of the free availability of hashish and marijuana, and because things were very cheap here. The food and the lodges were very cheap for them, which was a very big attraction. These people had all the time in the world. They would travel here on buses, and stay for a long time at very little cost.”

Reminiscing further, he adds, “This was how Nepal became an attractive tourist destination, and



Jhochhen became the center of it all. Later, they even changed the name to “Freak Street”, because all the freaks would hang out here. And, over there at Maruhiti, that place used to be called “pig alley” by the tourists, because the people there used to raise pigs, which would run around freely on the streets.”

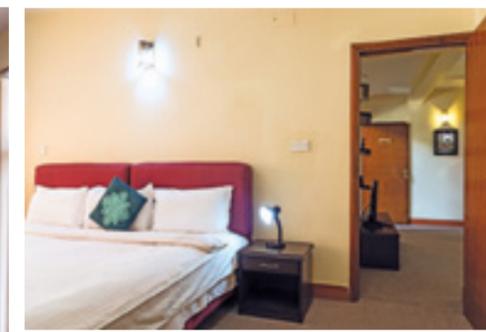
The entire Jhochhen and surrounding area had become a hub for the hippy movement in Nepal by the seventies. It was a colorful time. All kinds of people, flower children, journalists, even celebrities, used to come and stay in Jhochhen. Mr. Kakshyapati remembers that time when Cat Stevens, the singer who later wrote a song about Kathmandu, stayed in Freak Street. Even Charles Shobraj, the notorious serial killer, stayed in Jhochhen around that time.

His best memories of those days were of hanging out at these restaurants, enjoying the music and the ambiance, and interacting with these tourists. “There was this very popular restaurant called the Pleasure Room where they had the best of the music. The ambiance was dark, with psychedelic colors. It was like heaven for these people,” he remembers. He also fondly remembers the full moon parties at Swoyambhu. Every full moon, around 100-150 people could be found hanging around Swoyambhu with guitars. They would sing and dance and play musical instruments and just enjoy themselves.

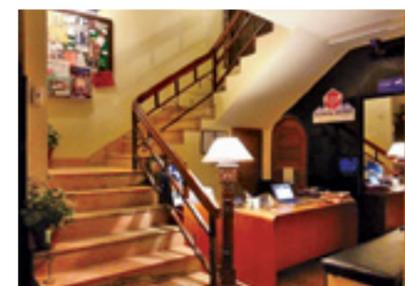
The hippy movement in Nepal went on till the late seventies. Back in those days, every other house was a lodge in and around Jhochhen. And, soon enough, it spread to the surrounding places, too, as Jhochhen did not have enough space to hold all these people on its own. And though Jhochhen did not grow as big as Thamel later did, it has certainly left its mark in Nepal’s tourism industry.

Mr. Kakshyapati believes that it was this movement of hippy tourists that first jump-started tourism in Nepal. Even the Department of Tourism was located in Basantapur, before it became a Ministry of Tourism. “The tourists could come to the Department of Tourism for information, and all the lodges and restaurants were right next door. So, all the touristic activities were then focused in this area.”

Slowly, in the late ’70’S, the hippy movement died down, but Nepal first became famous because of this movement, he states. Even people who weren’t part of this movement came to Nepal seeking some adventure, and they found it. Trekking started becoming popular, people started recognizing our culture, and Nepal became a known tourist destination. But all of this would not have been possible if the flower children of the 60’s and 70’s had not discovered Nepal.



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Feature

# Head In The Clouds

Exceptional Experiences at the Top of The World.

KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA

“Let me walk in front of you so I can check the trail,” my guide said to me, as snow continued to swirl in the cold wind, visibility dropped to no more than a few feet, and we were about to enter a particular ascending stretch about two feet wide with over 1,500 meters drop on the other side. “But if I walk behind you, how will you know if I have fallen?” I asked him, half joking. “That’s true,” he said, quite seriously. As steadily as possible, squinting to both see and keep snowflakes from covering my sight, I walked in front, holding on to the sup-

port metal wire nailed onto the cliff.

That November morning in 2011, when we left Thame (3,800 m) and headed out for Kongde (4,250 m), the sky was a perfect blue, and the temperature just right. Just as we began our Kongde ascent, the sky turned grey, and soon it was winter in the Himalayas, fog and snow enveloping the mountain landscape. At one point, as we crossed a river, what appeared to be solid ground covered in snow turned out to be thin ice. Fortunately, the water in that section was only ankle deep, and I was determined to get to what

Travel and Leisure magazine had defined as the world’s highest resort. Plus, if the five Yeti Mountain Homes—Lukla (2,840 m), Phakding (2,610 m), Monjo (2,840 m), Namche (3,440 m), and Thame—before Kongde were any indications, hot beverages, delicious meals, unprecedented comfort, and exceptional views awaited. Oh, and electrically heated beds, too.

There are only a few well-known mountain resorts in Nepal, and Everest View Hotel in Syangboche was a pioneer. Developed by the Japanese trekker Takashi Miyahara, the hotel opened in 1971. It probably re-

mains the most well-known and busiest mountain hotel in Nepal, and a popular stop for anyone trekking the Everest route. The views in many ways remains unmatched, and it has a rich legacy in the Himalayas.

Across the Khumbu valley from Everest View is a newer addition: Yeti Mountain Home – Kongde.

YMH Kongde opened in March 2005. It sits on an edge of the Kongde mountain at 4,250 meters above sea level. It is also recognized as the highest altitude lodging in the world, and was listed as the Hottest Destinations of 2013 by Travel and Leisure magazine. From YMH Kongde one can see Namche Bazaar across the valley. It is from Namche one goes north-east to go towards Syangboche and Everest, and north-west to go towards Thame. From there, the resort connects to Kongde. The rugged “connection” between Thame and Kongde are as much a part of the experience as the services and quality of the Yeti Mountain Homes themselves.

The trails around the Everest area, particularly from Lukla to Namche, and then east towards Syangboche, have villages and a constant flow of people, locals and tourists alike. Even the trail that leads westward to Thame is not much different. What makes the route from Thame to Kongde exceptional is that you do not come across villages, and you seldom meet anyone else unless they too are headed to the resort.

In other words, the Kongde trail that is mountain wild, and quite tricky at times, offers those who are on it the kind of solitude that is impossible to find in the traditional Lukla–Everest routes. Solitude advised with a caveat: walking it alone is not advised.

After visiting Kongde several times by helicopter between 2012 and 2013, I walked to Kongde from Thame again in 2014. The trail itself is only open from April to December. This time, the October weather was as perfect as one expects it to



be. It was in this clarity that one witnessed the truly stunning landscape the hike takes you through: from rich canopy of alpine trees, to mountain canyons of boulders and slates, endless heart pounding and vertigo inducing cliffs, and infinite breathtaking expanses. There is also something immensely joyful about crossing streams thousands of feet up in the Himalayas, and soaking up the sun next to a mountain lagoon before making yet another steep ascent, on a hike instead of what one imagines trekking to be like. And the scary climb with a 1,500 meter fall, despite being tricky, actually offered beautiful views. It had taken me 6.5 hours of fast paced marching through the snowstorm in 2011 to reach Kongde from Thame. In 2014, with clearer weather and a leisurely pace, it took an hour more.

There is an easier way to get to Kongde too: an approximately two minute helicopter trip from Lukla! It’s a short ride, but a gorgeous one nevertheless. An extended version, which includes a helicopter ride from Kathmandu and a mountain tour of about 15–20 minutes before landing at Kongde, is simply exceptional. For guests who are pressed for time, but not for cash, it is actually a great option. In fact, the resort has even hosted large-scale events for guests who fly in for breakfast, spend about an hour, and fly back down. In my last visit there, in autumn

2015, the resort itself was under post-quake renovation. But it was still hosting guests for Everest for Breakfast in its outdoor patio.

Inside, the common lounge is kept warm by an efficient wood stove, as staff readily serve unlimited warm beverages in between full three-course meals. Outside, an obstructed and unique view of the Himalayas: mount Khumbila in the foreground with Namche in its lap, and Everest in the background, with Ama Dablan in the mid-right.

Logistics of managing and operating a full service resort in a location like this is not easy. The resort has built a small greenhouse that produces quite a lot of vegetables. Otherwise, it often relies on chartering helicopter for all supplies delivery from Lukla, or makes the most of it when guests arrive in one. The property is powered by a mix of on-site solar power system and petrol generator, as there is no power grid there. And the trails leading to Kongde from both Phakding and Thame are closed from December to April due to snow.

After the April 2015 quake severely damaged most of the building’s walls and other parts, Yeti Mountain Home had no option but rebuild. It reopened this month, ready to pick up where it left off and give the guests a truly memorable world-class mountain experience, with their head in the clouds, up in the Himalayas.

Kashish Das Shrestha is a writer and photographer. He Tweets and Instagrams at @Kashishds





## AIRPORT HOTEL

Located at the heart of the valley, Airport Hotel stands tall and proud, mesmerizing each and every passing onlooker with its stunning infrastructure. With world heritage Pashupatinath Temple and the international airport at a walking distance, the hotel caters to the hospitality needs of international travellers who visit Nepal primarily for business, holiday, cultural and religious activities. State of the art rooms with full modern amenities, well equipped gym and fitness club and two multi cuisine restaurants- Atrium Café and Cloud Zero Revolving Restaurant take the hotel to another level.



## CLOUD ZERO

The first of its kind in Nepal, Cloud Zero is a fine dining revolving restaurant with 360 degrees revolving views of the Himalayas, the international airport, golf course and the city sky line. The two storeyed Cloud zero restaurant consists of the splendid revolving restaurant and the roof top terrace garden perched majestically on top of the Airport Hotel. With award winning fusion of multi cuisines like Nepali, Continental, Italian and Mexican, and well stocked state of the art bar, Clouds zero offers about 50 seats at the revolving level and 100 seats at the roof top garden.



50 years ago, constructing the highest hotel in the world, where there were no roads, let alone construction vehicles, was a daunting prospect to say the least. Even the thought of it was brave. Takashi Miyahara first laid eyes on the magnificent Everest range from a ridge in Syangboche, in the spring of 1968. His heart was caged by Himalayan allure, and he dared to dream.

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# The Himalayan Inspiration

People

SHIRISH KHATRI



Down : Takashi Miyahara as he rests on the trail to Everest.

Inspiration comes in many forms, and many magnitudes. What occurrence it inspires is the bigger deal. Nepal, abundant in natural beauty, can inspire anyone who lay eyes on it. But, many bypass the beauty, let alone bother to help it be noticed by others, that is a far-fetched concept. However, back in the day, amongst the few who were set on helping Nepal's beauty be truly admired was Mr. Takashi Miyahara. Inspired and set on bringing change to the Nepali hospitality business, his legacy has come a long way.

Born in Japan's Nagano Prefecture in March 1934, Mr. Miyahara graduated in chemical and mechanical engineering. Having taken part in Japanese expeditions in the Antarctic, and having led one to Greenland, in 1962, he came to Nepal and scaled Mt. Dhukul Himal (6,900 m). His first visit to Nepal, however, struck a chord with him, and on his second time back in Nepal, he started working for the Department of Cottage Industries here on a two-year contract. He recalls a conversation he had during that time with a friend in Pokhara. Hideo Ichiriki, an employee at Asahi Shimbun, who was visiting Nepal at the time.

Ichiriki remarked, "Miyahara, Nepal is great for tourism, isn't

it?" That ignited something in him, and during his slack time, he used to create tourism plans for Nepal. He then came to the conclusion that tourism, rather than manufacturing goods, was going to be the real champion of Nepali economy. Continuing on that belief, he established Trans Himalayan Tours Pvt. Ltd. and Everest View Hotel.

On February 1968, he received a telegram in Kathmandu from a friend that read, "We're just about dead. Send a helicopter to Lukla. Sakamoto. From Namche". Conditions could get tough for people who weren't used to such terrain; Mr. Miyahara was keen to travel to Lukla to help out because of this and another reason, concerning a friend who had intentions to

build a lodge on the upper Lukla and wanted him to investigate the area. He then promptly made his way to Lukla, where he met Sakamoto, joyous to be saved, unexpected emotions for someone who was close to death. It was maybe the mesmerizing effect the mountains had on anyone visiting, and how forgiving it turned out to be, despite the fact it could easily have been otherwise. This trip to Khumbu served as the impetus for the construction of Everest View Hotel, and Mr. Miyahara's journey as an hotelier.

Concepts of hotels and lodges in the high Himalayan regions were alien. Prior to what was to become the Hotel Everest View, hotels in Nepal could be counted on the fingers. Fifty years ago, constructing the highest hotel in the world, where there were no roads, let alone construction vehicles, was a daunting prospect, to say the least. Even the thought of it was brave. Takashi Miyahara first laid eyes on the magnificent Everest range from a ridge in Syangboche, in the spring of 1968. His heart was caged by Himalayan allure, and he dared to dream. Building a hotel at 3,880 m even today is no task for the spineless. Materials, were imported from Japan, shipped to Calcutta, and then transported by helicopter or porters carrying the items on a two-week trek of 80 km from Lamusangu. Mr. Miyahara even constructed an air strip in Syangboche, to further make the beauty of the Himalayas



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accessible to seeking eyes. Finally, the project was complete, and Hotel Everest View came to life.

This was followed by his next project, Hotel Himalaya in Kathmandu. From the time he built Hotel Everest View, Mr. Miyahara realized that a base of operations was required in Kathmandu itself, the nation's front door. The outburst of international tourists in the 70s meant that, a hotel in Kathmandu was a smart choice. Mr. Miyahara, however, needed help for completion of such a large scale project in the capital. After much persuasion, Hajime Tsuboi, the president of Mitsui Fudosan real estate developers, made his way to Nepal, and on a lightweight Pilatus Porter, he was given a trip around the Himalayas, Annapurna, and Pokhara. No human being on earth would have failed to be astounded at the beauty of those glistering peaks, and the plans were soon underway. Hotel Himalaya even today is a staple name on the list of hotels in the valley.

When I asked him, "What kind of

character does a hotelier require?" he sternly replied, "There is no such thing as a character requirement." He told me about the many Himalayan lodges run by Sherpa people, who run such places without any training in particular, and even so, visitors love the hospitality those places provide. He believes that once a person has a will, he can do anything. True in his case, it was completely unexpected, that a chemical and mechanical engineer from Japan would go on to become one of the most influential figures in the Nepali hotel industry. He's a firm believer in action, and how it outweighs words. He believes that what one desires on doing, one should start working on it immediately.

When asked about his current thoughts about Nepali hotels, he let us know that it has come a long, long, way. One of the original leaders of the industry back in the day, Mr. Miyahara believes the true reason his hotels are successful is the presence of sincerity. For the future development of hotels, he believes maintaining this said sincerity, and putting emphasis on

service, regardless of the scale or the resources a hotel possesses, is an important factor. A hotel, he believes, has to take up the prime responsibility of keeping the guests happy with extreme solemnity. Still mesmerized by Nepal's natural beauty, Mr. Miyahara also hopes that fresher locations will be home to new hotels and lodges, as Nepal's beauty is truly beauty begging to be admired.

Now 82 years old, he lives in Nepal as a Nepali with his long-time partner Gyanu and daughter Sonia. His latest project is Hotel Annapurna View. An idea pending for 40 years, but already alive in pictures and graphs for a long time, Mr. Miyahara is now finally living his dreams to build a hotel in Pokhara. With him now to help is his daughter, Sonia. Growing up around her father's legacy, she's witnessed his hardships, and endeavors in the flesh. Growing up, she knew all about her father's achievements, which has inspired her. Such a bold legacy, needs a tough scion, and she is definitely up for it!

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# Radisson: People The Ebb and Flow

Standing tall and proud, it is rated as one of the best hotels in Nepal today. The initial years were, however, fraught with difficulties.

ICHCHHA PRADHAN

As you enter through the gates of Radisson Hotel, a certain magnificence and grandeur engulfs you that makes you aware of the atmosphere of a leading world-class luxury hotel. Rated as “Best Spa Hotel in Nepal” through guest reviews, Radisson is home to Tranquility Spa, a rooftop swimming pool, and a whirlpool tub, which provides you ultimate relaxation during your Nepali adventures. You can ride the convenient airport shuttle, complete work in the on-site business center, and stay fit with the well-equipped fitness center. You won’t have to leave the hotel for an unforgettable dining experience either, thanks to the range of international fusion cuisines available at its restaurants. Ergo, in almost two decades of its establishment, Radisson has carved a niche for itself as one of the finest hotels in the country. But, like any journey to success, its road to glory hasn’t been a piece of cake either.

“We started off in the year 1998. As we all know, it wasn’t the best time due to the Maoist conflict and insurgency. The number of tourist arrivals went as low as 150,000 a year. But in every business, the risk is always there. So there is no way to guarantee that the investment is 100 percent safe. If you look at our business 10 years ago, it was not doing well at all. The business was unsatisfactory, regardless of our efforts. Hence, despite facing some difficulties during the inception, we travelled our way through,” shares Mr. B.K Shrestha, the founding owner of Radisson Hotel.

Mr. B.K Shrestha, Managing Director of Oriental Hotels Ltd. that operates Radisson Hotel in Kathmandu, has been in the tourism industry for more than four decades. Also having served as Vice Chairman of Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and President of Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN), the umbrella body of hotel operators in Nepal, he is a veteran at hotel management. No wonder Radisson Hotel has achieved its pinnacle under his supervision.

“We had only 160 rooms when we established, and fewer food outlets and services. But as a part of the leading chain of luxurious Radisson hotels, we did provide plush accommodation to meet the upscale international benchmark for five-star standards since the very begin-

ning,” he informs. In 2013, a hundred rooms were added to the palatial property, making it 260 rooms in total. Food outlets such as the Olive Garden, Lobby Bar, and The Terrace Garden were included, among other dining services, to create an enriching experience for foodies as well as the hotel guests.

Yet, Radisson, along with other hotels in the valley, suffered a major setback in 2015 due to operational difficulties caused by the earthquake, which was immediately followed by massive fuel crisis. Sixty-year-old Shrestha said it had become a daily routine for him, as HAN President, to meet government authorities in a bid to solve the problems of hoteliers. He recalls, “We’ve never had to face such a dire situation before. Hotels were failing to meet the standards of star hotels due to lack of diesel to run generators. Even we, as a five-star hotel, were having difficulties providing the rudimentary like air-conditioning facilities to guests.”

He regards Nepal’s political instability as the biggest factor on which his hotel, and in general, tourism’s business, depends on. He informs that, in the recent years, political situation is relatively better, and that is the reason behind the increased number of tourists to Nepal, which in turn has helped Radisson’s business prosper, as well. “Our plans depend on the performance of the tourism industry. If the industry situation gets better, we will have further plans of expanding our property. We are thinking of setting up Radisson’s branch hotels in Pokhara and Lumbini. But the plan is still nascent, and all depends on Nepal’s tourism scenario,” he reveals.

Today, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu is synonymous with outstanding levels of service and comfort delivered with utmost style. “Radisson is the result of good strategy, marketing, and teamwork. We were also regarded worthy of the “Best Service Award” presented by the international Radisson headquarters. At present, we deliver even more to make sure we maintain our prestigious position at the forefront of the hospitality industry now and in the future,” he declares. In the hands of Mr. B.K Shrestha, one of the country’s most prominent hoteliers, it is assured that Radisson Hotel Kathmandu will reach sky-high stature in the years to come.





# REMEMBERING VISITORS TO Feature TIGER MOUNTAIN

Every time I visit the hills or jungles of Nepal, I wonder why do we sell ourselves so cheaply today, when we have such peerless tourism attractions?

 LISA CHOEGYAL

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge is built of stone from the local quarry and commands unrivalled views of Machhapuchhare and the Annapurnas.

Photo: Tiger Mountain



**W**hat is it about Nepal that attracted pioneers, poets, princes, and pop stars since the doors were first opened to the world in the early 1950s? Was it the legends of Shangrila, the abode of the gods, or the inspiration of the mountain sages? Or is it more mundanely the same magic that enraptures all of us—the sheer beauty of the landscape, the rare warmth of the people, the living religions and vibrant cultural heritage, and the incredible contrasts to be found here.

Whatever the reason, the reality is that Nepal's reputation used to attract a galaxy of world celebrities and superstars; this was before the insurgency, political upheavals, and natural disasters that have constrained destination marketing, discouraged high-end visitors, and changed the country's tourism patterns.

Marking the Golden Jubilee of the Hotel Association of Nepal, perhaps this is an opportune moment to reflect on re-establishing Nepal as a fashionable and desirable destination that will appeal to the higher-paying end of the visitor spectrum. Every time I visit the hills or jungles of Nepal, I wonder why do we sell ourselves so cheaply today, when we have such peerless tourism attractions? Nepal is blessed with matchless mountains, nature, wildlife, culture, adventure, and historic monuments, many of global significance and protected as World Heritage Sites.

I was lucky to have worked for over 25 years since the 1970s with the legendary adventure travel pioneers Jim Edwards, who founded Tiger Mountain, and Col Jimmy Roberts, who first introduced trekking in the Himalaya. In charge of marketing, public relations, and quality control for the group

of companies, I traveled the world to help position Nepal's "nature culture adventure" reputation in order to promote trekking with Mountain Travel, wildlife viewing with Tiger Tops in Chitwan and Bardia, and other specialist adventure activities such as river running, mountaineering, and fishing.

Back home in Nepal, we concentrated on providing highly trained mountain guides, expert naturalists, and personal interpreters to our guests so as to showcase the best of what this amazing country could offer. Even by today's measures, the camps and lodges commanded high room rates for quality service standards. The stylish accommodation blended with the environment, using simple natural materials and local handicrafts, but offering essential comforts, unique experiences, and personally guided activities to visitors.

I was first based in Chitwan National Park and loved the excitement of exploring the jungle on elephant back deep in tiger country. One day, returning on foot from greeting guests at Meghauli airfield, I was charged by an irate rhino protecting her calf, and only saved by a tourist-laden Roop Kali and her smart elephant driver, Sultana. Despite being a perilously close encounter, the delighted visitors thought it was all part of the Tiger Tops experience, and I was hooked on the wild thrill of jungle life.

Over the years and at its height in the 1980s, Tiger Mountain tourism operations stretched into India, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, Iceland, and even Russia's Far East. In 1998, Sir Edmund Hillary opened the award-winning Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, clusters of stone bungalows with an iconic swimming pool reflecting the white peaks of Annapurna, an eco-lodge operation that is still setting responsible tourism standards today.



With tourism activities mostly taking place in Nepal's protected areas, a philanthropic, environmental protection ethos underpinned Tiger Mountain, including the support of wildlife research, rhino and tiger conservation, environmental awareness, and local community development. It was only much later that the term "ecotourism" became so widely adopted. Nepal was truly an early pioneer, recognized as setting Asian standards for responsible, sustainable ecotourism.

In addition to general interest tours, specialist museum and zoo groups such as from the Audubon Society, Zoological Society of London, and Frankfurt Zoo, amongst others, helped establish Nepal's international wildlife credibility. The Smithsonian Institution's long-term tiger monitoring project used local trackers and pioneered the early camera traps, led by renowned tiger-ecologist Chuck McDougal. Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands visited as WWF president, and Sir Peter Scott "launched" the first gharial crocodile into the Narayani River,

reared by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation to secure this endangered species—the first batch of gharial eggs was hatched in my bedroom!

In those former days of the Shah monarchy, we would often be involved in hosting royalty, world leaders, and celebrities. After King Mahendra's state visit to the UK, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip came to Nepal in 1961, causing Meghauli airstrip to be carved out of the (then) thick terai jungle for one of the last royal tiger hunts. Although tigers were shot, Prince Philip's diplomatically bandaged hand prevented him taking part, thereby avoiding international controversy. The royals return visit in 1986 cemented the strong Nepal Britain relationship. The 200 years bicentennial of these ties, formalised with the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816, was celebrated this year with a series of events, including the visit of Prince Harry in March 2016. He sent a strong and much-appreciated message of confidence for post-earthquake tourism.



King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya with Jim Edwards at Tiger Tops in 1988. Photo: Lisa Choegyol



The Duke of Edinburgh visiting Chitwan accompanied by Prince Gyanendra and Jim Edwards in 1986. Photo: Lisa Choegyol

**During the 1980s, the word was out that Nepal was the place to relax and enjoy that rare commodity of undisturbed peace and privacy.**

Mountain Travel arranged both trekking holidays in Nepal for Prince Harry's father Prince Charles the Prince of Wales in 1980 and 1992. The first was hosted by Prince Dhirendra, and their route became popular as the Royal Trek. My task was to manage the press; elaborate planning, a secret code-named trekking route, and army helicopters ensured that the media never caught up with Prince Charles, leaving him to his watercolour painting and contemplation of life beneath the Annapurna peaks. Princess Anne the Princess Royal relaxed wildlife viewing in Chitwan, and stayed at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge during a couple of rigorous working visits on behalf of Save the Children, of which she was president.

Many celebrity visitors became old friends of Nepal and returned year after year. The great Burra Sahib, Sir Edmund Hillary, was not only an international icon of achievement, but also a friend, loved and revered by the Sherpas he spent most of his life helping through the Himalayan Trust. Mount Sagarmatha had shaped his life, since first reaching the summit on May 29, 1953, with Tenzing Norgay.

As might be expected amidst the world's highest mountains, many of the pioneers were climbers, magnetised by the Himalayan peaks. Maurice Herzog, the distinguished French alpinist, lost several fingers when he scaled Annapurna I in 1950, the first 8,000 m peak ever to be climbed. Reinhold Messner, the Italian

mountaineering hero, was the first person to climb all the world's 8,000 m peaks in 1986, and still returns often with friends and family.

Stories of hunts for the Yeti, the Abominable Snowman, periodically hit international headlines. Despite several expeditions and much research, findings remain inconclusive. British writer Bruce Chatwin was a frequent visitor, memorably recording his yeti experience in his posthumous *What Am I Doing Here*. Agatha Christie, Freya Stark, and Françoise Sagan were early visitors, and last year saw JK Rowling of Harry Potter fame. Han Suyin engraved a place in the history of the Valley with her classic romantic novel, *The Mountain is Young*. The life of Boris Lissanevitch, the legendary Russian who first introduced tourism at his Royal Hotel in Kathmandu in 1951, is immortalised in *Tiger for Breakfast*.

During the 1980s, the word was out that Nepal was the place to relax and enjoy that rare commodity of undisturbed peace and privacy. Robert Redford, Richard Chamberlain, Maggie Smith, James Coburn, and Joan Rivers have all paid a visit, and superstar Diana Ross trekked in the Khumbu in 1986. Goldie Hawn and Kurt Russell liked it so much that they came back twice. Henry Kissinger visited Chitwan in 1986, but declined the elephant ride due to his phobia of heights, and ex-President Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn spent several days in Chitwan after their trek to Everest Base Camp. John J. Kennedy Jr. hung

Left to right: A youthful Hillary Clinton, then US First Lady, visits Chitwan in 1994 accompanied by Jim Edwards, Chairman of the Tiger Mountain group. Photo by Lisa Choegya

Toni Hagen, Jim Edwards and Sir Edmund Hillary at the opening of Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge 1998 Photo: Lisa Choegya





Superstar actor Orlando Bloom enjoys an elephant safari in search of wildlife with Timothy Edwards as part of a visit to Nepal for UNICEF in 2008 Photo: UNICEF

out in during his gap year, but had trouble cashing his mother's travelers cheque, which was signed both Jackie Kennedy and Jackie Onassis. Rolling Stone Mick Jagger came with Jerry Hall and their children in 1990. Hillary Clinton stopped by with her press corps for a break during her 1995 South Asia tour, during which I introduced her to Sir Edmund Hillary, allegedly her namesake, though she was born six years after he climbed Everest!

More recently, celebrities have come for work rather than play. Orlando Bloom and David Beckham both visited Nepal as UNICEF goodwill ambassadors, and WWF brought Cameron Diaz and Eva Mendes to raise awareness of climate change issues. In early 2010, Leonardo DiCaprio visited Bardia with WWF in a successful bid to solicit his support for tiger conservation.

Foreign filmmakers have long loved Nepal for its stunning scenery, and not only the many successful neighboring Indian and Chinese productions. On the global stage, Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci took over Kathmandu Valley in 1992 to shoot Little Buddha, starring Keanu Reeves, and using a production team who had no less than 13 Oscar awards amongst them. Eddie Murphy never actually came to Nepal for The Golden Child, but we supplied props for Vertical Limit, Kundun, and Seven Years in Tibet. Last year, Hollywood's Everest provided a widely screened boost to mountaineer-

ing tourism in Nepal, as well as employment during the shoot for many Nepalis. The Australian-directed Sherpa and New Zealand television mini-series Hillary will also help raise awareness of the beauty of the Nepal Himalaya.

But perhaps the most significant impact in terms of movies that create awareness of Nepal is likely to come from the latest Disney Marvel superhero Doctor Strange starring British heartthrob Benedict Cumberbatch and set largely in Kathmandu that will be released this month (November 2016) to an international audience of literally hundreds of millions. What an incredible global tourism opportunity for Nepal!

Attracting higher paying visitors with high profile celebrity visits and widely-screened movies will help the tourism industry not only boost visitor numbers, but also redress the balance with Nepal's current predominance of low-budget short-staying groups. We wish HAN all the very best for their next 50 years of Nepal tourism, and let us all pull together to improve tourism in Nepal.

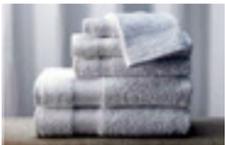
*British-born Lisa Choegyal has made Nepal her home since the mid-1970s, working for most of that time in tourism and conservation. Her most recent book, Nepal Himalaya: A Journey Through Time (Vajra Books), was published last month. Lisa is Director of Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, and since 2010 is New Zealand Honorary Consul to Nepal.*



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PHARMACY



'Madam you want to see Nepal? Come, I will show you. I can take you to Swoyambhu, the big monkey temple. Come Madam. You sit, and I will take you. Beautiful Nepal Madam! Beautiful Nepal!' says one of the rickshawals in front of Kathmandu Guest House as he whirls around with his rickshaw, searching for his next visitor.

Ajun Singh silently perches himself on his rickshaw, looking to and fro at the lives passing by him. He smiles at a foreigner, and lightly gestures to take her for a ride. But the guard keeping watch below the board of the Purple Haze tries to whoosh him away. And he peddles before being stopped by a local who wants to take the rickshaw ride. Singh simpers, and says, 'Bahini, this is what I have learnt, to peddle on with my life, so, where do you want to go?' 'Nowhere, actually, just show me your world.'

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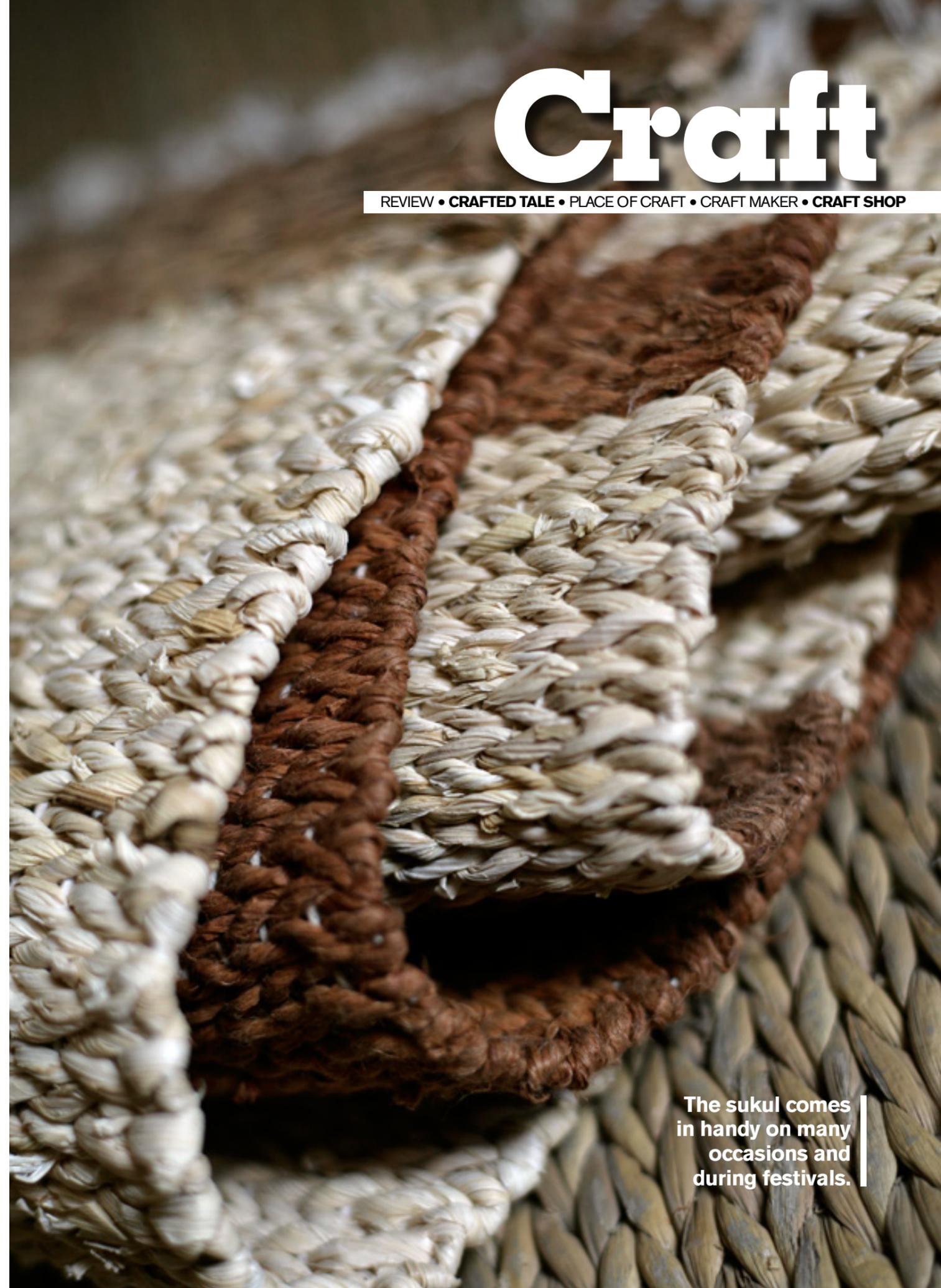
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# Project Sarangi Craft story

## Crafting Locally

The revival of Nepali folk music is an ongoing process, and this goes hand-in-hand with revival of traditional musical instruments like the sarangi.

PRABIN MAHARJAN

**K**iran Nepali needs no introduction in the Nepali music industry. He is one of the key people of the folk band Kutumba, which has set a legacy, there is no doubt about it. In a way, they also provided direction for like-minded young musicians wanting to pursue traditional folk music and instruments of Nepal. Kiran is a soulful musician, reviving and pushing the folk music of Nepal on to a whole new level. He specializes in traditional sarangi, besides other instruments, which is considered to be one of the oldest traditional folk instruments of the country, and Kiran at this time is playing it as systematically and scientifically as it can be done. And, that's where his role with Project Sarangi comes in.

On the basis of how rich the country's priority for music was back in the old ages, I believe music has always been an important part of our culture. And, there must have been some sort of policies and guidelines regarding the preservation and promotion of the same. But traveling further down some generations, fact now is that there aren't any at present. Nepal seems to have been living under past glories, at least it seems so, and so it goes with the music, as well.

From the early days, Mr. Ram Manandhar of Baneshwor is someone whom Kiran has always looked up to when it came to playing the sarangi. Even after Kutumba came to mainstream success, he was the same person who made him the equipment and repaired them. Had the demand of tra-



## There were no proper makers of sarangi, as well as for almost all folk musical instruments, let alone standard industry quality instruments with proper serial numbers.

ditional instruments been high, things would have been different. But, Manandhar stopped doing it anymore, leaving Kiran dazed and confused. He was in real trouble, as he found no one else making the instrument, and his band Kutumba was enjoying huge popularity and demand, which continues to be so. Luckily, one of his relatives, Mr. Dil Bahadur Gandarva, stepped in, telling him that he knew how to craft the sarangi.

By the time he met Dil Gandarva, Kiran was already sure of the lack of some seriously needed basics in the field of traditional folk music. There were no proper makers of sarangi, as well as for almost all folk musical instruments, let alone standard industry quality instruments with proper serial numbers like the instruments that come from abroad. Reminds me of a friend studying the sarod, considered as a powerful instrument of Indian classical music, at the music department of Kathmandu University, telling me about importing his gear from India itself, as nobody makes them here. The irony is that the problem with the production of Nepal's own folk instruments exists presently when more and more musicians are diving towards learning and making music with them. And, the audience has always cherished the craftsmanship and sound of folk musical instruments, which is also the base Kutumba's music.

Almost all of the folk music, along with the knowledge of playing the instruments, have been passed on to the younger generations till this day through hymns in the form of songs, and visual display of the method of playing them on instru-

ments. Sadly, all the music theories and the history of making the hymns have been lost somewhere in the lapse of time. I was left wondering why, when once I was learning the traditional drum dhime in my Newar community in the session run by the musical bhajan group composed of musicians of all ages. I had no idea why something or a pattern had to be played the exact same way. I believe the traditional folk and bhajan music devoted to the gods are musically very rich, takes a lot to master, is amazing, and has standards as well.

But if somebody is to question those standards, well, the answers are absent, as they have always been concealed as tribute to the gods, and I believe nobody knows why. The learners are very probable not to be able to fuse them with other instruments other than those taught; folk music is always taught in groups comprising a number of instruments in Nepal. And this partly unanswered methodology of teaching mechanism is what is causing mismatch with the universal law of music, which is to fuse any instruments; after all, the sound is composed of the same notes.

Kiran, with the establishment of his own small scale company, Project Sarangi, at his home itself in Kirtipur is just addressing these issues, which undoubtedly is vital if as we think the folk instruments of the country should be embraced by the youth, and reaching to the rest of the world. With Dil Gandharva as the key person in the production of the sarangi, Project Sarangi has handcrafted about 800 units of sarangi since 2012. And, every unit of sarangi this home-based company produces



is of industry standard. While Kiran has solved problems of his own, he has stepped forward with his team for more demanding challenges in the field of music.

The responsibility of inspiring youth in folk instruments, and providing them with standard music education, is actually huge. Through his involvement with Kutumba, Kiran has definitely inspired a lot till now, but given the complication with finding the proper instruments and proper formal education, it's still a major problem that the youth easily move towards other popular instruments like guitars and drums.

This is why they came up with event like Jamarako, Euta Sano Prayas, explains Kiran. This event, which proved to be a platform for showcasing the skills of young musicians working with folk musical instruments, also became an opportunity for those who love the sounds of these instruments to have a good time. Around 25 musicians and groups performed, from original compositions to fusion with Western sounds, during the event that took place during the festive time of Dashain. The success and visibility of the impact the event made was greater than the team had expected, as this was the very first event done by Project Sarangi. The team will be carrying this event every year now.

Discussions with Kiran revealed lots of plans, and with them, a very promising future for the company, as well as for the music industry itself. For the popularity of the sarangi, Kiran will be

playing in various shows, and doing workshops time and again at different schools with his other band, Sarangi Trio. The role Kiran does with Kutumba while touring all around the globe has always been there. Stepping ahead, Project Sarangi will also be stepping in producing other folk musical instruments such as tungna in the near future.

The team is looking forward to sell their produced units through various music stores inside the country, and soon internationally, as well. They are already working on coming out with standard music teaching procedure for folk musical instruments, the success of which can hardly be argued about, as the country has already witnessed what Kiran with Kutumba did in the music scene here. And, most assuring of all, the company is also prepared to provide craftsmanship education to those interested in making the sarangi. Not to forget, they also showcased a live demonstration of crafting sarangi out of wood during the event. Jamarako.

Project Sarangi is home-grown, arising out of Kiran's personal goal to have a team capable of bringing a revolution in the Nepali music scene, both musically and commercially. The company is in the early steps, but the synergy created by the team and key players of the music market here can definitely let them represent the country as a big music brand someday soon. And, events like Jamarako will be vital in reviving the popularity of folk music and instruments inside the country.



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Travelogue

# Uncharted trail to Khopra

Going local: trekking off the beaten path with a student group from Europe

AS TOLD TO ALEX BURI

**R**aj Gyawali, a local social and travel entrepreneur from Kathmandu, recently took leave of his day job as director of socialtours to go on an adventure through the Annapurna foothills. Ten days later, he returned full of ideas and excitement around a new route to Poon Hill via Mohare Danda.

**How did this trip come about? Who did you go with?**

There is a school group from Germany and Holland that has come to Nepal every year for the last 11 years. They have partner schools here in Nepal, and during their yearly trips, there is a trekking component and a village stay component in partner villages. As a travel company focusing on offbeat travel, we always recommend treks that spread the money into the local economy, and this trek is one that spreads the money to communities outside the main trekking routes.

Also, these students are special. For the last 11 years, they have been running an award-winning students' company in Germany called Namaste Nepal S-GmbH that has been doing amazing fundraising to boost the schools in Gati VDC of Nepal via its Nepal counterpart Namaste Nepal. Since the earthquake, the commitment has grown to rebuild 11 schools in the VDC, which is progressing now.

Raj Gyawali

**What's unique about the route you took?**

Let's start with the basics: the views are amazing, so that's no different than trekking anywhere else in Nepal. The villages are stunning, the people are hospitable, etc. But, what's unique is that the trekking route has the possibility to book with the local community, thereby ensuring that the money goes directly into the hands of the community. There are community eco-lodges in many of the villages along the way, and where there is not, then the homestays are equally charming.

**What surprised you about this trek?**

Most treks in the Annapurnas have a single highlight, a high point, a sunrise view at Poon Hill, reaching the amphitheater of Annapurna Base Camp, or the highest point where Hinduism has reached at Muktinath. This trek, done at a particular length, has two great highlights: Mohare Danda at 3,300 m, and Khopra Danda at 3,600 m. You can even combine it with a



Raj Gyawali

high-altitude lake highlight at 4,000 m above Khopra Danda. This is amazing.

**What did you learn about the region that you didn't know already?**

I learned that a whole new network of possible trekking routes exist—doable, comfortable, and well-marked—and the Annapurnas need not be run-of-the-mill at all. Options exist, from going offbeat for just three days to over 11 days, that's amazing.

**What was the most memorable aspect of the trek?**

There are so many highlights that it's difficult for me to put into words. Leading students working on inspirational aspects, daily, each day getting the group to learn how different their lives are from the Nepali villages, and yet appreciating this simple life much more than anything: the sunrise at Mohare Danda, the pre-sunrise walk up from Khopra to 4,000m to view sunrise from that level... there are so many highlights.

**Any advice for people looking to explore this region?**

Read about it and learn as much as you can before you set off. When traveling off the beaten path, remember to use the local guides, they make some money, and you will feel fulfilled and happy that your money goes directly into the hands of the community. Remember also to book your stay well in advance; these are not mass trails, so accommodation is not always guaranteed. Hence, booking with an agency that knows what they are doing and has the right community connections is important.

The rest? Travel with the right attitude, and you will discover new sides of Nepal, and of yourself!

**Author bio:**

Raj Gyawali started socialtours back in 2002 as a way to promote socially responsible tourism in Nepal, and is a local partner for kimkim, a travel company from the U.S. that specializes in planning custom travel experiences in Nepal. When he's not thinking of new ideas and places to go, you'll find him mountain biking on the trails around Kathmandu or enjoying a coffee

Alex Buri



# NEPAL TOURISM FACTS, 2015

Get into tourism's real numbers.



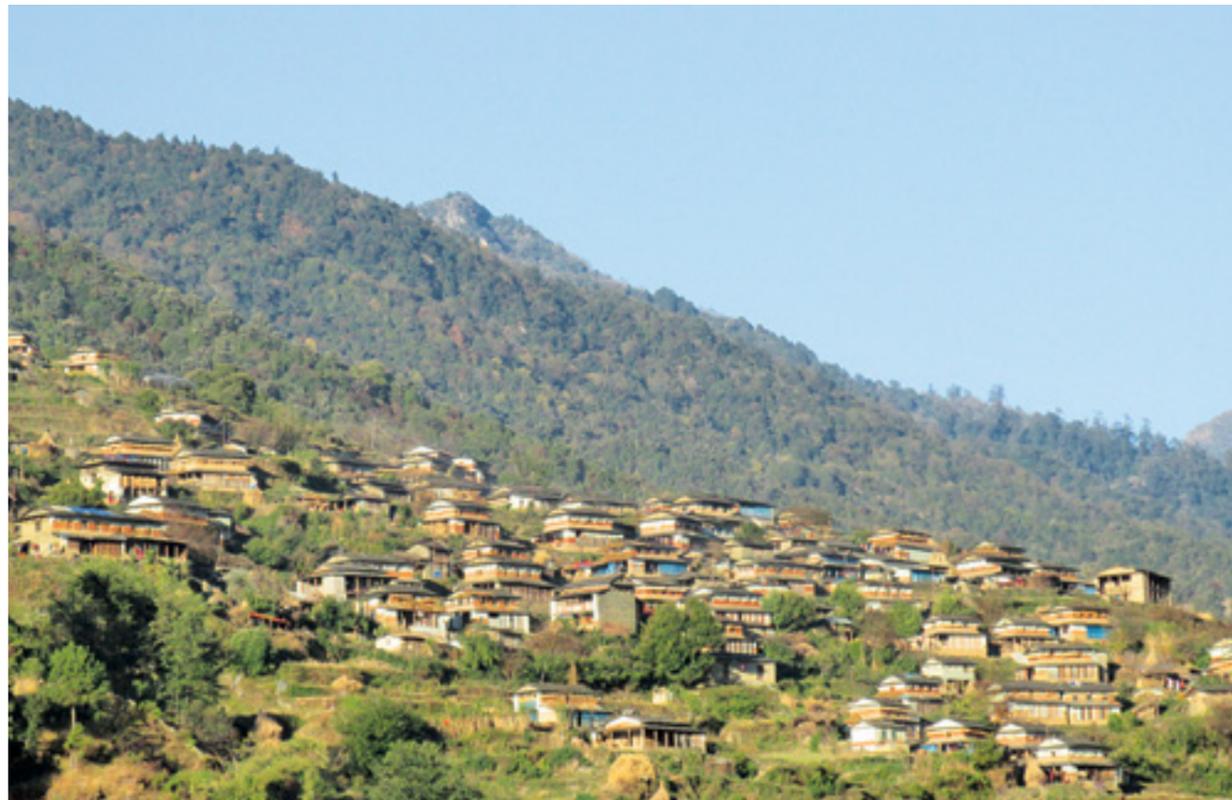
Source: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation

HAN, Nepal the Shangri-la

Myagdi has a lot to offer: stunning topography, rich culture, ancient Newari architecture in Beni, majestic temples, impressive mountain ranges, all sorts of wildlife, and not to forget, red pandas.

# Escape Magical Myagdi

📷 SAROJ SHRESTHA



2016. What a year! Again. I'm so incredibly thankful and humbled by everything that this year brought. Some travels were solo, some with friends. I love getting lost. Yes, Myagdi has a lot to offer: stunning topography, rich culture, ancient Newari architecture (Beni), majestic temples, impressive mountain ranges, all sorts of wildlife, and not to forget, my favorite red panda. *Myagdi* is an enthralling place to visit. I have been tempted to visit this place for so many years, and finally I made it.

Last January, I headed to this majestic land, the district head-

quarters Beni Bazaar is 290 km from Kathmandu, and 80 km from Pokhara. It is the gateway to Mustang, also the famous Annapurna circuit trek route with the highest and biggest Tilicho Lake (4,919 m) and the world's second highest pass, Thorang La (5,416 m). Beni Bazaar is located at the confluence of the Kali Gandaki and Myagdi Rivers. It is mainly divided into two parts by the Kali Gandaki.

As soon as we arrived at Beni, we saw that the streets were lined with people, I mean lots of people, occupied with daily chores. Life isn't perfect. But it's pretty

damn good. Next day, we headed for a village named Muna, which comprises of the indigenous Magar community. Most of the houses are synchronized in some kind of striking pattern.

### Muna Village

From here, we drifted to Gurja village, one of the remote villages of Myagdi. It is an 8-9 hour walk from the nearest human civilization. We started our journey after having a cracking brunch.

As we were getting closer and closer to this village, we were welcomed by snow-capped Gurja Himal at stone's throw distance. As

we were approaching this himal, I remembered the famous quote by Hermann Buhl, "*Mountains have a way of dealing with overconfidence.*" The Gurja village is around 2,800 m above sea level. As we were getting closer and closer to the village, it started getting dark, and we had just arrived at my first-ever homestay. Homestay here is generally much less expensive than hotels. And, more personable.

### Gurja Himal

During our stay in the homestay, we were served scrumptious Nepali food. Due to extensive use of herbs and rich organic flavor, this cuisine possesses a unique and relaxing taste.

### Nepali food

Traveling in the Himalayas allows you to meet the local people, to discover life in the

villages, and to explore a whole different way of living.

Another exceptionally interesting stop in our journey was Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve. This reserve spreads across scores of districts, but we trekked up to Jaljala, bordering Myagdi and Baglung districts. During our journey to Jaljala, we encountered different kinds of wildlife, including some eye-catching bugs.

### Colorful bug

This place, Jaljala, is so immeasurably expansive that it can literally land a Boeing 777. Jaljala lies at 3,400 m above sea level with faint layer of air to breath.

### Typical morning at Jaljala

In Jaljala, you often see yaks in your backyard, literally backyard I mean, how often do you see fat yaks breathing thin air?



### Fat yak breathing thin air

The people here are warm, friendly, and extremely welcoming. This is truly a fulfilling experience. I was mesmerized by the simplicity of life in the village. Eat. Walk. Enjoy. Repeat. Life gets really simple in the mountains. Happiness,

too. A baked potato. Folk music. That's all you want to be happy in the Himalayas. Simple.

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# Adventure

GEARS • EXPERIENCE • PLACE • HOW TO



The rare and endangered one horned rhinos cooling down in a river near Kasara Resort, Chitwan.

KISHOR KAYASTHA

As our motorbike sluggishly pulled us through the dust-clouded road stretching from Mugling to Chitwan, I wondered several times if the journey was worth it. On reaching the destination, and even before that, the answer was—I would go through it all again in a heartbeat.

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# A Villa Experience in the Jungle

AKRITI SHILPAKAR

PRAJWAL MAHARJAN





**T**he broken-down road Mugling onwards is not easy at all, whether you are traveling via bus, private car, or like me, on a motorbike. The road is awful terrible, and so, it is possible that you will forget to admire the aqua-green river that follows almost all the way through, the free-falling waterfalls that are visible once in a while, and the mighty hills that in the beginning seem to be narrowing in, but eventually completely disappear. In the continuous but frivolous attempt to save my already dust covered self from the whirlpool of incoming dust, it took me a while to realize that the hills had transformed into flat lands. But the moment of realization was surreal. I was in the terai, and it was more than I had ever hoped it to be.

Chitwan welcomed me with thick forests on either side of the road, acres and acres of flatlands covered in emerald and neon green paddy fields, punctuated by farms of banana plants and a few houses. The picturesque town of Bharatpur is landscaped with two-storeyed homes with charming little front lawns, and clean, paved streets. To go from a congested traffic-filled

Kathmandu, then a dusty highway, to a serene, peaceful town was already turning into an ideal vacation. It was nostalgic to see the Bikram tempo, which has, for a decade now, been banned in Kathmandu, sputtering up and down the streets. A few scenes of the city seemed to have popped right out of the textbooks. And, when I was still soaking up the beauty that is terai, we had already reached our destination: Jungle Villa Resort.

Situated on the northern bank of the great Rapti River, Jungle Villa Resort is a balanced amalgam of nature and aesthetics. The resort blends into its surrounding, which is easing to the eye, and pleasing to the soul. Every brick, every stone, and every plant in the resort is in sync with nature, and doesn't feel out of place. Most of the resort's landscape is dedicated to trees and grassland. What is remaining has been carefully carved in to make super luxurious residential rooms that complement the overall setting of the resort. The resort has of 30 guest rooms, a restaurant, reception lobby, a canopy-inspired hall, and a tasteful bar. The residential spaces have been given a traditional mud-house like outlook that have

been inspired by Tharu culture. The interior and exterior walls are decorated with colorful handprints. To add the spirit of Chitwan and its jungles to the rooms, each room has been named after an animal. Our room was called Linsang.

The rooms are tastefully decorated, with a rustic feel. Although minimalist, each room has all required amenities in place. The attached bathroom is spacious and efficiently designed to be comfortable. The designer has to be applauded for the use of recycled wood to create a gorgeous mirror frame; the traditional slates instead of tile, and locally produced straw blinds. It is the seamless concoction of aesthetic pleasure and traditional values that strums a chord with you. It is the same concoction that is repeatedly visible and felt during the entire stay at the resort.

While the resort offers a 2-day, 3-night package with several activities lined within it, you can choose to have a custom-designed package depending on the length of your stay. The evening event at the resort is alternated with either an informative slide-show presentation on Chitwan, or an entertaining traditional musical performance by the locals.





Dunga BAR

Junga  
ESTABLISHED 1988



**Tips:**

The best time of the year for wildlife sighting is February–March. Visit nearby villages or the town for an exclusive travel account. Request for a short walk inside the Chitwan National Park, if you dare. Bathe Villa or Jungle Kalli in the Rapti River. No sleep is worth missing a rhino sighting within the resort, so get up when you get the information. Things you can hear only in Chitwan: “The rhinos destroyed the crops again last night!”

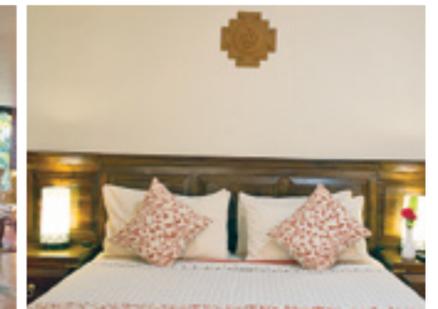
**One of the main reasons people visit Chitwan is to explore the wild. Next time you visit this region, do it for its people; for their warm culture, caring values, and welcoming spirit.**

The musical event involves Tharu cultural dance performance, which ends with a body grooving dancing on the beat of “Chari Gudaima...” The song may be repeated every night, but it never gets old, and you will find yourself dancing to it again and again.

A tour to the neighboring Tharu village opens you to their rich history, culture, and values. Channu dai, who is a licensed naturalist at the resort, is the guide for the village tour and every activity on offer at the resort. The resort owns two elephants: Villa Kalli and Jungle Kalli. An elephant safari to the jungle on one of these mighty animals will offer you an uninterrupted viewing of the natural habitat of wild animals. However, a stupendous sighting of the magnificent tiger is very rare. I wish I could say I saw one, but that will be lying. But I did see rhinos, and not just once, but on six occasions. The fact that one of those occasions was at one in the morning on the resort’s premises is anything but a lie. Channu dai, upon our request, accompanied us to a 45-minute

walk to Tamor Lake in Chitwan National Park. The walk itself was exciting, and although we didn’t have any encounters with wild animals, Chhanu dai’s narration of surviving a rhino attack made up for it. We did get to see many and different birds, and not two birds were the same. It was healing to the soul to hear chirping and singing of so many birds instead of the honking of Kathmandu traffic.

One of the main reasons people visit Chitwan is to explore the wild. Next time you visit this region, do it for its people; for their warm culture, caring values, and welcoming spirit. You cannot help but feel a sense of belonging at this place. As for wildlife sightings, just plan a few days’ stay at Jungle Villa Resort. A clear sighting of the one-horned rhino lazily bathing in the Rapti, deer hopping on the other side of the river, and the cold-blooded crocodiles basking in the sun on the little islands is guaranteed, even as you sip on a chilled beer or cool lemonade on the resort’s deck.



**Traditional Comfort**

**T**raditional Comfort, as the name suggests, is a boutique hotel that follows Newari traditions and hospitality in providing the best modern services. It is located at Kamal Pokhari, (the lotus pond) which can be viewed from the beautifully carved wooden windows of the hotel. From the rooms to the hallways you are sure to be overwhelmed by the beautiful arts, statues, and sculptures in the hotel. The hotel has 36 rooms, ranging from standard with one queen-sized bed, to deluxe with

a king-sized bed, for those who prefer having some extra space. A few rooms have enough space to fit an additional third bed, should this be required. The hotel has a spacious lobby furnished in a traditional manner. All bed linen are handmade and hand-printed, using traditional block-printing and fabric painting techniques. Continental breakfasts are served in the dining area adjacent to the lobby. A snack and light meal menu, as well as drinks and cocktails, are available throughout

the day. The hotel is eco-friendly, as all of the LED lights in the hotel are solar-powered. The water heating system is also powered by solar. The hallway has a display of small statues and sculptures of different gods and goddesses. The second-floor lounge is fitted with comfortable couches on which to relax. The rooftop terrace has stunning panoramic views of Kathmandu Valley. Snacks and drinks can be purchased from the rooftop as well. The hotel prides on providing top notch services.

**CONTACT**

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Kamal Pokhari, Kathmandu, Nepal

# Experiences of a lifetime

AS TOLD TO PRAMITA SHRESTHA

Nepal is home to exhilarating adventures that give you a sense of accomplishment, memories of once-in-a-lifetime experience, and fascinating tales to take back home. From rafting on grade 4 rapids to bungee jumping into a deep gorge and extreme mountain biking, these are the adventure experiences of some of Nepal's intrepid heroes.



**Bigyan Raj Sharma (AIGP, Crime Investigation Dept., Nepal Police)**

## Bungee Jumping

On looking at how it really was, I got agitated, but couldn't cringe away as I had bragged enough about doing it the previous night to my sons! I was standing on the edge of the steel bridge, 160 meters high, and all tied up, ready to take the jump. The only thing in my mind was the confident instructor telling, "Fly like a bird, walk like a penguin". It was all very quick: you leave a message for the camera, which I decided not to; wave, then have a countdown one...two... three.... I took the leap at one! (Laughs)

In that fraction of second, I was free-falling against the wind, blue skies above, roaring rapids of the Bhotekoshi River below, surrounded by lush greenery, hung upside down, dumbstruck, swinging! As you are bouncing around, it is exhilarating. I was then collected by people down on the bank of the river with the help of a long bamboo stick. Doing a bungee jump was a great experience, and I am very glad I did it.



**Megh Ale (Founder and President of Nepal River Conservation Trust)**

## Rafting

I started rafting back in 1985, and I still haven't had enough of it, as a consequence of which, I raft at least twice a month. I enjoy river journeys ranging from half-day testers to 2, 3, 4, or even 12-day adventures. Rafting in the white water gives me an adrenaline rush, an urge to go back to the rivers to feel the blood rush through my veins. I enjoy when I pierce inside the water waves and feel the current of water every time I raft.

Rivers are very interactive; they have a world of their own. Several adventures lie in their laps, beneath them, and above them. Rivers fascinate me every single time I set my feet on them, and rafting is what keeps me coming back to these beautiful rivers. Rafting is a challenge I find pleasure in, and I am addicted to it, anyone doing it once, definitely gets addicted to it. It is dangerous when safety precautions are not taken, but what fascinates is that beauty lies in danger, and danger lies in beauty.

**Ajay Pandit Chettri (Winner, Yak Attack Mountain Biking, 2015)**

## Mountain Biking

I have the experience of cycling at the highest and toughest trails of the world, which lie in Nepal. Mountain biking for a competition is not competing with others, but Mother Nature herself. You are exposed to extreme weather conditions and trails that challenge you, which is what electrifies me about it the most. It is not only about your physical presence and stamina, but mental strength as well. I have the most thrilling experience of cycling at an altitude of 5,400 meters, where most people find it difficult to breathe.

At times, you even have to carry your cycle for 2-3 hours in extreme weather up the steep trails. While in a race, I speed up to 70 - 75 kmph, which is dangerous, but the passion I have for cycling pushes me whenever I think of giving up. I see my friends falling, fracturing their hands, and injuring themselves; it has happened to me as well, but that is what lets us be there, living the moment, while cycling.





**A** very famous baha that lies just on the main road from Mangal-bazar to Pulchowk. It is a beautiful three-tiered temple and also a holy Buddhist monastery. You can go around the temple inside the courtyard itself, where you will find a lot of shrines and monuments of different gods. The area where it is located is very business-oriented and a prime location at the moment housing different banks, ATMs, jewelry shops, and fashion houses. This is the area where, historically, people of Patan have mostly visited for buying gold and silver ornaments and jewelries. The locale, as for ornaments, has always been a reputed place for tailoring suits and clothes.

Despite being attached to the main road, the feel of silence and peace is overwhelming and welcoming as soon as one enters the baha. The baha is considered holy, and every day, people come to worship here from all around. And, on several occasions like Machhindranath Jatra, everyone stops here to pay their homage. It is one of the iconic bahas of Patan, which endows huge value to the area, the people here, and probably a bit more to the tourists and travelers. And everyone is allowed to take photographs of the temple and baha, or if you want to stay for a while, there are two resting places called patis just inside the entrance, as well as other sitting areas inside. And, finally, it's just a two minutes' walk away from the Mangal-bazar chowk.

Hint: This baha houses the Kumari of Patan.

# Living Landmark

Where am I?

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Meena Kaini  
Kathmandu, Nepal

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Marcus Cotton, Managing Director  
Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, Nepal

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# The Buzz

MARKET WATCH • EVENTS • NEWS



## Spiny Babbler Spinning Towards Early Creations

"Early Creations", a solo Spiny Babbler art exhibition by a three year old, Vidheha S. Ranjan, was showcased on her birthday, at Nepal Art Council. Vidheha, along with her parents, took the initiative to portray more than 80 original creations of her artwork. The exhibition also featured 22 videos featuring Nepali and English rhymes and songs. A book of her artwork, called "Early Creations", was also published. Spiny Babbler's aim is to change the conventional mindset of parents, and help in expanding children's horizon towards art and other professions also.

## Genxt Launches HTC Phones

Genxt Nepal has launched the desire series of HTC phones. HTC cooperation is a Taiwanese consumer electronic company headquartered in New Taipei city, Taiwan. In the launch Genxt is offering five HTC desire products; the Desire 630 628 626 which are 5" devices and 728 and 830 which are 5.5" devices. The main

striking qualities of these devices are the 13 MP and a 5 MP rear and front camera respectively. The phones are also dual sim phones, with good battery backup. The HTC desire in particular houses a octa-core CPU of 1.5 ghz and android OS v 6.0 with a 3gb internal Ram. It also has a screen resolution of 1080X1920 pixels

401 ppi density, on a super LCD capacitive touchscreen. The product price ranges are from Rs. 22,000 to Rs. 34,000 but for the festive season ranges are going to be from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 50,000 and a free power bank on every purchase. Over the next few months Genxt will launch more exciting products from HTC.

## Inheadlines: Making headlines in Nepal

The number of newsreaders has statistically decreased by a significant number at present; the main reason: lack of time. Ankur Agarwal, collaborating with Brijesh Gupta, came up with the idea of Inheadlines, a startup that crunches news into a crisp 60-words skeleton for busy readers. They worked on building the app for a news portal with a team of editors

that summarizes normal lengthy news to 60-70 characters. The app offers offline features and toggling between Nepali to English, and has had 5,000+ downloads in two months. They intend to inspire Nepali youngsters to invest their skills in their own country and gradually take it globally, like they have planned to.

## Oman Air Wins Twice At World Travel Awards Middle East 2016

Oman Air has been named 'Middle East's Leading Airline, Business Class' and 'Middle East's Leading Airline, Economy Class' at the World Travel Awards Middle East 2016. The awards were presented at a glittering red-carpet ceremony, hosted by Shereen Mitwalli at the St Regis, Dubai on 29th September. They were accepted by Mohammed Al Shikely, Vice President Marketing at Oman Air, on behalf of Chief Executive Officer Paul Gregorowitsch.

"On behalf of all my colleagues at Oman Air, I would like to thank the jury and all those knowledgeable and experienced professionals from the travel and tourism and the consumer travel buyer sectors whose votes have contributed to our success. Most of all, however, I would like to express my gratitude to the millions of guests who have booked and flown with Oman Air over the last year," comments Mr. Gregorowitsch.

## HYATT REGENCY KATHMANDU WINS WORLD TRAVEL AWARD

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu has been recognized by World Travel Awards as Nepal's leading hotel 2016 in a recent event held in Vietnam. The award is a well-earned recognition of providing authentic hospitality to guests. Besides this, the property has also won the same

award in 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2013. The World Travel Awards acknowledge, reward, and celebrate excellence across all sectors of the tourism industry across the globe. The WTA brand is recognized globally as the ultimate hallmark

of quality, with winners setting the benchmark to which all others aspire. The awards are voted for by travel and tourism professionals worldwide, and these accolades recognize the commitment to excellence which Hyatt Regency Kathmandu has demonstrated.

## Contemporary Nepali Basketry Exhibition



Siddharth Art Gallery recently held the opening of the exhibition by Shyam Badan Shrestha, chairperson of the Nepal Knotcraft Center Pvt. Ltd. (NKC) on the Contemporary Nepali Basketry. The event was inaugurated by Sangeeta Thapa, the art curator and director of the Siddhartha Art Gallery. It saw the presence of numerous artists and art lovers such as Gautam Shumshere Jung Bahadur Rana. Dr. David James Molden, Director General, ICIMOD was the chief guest of the event. He congratulated Shyam Badam Shreshtha for her contribution to women entrepreneurship in the country and to the development of the handicrafts in Nepal. The exhibition showcased numerous

baskets made of raw materials such as sisal fiber, bamboo, banana fiber, pine needles, papyrus, moonj, pater and water hyacinth. The exhibition aims to present indigenous skills of ethnic communities of Nepal. The hand weaved baskets are specimens of natural fibers found in Nepal and the incredible skills women artisans of Nepal. Currently, NKC has producer's group in 11 districts, which sell products under the brand name "Weave Nepal" with the motto "Weaving nature into women's livelihood" The 7 day long exhibition will end on October 28th. The gallery hour is 11am to 5pm from Sunday to Friday and 12 pm to 5pm on Saturdays.

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# 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](mailto:ecs@infoclub.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. **PLACEMENT FEE: Rs. 5,000**



## 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.

## 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.

## 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)**

## HOUSE KEEPING & FOOD HANDLING

**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. **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. 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. **VENUE: Maharajgunj FEE: Rs. 15,000**

## VEGETARIAN COOKING COURSE

Participants will be able to cook the following items :

- 1) Vegetable moussaka
- 2) Zucchini Patty
- 3) Pan glaze tofu with orange juice warm spice
- 4) Mozzarella Aubergine Rolls
- 5) Mushroom Blintz

**DATE:** 23rd October 2016  
**TIME:** 1:00pm - 5:00pm  
**VENUE:** Maharajgunj  
**FEE:** RS. 1,500

## DINNER COOKING COURSE

Participants will be able to cook the following items:

1. BBQ Chicken Burger
2. Macaroni Cheese
3. Mushroom Soup
4. Apple Prist
5. Coleslaw

**DATE:** 27th November, 2016  
**TIME:** 1:00p.m-5:00p.m  
**VENUE:** Maharajgunj  
**FEE:** Rs. 1,500

## ECS

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



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

# Laxmi, Goddess of Wealth and Fortune

Heritage tale

Be sure you clean and decorate your home meticulously this year, as it is widely known that the goddess is easily pleased by those who venerate her, granting them fortune and bounty and a life of comfort and prosperity!

SWOSTI RAJBHANDARI



As the season gears up for the celebration of the festival of lights, traditionally known as Tihar in Nepali, and Sunti in Nepalbhasa, people begin to clean their homes and decorate them with garlands of marigold flowers and traditional oil lamps, and in present times, with colorful flashing electric lights, in preparation of the veneration of Laxmi, the goddess of wealth.

Lakshmi is the mother-goddess who nurtures and nourishes all life, and is often associated with Lord Vishnu. A day dedicated to her worship, Lakshmi Puja, falls on the third day of Tihar, a festival joyously celebrated by all Nepali Hindus. Besides Tihar, Goddess Lakshmi is also worshipped on Kojagrata Purnima, the last day of Dasain, as Mahalakshmi.

Popularly known as the consort of Lord Vishnu, preserver of the universe, various religious texts offer different narratives regarding her origin. She is said to have been born with auspicious features and great beauty in the hut of Sage Brigu and Khyati, and also from the body of Lord Vishnu as the other half (ardhangani). However, the most popular narrative is mentioned in the *Samudra manthan* chapter of Bhagwata purana (puranas are a body of ancient Sanskrit texts), where the goddess is known to have emerged during the churning of the kṛīrasāgara, or “Ocean of Milk”.

Regarded as the deity of abundance, wealth, prosperity, and beauty, she is worshipped in the form of paintings or sculptures as a single deity, as well as with her consort Vishnu. The Amarkosh mentions various names, Sri, Padmalaya, Padma, Kamala, Haripriya, Lokmata, Maa, Rama, in



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total, 11 names. Other puranas mention Lakshmi as having superior status over the other consort, Shakti, of Lord Vishnu.

The iconographic features for the making of the goddess are dictated by various religious texts that provide detailed iconographic as well as iconometric descriptions of the entire pantheon of Hindu deities and the process of their making. According to these texts, the deity of abundance, bounty, and fortune is portrayed either as a singular idol, or with Goddess Saraswati and Lord Ganesha, with Lord Vishnu and his consort, Garuda, popularly known as Sridhar Vishnu, and as Gajalakshmi, with two elephants offering water from pots.

The most popular book of Hindu iconography, the Vishnudhamottar Purana, describes the goddess to be fair complexioned, four-armed, carrying the ratna-patra (vessel filled with gems), sasya-patra (vessel filled with vegetables), oshadhi-patra (vessel filled with medicinal herbs), and a lotus. She should be seated on the back of four diggajas, or elephants, facing four cardinal directions. This depiction personifies her as the provider of abundance and fortune.

Another popular Sanskrit text, Silparatna, describes her as white complexioned, holding a long stalked lotus and the bilva (bel) fruit with her right hands, and her left hands holding the amritaghata (pot containing the ambrosia) and the shankha (conch shell). Two elephants bathe her with water from either side. She is adorned with a pearl necklace, and various other jewelry on her arms, neck, waist, and hands, attended by two maidens waving the chamara (flywhisk) near her. The book also mentions her as having two arms when placed with Lord Vishnu, and four arms when portrayed singly, seated on an eight-petaled lotus placed upon a simhaasana (her vehicle, the lion).

She is usually positioned either seated singly on a lotus pedestal, standing with Lord Vishnu on the right. Small portrayals of the goddess also accompany various incarnations of Lord Vishnu. She is prominently placed at the feet of the reclining Vishnu in the form of Jalasayan Vishnu at Budanilkantha, engraved on the Vishwarupa idols, in form of the ar-

dhanawari, or the one half in the idol of Vishnu, and on the left side of the Harihara idol, the compound idol of Lord Vishnu and Shiva.

In Nepal, the idols of Lakshmi date back to the first century, excavated from Tilaurakot and Hadigaon, made of terracotta. Scholars date the Gajalakshmi at Patan Chyasalhiti, to the first century, according to its features. However, the best and most renowned stone idol in Nepal is that of Padmahasta Lakshmi at the National Museum, holding a lotus flower, and adorned with intricately carved crown, necklace, armband, bangles, and waistband.

Be sure you clean and decorate your home meticulously this year, as it is widely known that the goddess is easily pleased by those who venerate her, granting them fortune and bounty and a life of comfort and prosperity!

**Swosti Rajbhandari Kayastha**

*The author is a scholar of Nepali culture, with special interest in art and iconography. She can be reached at swostirjb@gmail.com*

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