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SEPTEMBER 2018

202

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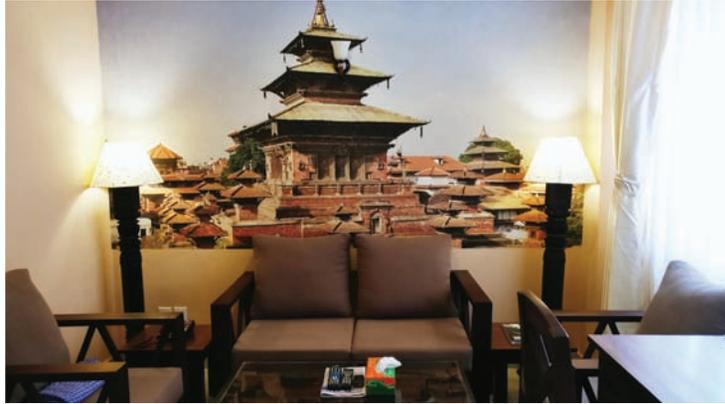
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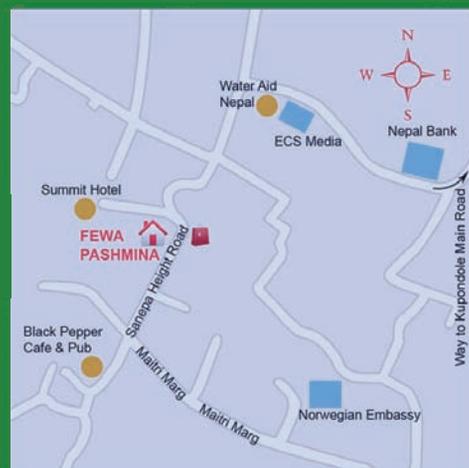


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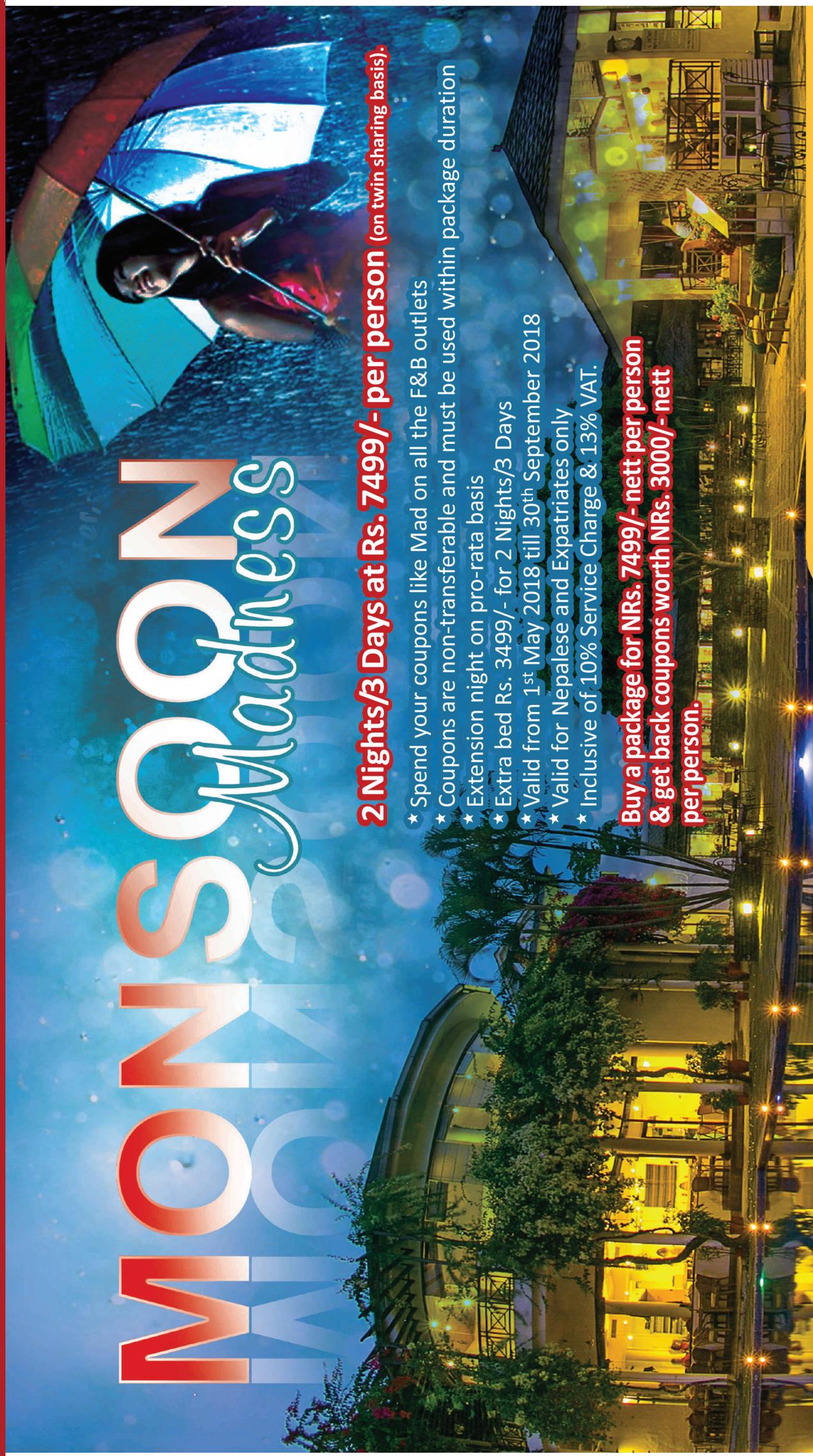
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# Editorial

SEPTEMBER 2018 • Issue 202

## Do Something New

In the past few weeks, I've come upon parts of the valley that I was unfamiliar with. Sometimes intentionally—visiting new friends in Sano Khokhana, where I passed vibrant green rice growing on all sides, and also by accident, when I tried to find a back-road shortcut in Boudha and ended up in Jagadole, which I'd never even heard of, looking down from the hill to an amazing valley view below.

Both days were a pleasant reminder that there is always something more to see, learn, and do, and if one can still find new discoveries after years in the Kathmandu valley, imagine what there is to experience within the whole of Nepal!

This month's issue is a little bit like that—a potpourri of subjects, some of which, I hope, will be a new discovery for you.

Colorful photos from the bead sellers at the *pote* bazaar celebrate this time of year, as does a recipe for *oal*, the lesser-known tuber that's eaten as a curry in the Terai, particularly during this month. And, speaking of food, one of our writers also explores a restaurant serving *bhakka*, a dish long popular in the eastern part of Nepal that is now delighting valley residents, too.

In the valley, we visit the old town of Panauti, both as a historical location and its homestay program. Another writer takes us along on a monsoon hike, while on the other side of the adventure spectrum, we learn about a family that's setting nearly unbelievable records climbing Mt. Everest every which way.

Everest is also the subject of another article, about the Nepal-New Zealand collaboration to remeasure the tallest mountain in the world. Measuring a mountain is a thorough and detailed process that I was fascinated to learn about. Will the results mean that the history books need re-writing? No one knows yet, but the team plans to have the results ready to release by next year, and I'm looking forward to finding out.

There's old and new in the craft section and our regular columns, and I hope you enjoy reading all the articles this month, as the wet weather lessens and we move into the bright beauty of fall and the upcoming holiday season.

And, maybe, consider getting lost and ending up somewhere you've never been before. Adventures can happen close to home if we step out of our regular routine—trying a new food, a conversation with a new person, a visit to a new part of town. Perhaps you'll soon be writing to tell us about it.

Enjoy!

**Evangeline Neve**  
Associate Editor

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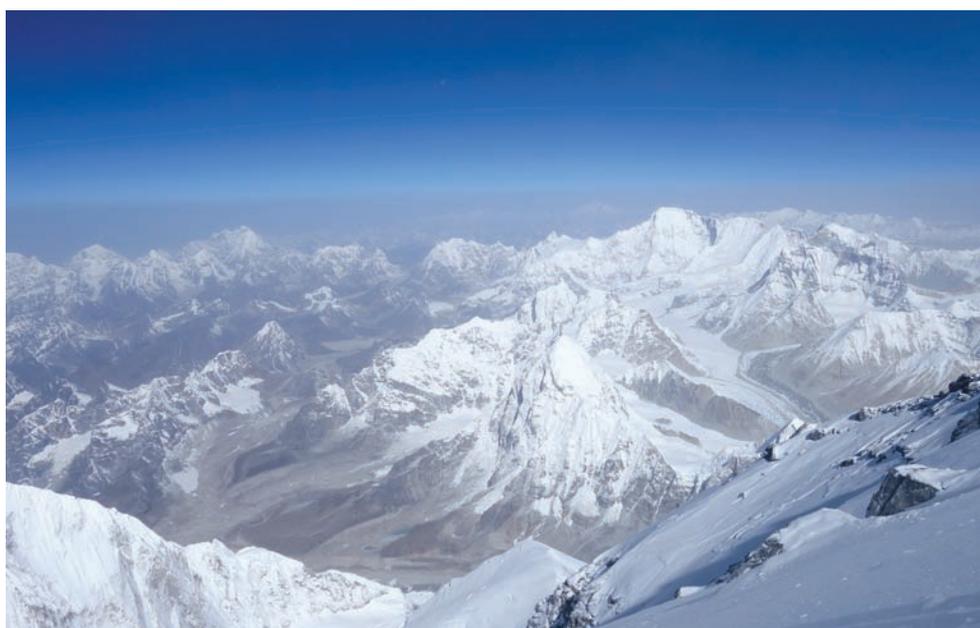
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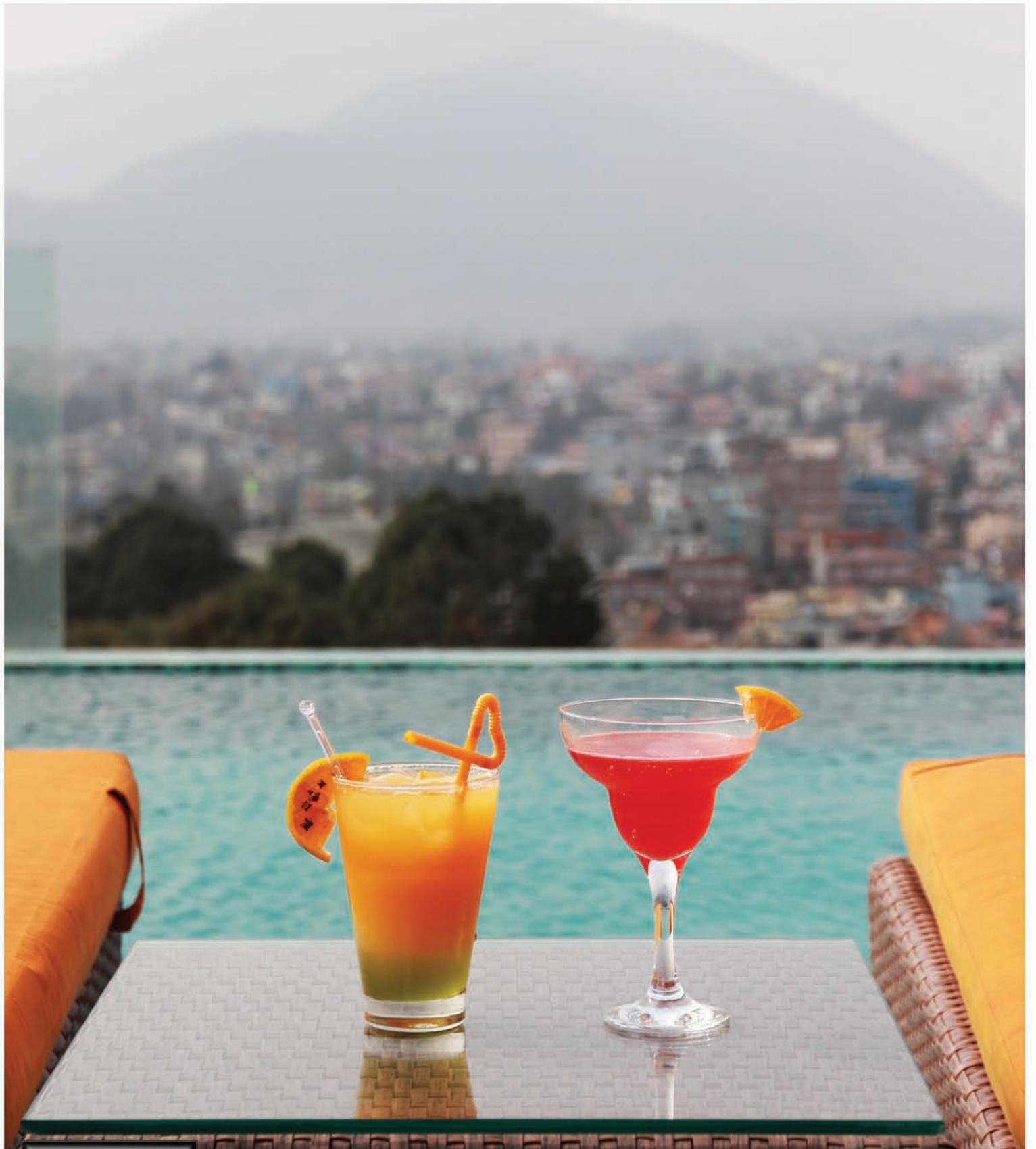
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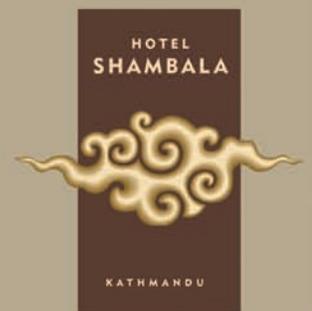
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# Living in Nepal

THINGS TO DO • FOOD • FESTIVAL WATCH • CULTURE

## 5 things to do in Nepal

WORDS APEKSHA GHIMIRE

*Week days are filled with stress; it is easy to lose the connection you have with yourself. Get ready for recharging, reconnecting, and rewarding yourself after all of the week's hard work. Here is a list of five things you can do during the weekends to get back in tune with yourself.*

### **1. Go to the Farmer's Market at Le Sherpa**

The farmer's market community itself is so refreshing to observe. What is as amazing is the food. From the spicy and spectacular da pao to the mind blowing cheesecakes to the brilliant baras, they have it all. This market is perfect for you to indulge in the finer delicacies of life.



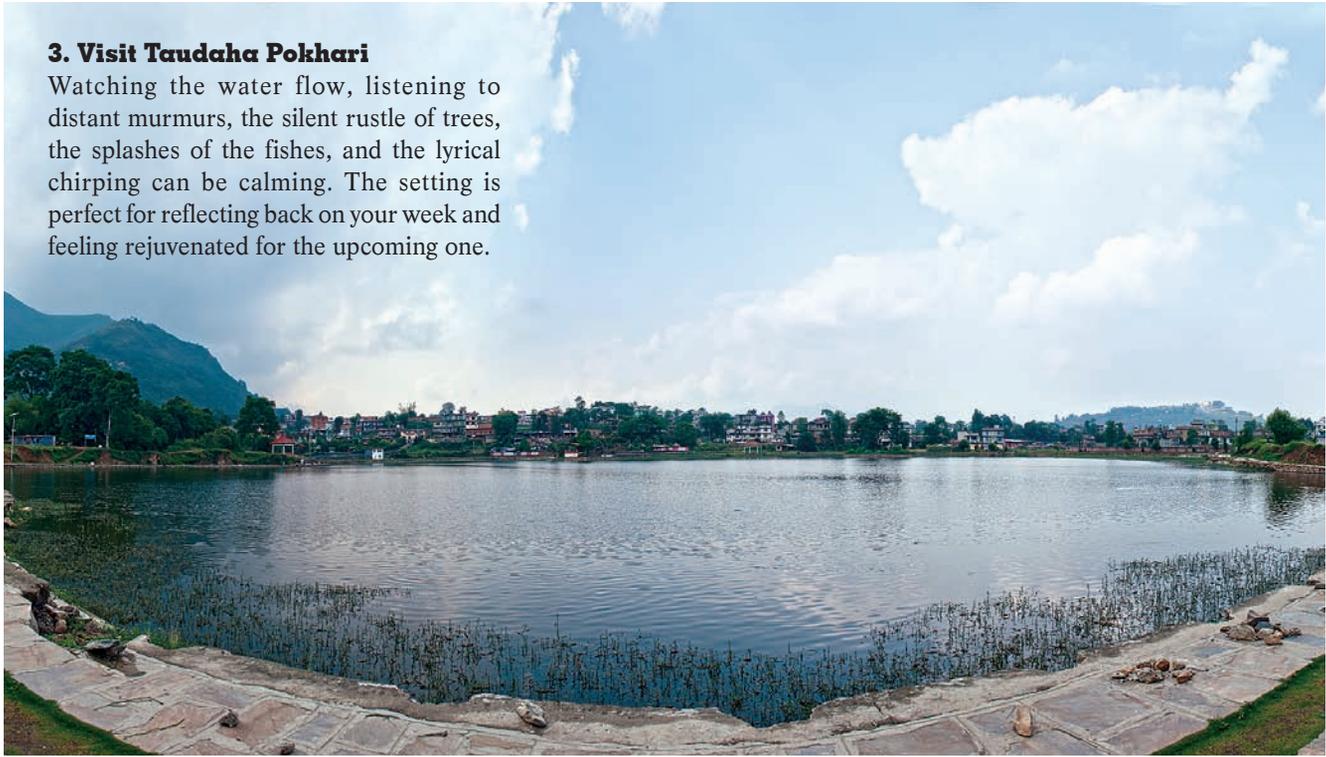
**2. Be a part of the Yellow House art market**

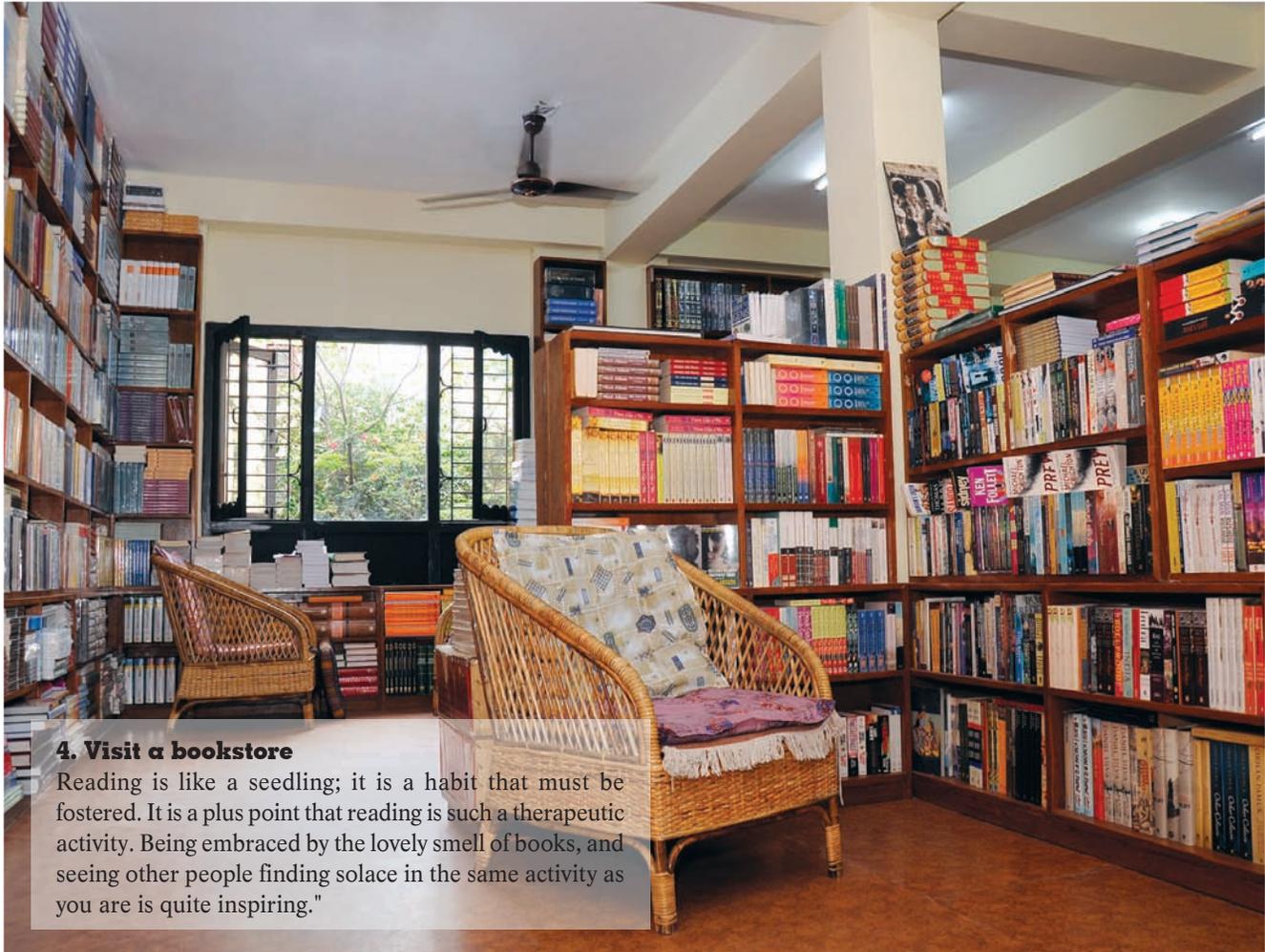
Immerse yourself in art on the first Saturday of every month at Yellow House. In collaboration with ImageArk, a space has been created for artists to

enhance their earnings and audience. Being a part of a market like this one could also inspire you to make art of your own. Maybe, next weekend your new means of catharsis can be art.

**3. Visit Taudaha Pokhari**

Watching the water flow, listening to distant murmurs, the silent rustle of trees, the splashes of the fishes, and the lyrical chirping can be calming. The setting is perfect for reflecting back on your week and feeling rejuvenated for the upcoming one.





#### **4. Visit a bookstore**

Reading is like a seedling; it is a habit that must be fostered. It is a plus point that reading is such a therapeutic activity. Being embraced by the lovely smell of books, and seeing other people finding solace in the same activity as you are is quite inspiring."



#### **5. Hike with the Prakriti Premi Samuha**

Reserve the fourth Saturday of every Nepali month to go on a hike with this organization. Their goal is simply to be healthy and happy. To be a part of this program, beginners are required to make a donation of 1000 rupees, and get ready to do some volunteering work during the hike.



Food

# Bhakka

## A Dish from the East

WORDS SHREESHA NANKHWA

If you were to head out on a winter morning somewhere in Morang, Jhapa, or really anywhere in the eastern Terai of Nepal, one of the first things you'd see would be middle-aged women out in the streets selling piping hot rice cakes in newspapers or *taparis* (leaf bowls) with a side of *noon-khursani* (salt and chilli powder) or some home-made sauce.

*Bhakka*, as this dish is called, is a traditional dish for people of the Rajbanshi, Tharu, and Tajpuria communities. However, in the last two

decades, it has grown incredibly popular in the eastern Terai and is now creeping into the palates Kathmanduites as well.

If you are from the eastern Terai, you probably don't need me to tell you where to get your bhakka. However, for the rest of us valley dwellers, you can try out this dish at Bhakka House, a new restaurant in Old Baneshwor dedicated solely to bhakka.

The thing that makes bhakka enthusiasts come back again and again for this dish is its texture. It has a light spongy texture that most who try it enjoy

immensely. Taste-wise, bhakka is rather bland. It is made simply from rice flour and water, so it tastes just like plain rice. What gives the dish its flavor are its accompaniments.

You can have bhakka with many, many accompaniments. Someone from the eastern Terai would probably prefer to have it with *noon-khursani*, as is traditional. At Bhakka House, on top of *noon-khursani*, you will find three kinds of sauces, one sweet, one spicy, and one mild tomato *achaar*, which you can pair with their bhakka. You can also

pair it with some *chaukuni*, a mildly spicy yogurt-based salad native to Palpa that the owners of Bhakka House have cleverly paired with bhakka for the hot summer months. If you still want more options, some people in certain places in the Terai also enjoy their bhakka with fish curry.

The accompaniment for bhakka also seems to vary from place to place. According to the owners of Bhakka House, as bhakka spreads to more places, the types of achaars and accompaniments that go along with it are also increasing.

Bhakka is meant to be eaten hot. “If you let it cool down, it loses its spongy texture and is not really that good anymore,” says Biwash of Bhakka House. So, when you do get around to trying this dish, attack it as soon as it hits your table.

Bhakka is only made using rice flour and water. “There are no other added ingredients,” says Biwash. However, there is a specific method that one needs to follow while making bhakka that is slightly complicated. It is also considered rather healthy, as it uses no oil, sugar, or any other unhealthy ingredient.

Originally believed to be a traditional Rajbanshi cuisine, Bhakka has a rich traditional importance in their culture. “In our culture, we send *sel roti* and sweets as a *koseli* (gift) to the bride after a wedding when they first visit their maiden home and return. Among the Rajbanshis, they give bhakka to the bride instead,” explains Biwash.

Outside of Bhakka House, you will find that the majority of bhakka makers and sellers are women, typically Rajbanshi housewives, who sell bhakka in the streets first thing in the morning before returning home for their other daily activities. “Bhakka is a street food. We are the first to open a restaurant (dedicated to bhakka) and create this kind of environment,” says Biwash.

Bhakka also holds a lot of memories for people from the east. “I’ve been eating bhakka since I was little. I did not know how to make bhakka, but since I had the concept for this restaurant, I have learned how to make it,” says Biwash, who has hired a better cook who does the actual cooking of the bhakka. If you look at the sticky notes that previous customers have left on the door of Bhakka House, Biwash is not the only person who fondly remembers bhakka.

**Bhakka is only made using rice flour and water. “There are no other added ingredients,” says Biwash.**



“Jhapali taste... went back to school days!” says one note, while another comments, “Reminded me of Jhapa after 10 years... missing *timur* achar.” There are many more comments like that. Another note says “Loved your bhakka... reminded me of Jhapa”, while yet another note says, “Reminded me of Jhapa and all those cold winter days. Great place and yummy bhakka.”

It is not only Jhapolis who have left their comments. Many others who tried the dish for the first time also sing its praises. “Never tried this amazing food before” says one sticky note, and several others seem to share the same sentiment.

If you like trying new food and if you are interested in exploring traditional Nepalese cuisines, we suggest you try this dish at least once.



Happening

# Unsnarling the Complexities

WORDS EVANGELINE NEVE

The cozy, bright interior of GG Machan has been hosting art exhibits for some time now—this is the fifth ‘Art @ GG,’ though the first that I’ve attended. The exhibits each showcase a different artist for a one-month period. *Interconnected Affection* is artist Sabita Dangol’s fourth solo exhibition, and quite an outstanding one. I arrived early, so I had a chance to examine the paintings myself and then watch the reaction of everyone else doing so, all before the official opening.

And it’s that kind of art, really, because the colors of the paintings are so vibrant, and in some ways, unexpected, that they catch you off guard and make you think. After my first look-through, I found myself walking back along the

space, examining the pictures again and again once I started to see the patterns and recurring motifs. While each painting depicts two figures, a man and a woman, usually gazing at each other, there are also multiple animal shapes embedded in the art itself: turtles, fish, and so on. And in each painting, sometimes so worked in that you don’t at first see it, a comb. Sometimes, the two figures are joined by a single hair comb, other times two combs are joining in the image.

The exhibition was inaugurated by Mrs. Pratima Pande, M.B.E., Honorary Consul General of Italy and President of the Nepal Britain Society, who is a lover and patron of the arts, and her

enthusiasm was evident as she spoke to the gathering.

The artist, Sabita Dangol, is a modest, charming woman who has been painting for ten years now, and it’s easy to see that she is a happy person with a satisfying relationship—it shines out from each canvas. There’s a deep feeling of love and romanticism in the art, in addition to the use of symbolism and bright colors—gold, turquoise, red—that really reach out and grab the viewer. When I ask what inspires her, she happily replies, “My surroundings, what I love, where I grew up!” As a Newar, she finds ideas all around her, whether in her home or a temple. And what about those combs? I ask. That’s simple to answer: for her, the comb is a symbol of solutions; a comb brushes out the snarls and the tangles and makes everything smooth again.

Most recently, her work was displayed in the 2018 Indian Art Fair, and she’s also been selected to participate in the 18th Asian Art Biennale being held later this year in Dhaka, Bangladesh. With her talent and passionate artistic style, combined with her grounding as a person, it’s certain we’ll be seeing a lot more great work from her in the future.



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# A Glittering Bazaar

WORDS BIBEKA BAZRA

Pote holds a significant value to every Nepali married woman, especially in Brahmin and Chhetri cultures. Pote is a necklace made from around 20 strands of glittering colored glass beads, with or without a hollow golden tube called tilahari attached to it as a pendant. The necklace is given to a woman at her wedding, and therefore, defines the marital status of Nepali women. There are around 40 shops in the Pote Bazaar area located in Indrachowk, packed and hung with strings of beads of various lengths and colors. Red, green, and yellow color palettes dominate the shelves of the shops. In addition to the simple strands of beads, there are many other adornments with more intricate designs; patterned necklaces, interestingly shaped pendants, and ornamented bracelets. One quirky fact about Pote Bazaar is that most of the shops are run by the Muslims who came to Kathmandu as traders at the time of King Pratap Malla (1624-74 A.D.). Indrachowk's Pote Bazaar acts a symbol reflecting religious tolerance between communities. Additionally, it is undeniable that the Pote Bazaar in Nepal has given the valley an essence of the legendary roots that define our culture.







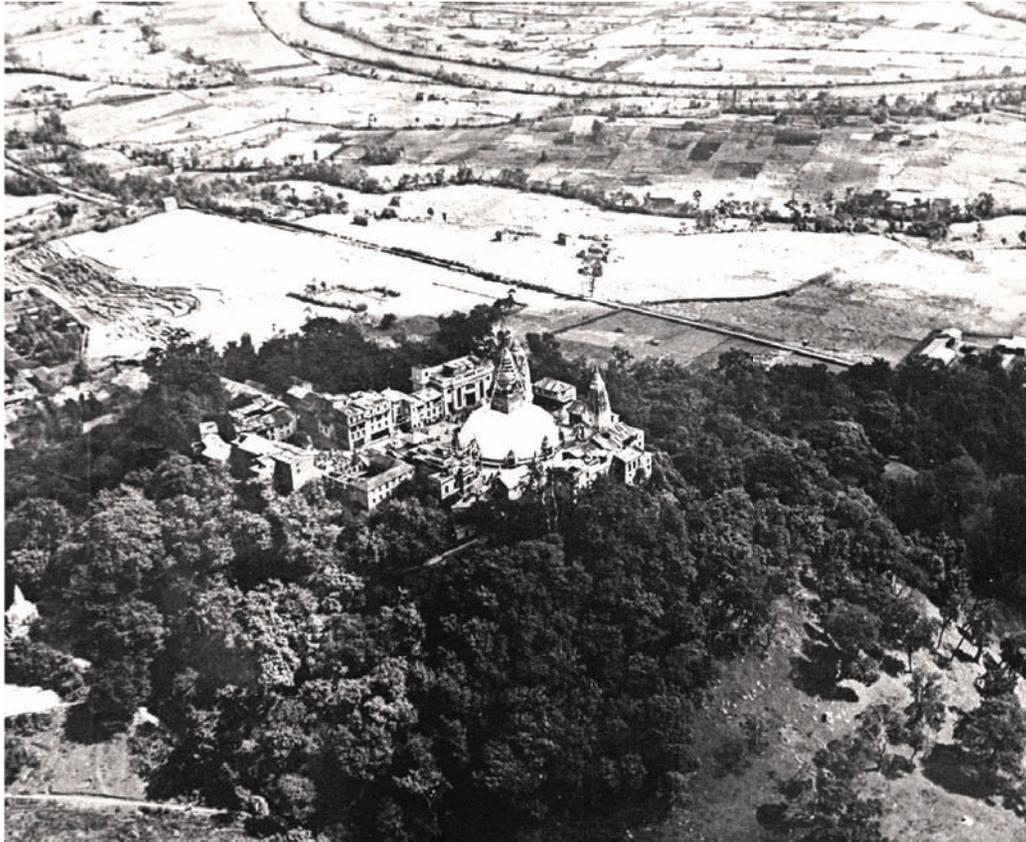












◀ Aerial view of Swayambhu, the Self-Created or Self-Existent, is one of the most venerated and sacred Buddhist sites. It is reputedly the oldest settlement in the Kathmandu valley surrounded by several smaller shrines and temples. According to legend, Kathmandu Valley was a lake, and Swayambhu in the form of light, emanated from a resplendent lotus. Bodhisattva Manjusri, finding the lake full of monstrous aquatic animal, drained the water with his sword so that people could access the temple. Although the first inscription mentioning Swayambhu is in the fifth century, the stupa gained popularity in the fourteenth century.

© Dirghaman & Ganeshman Chitrakar Art Foundation. Photo taken by Ganesh Man Chitrakar, 1950s.



▲ Aerial view of Swayambhu during Buddha Jayanti, the birthday of Gautam Buddha. Every year thousands of devotees pay homage to the Buddha during this festival.

© Dirghaman & Ganeshman Chitrakar Art Foundation. Photo taken by Kiran Man Chitrakar, 2010.

Feature

# When Photography Runs In Your Blood

WORDS PRASHANT SHRESTHA

Photography as an art form is not taken seriously sometimes. A popular saying goes, “Anyone with an expensive camera is a photographer”. To me, photography is a universal language that transcends literacy and cultures. Even an illiterate person or someone who comes from a different cultural and linguistic background can appreciate photos. Photography is an expression captured, at times, for eternity, forging invaluable evidence for posterity. A photo can evoke an emotional response in us. That is the mark of good photography! Today it has become accessible to the masses at an unprecedented level. Anyone with a smartphone can produce pictures. On top of that, the booming social media provides a platform of sharing and appreciating them; pictures of both the monumental and the mundane. It is safe to say that it has, in a way, become more democratic.

Photos have found a new meaning and a new role in this century. At the same time, vintage photos have become priceless and we must salute those photographers who have left behind them rare glimpses of life of the past.

No single individual in Nepal must have a more immaculate record of Nepali history in the form of photographs than the celebrated photographer Kiran Chitrakar. He has worked for Nepal Television for 33 years as their chief cameraman and is the recipient of the prestigious Gorkha Dakshin Bahu for his contributions. He also happens to have an illustrious family history. He is a descendant of pioneer court photographers, Dirgha Man Chitrakar (grandfather) and Ganesh Man Chitrakar (father). His son, Swaraj, is also a photographer, and he is at present involved in digitizing the old photos, and along with his

sister Cristeena, hopes to publish a book someday with those important pictures taken by their predecessors. Currently, his family has an impressive collection of five thousand negatives dating all the way back to his grandfather in the late 1800s.

Etymologically, his surname Chitrakar is composed of ‘chitra’ which means picture and ‘kar’ means craftsman. Looking back at the achievements of their ancestors, the picture of Jaya Prakash Malla, the last Malla king of Kantipur, in Kumari House was painted by Laxmi Lal Chitrakar, the great-grandfather of Kiran Chitrakar. Dirgha Man, his grandfather, was under artistic apprenticeship of Purna Man, a distant relative, from the tender age of fourteen. He is said to have had an innate penchant for painting. He worked in the palace from the time of Girvan Yuddha and Mathabar Singh Thapa. The





**In this photo, Chandra Shumsher is with his second wife Bal Kumari Devi of Jajarkot and their two sons, Bishnu Shumsher J.B. Rana (right) and Shankar Shumsher J.B. Rana (left).**

advent of photography was revolutionary, and most of the painters found themselves sidelined by this new technology. At first, Gyahendra Shumsher had brought Bengali photographers, but due to their mistrust of foreigners, the Ranas decided to turn their painters into their photographers.

The story goes that Dirgha Man sought help of the royal physician when his brother Surya Lal was seriously ill. In return for his treatment, he presented the physician with a medallion painted by himself. The then Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher came across the medallion and was thoroughly impressed by it. He appointed him the court painter and royal photographer. Mr. Chitrakar still has a document of the purchase of chemicals from Calcutta in 1917 A.D. In it, Dirgha Man was mentioned as the official royal photographer of Nepal. He even accompanied Chandra Shumsher in his 1908 state visit to England. He took pictures of the Shree Teen

Maharaja on various occasions, one of which is presented here. In this photo, he is with his second wife Bal Kumari Devi of Jajarkot and their two sons, Bishnu Shumsher J.B. Rana (right) and Shankar Shumsher J.B. Rana (left). It was taken in the 1910s. The backdrop in the photo was painted by the photographer himself and is still in possession of his family.

Another photograph of his, also included here, shows the Gadhi Baithak during a royal procession. It was taken most probably before 1908 A.D. Apart from photographing the royals and aristocrats, he has taken numerous pictures of the landscapes and towns of Nepal. He went on a journey from Kathmandu to Muktinath, traversing Palpa and Riddhi Siddhi in 1915 A.D. Mr. Kiran Chitrakar has more than 300 photos of this trip. They depict life in Nepal in the early 1900s. Some of Dirgha Man's paintings are on display in the National Museum, Chhauni. A few of

them are housed in the parliament building and many are still in private collections. He served as a painter and photographer to the royals until his demise at the age of 71, in 1945 A.D. His life was long and indubitably eventful.

His father, Ganesh Man, too lived a remarkable life. He filled in his father's shoes as a court photographer till 2007 B.S. After the downfall of the Rana regime, the photography department was unfortunately closed. From 1951 to 1970 A.D., he worked for USAID as their chief photographer. After retiring, he took pictures for a survey report on the Kathmandu valley published by UNESCO in two volumes. He was the first Nepali to process color slides. Talking about the firsts, he was also the first in Nepal to take an aerial shot from a helicopter. In the 1960s, he took courses in advanced photography in Delhi, most probably making him the first Nepali to take professional training in photography. It is Mr. Chitrakar's ambition to compile a book named *Kathmandu: Then and Now*. He intends to take pictures from the exact same location whence his grandfather or father took pictures and document the changes. He intends to go on a trip to Muktinath following his grandfather's trail for this very purpose. He also wants to take pictures of Kathmandu Valley from the same spots his father had photographed for the UNESCO survey report.

The Chitrakars get invitations to exhibit their photographs from all over the world. They have displayed their work in India, Bangladesh, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Cambodia, England, France, U.S.A., Switzerland, Norway, and Russia. Mr. Chitrakar wants to exhibit his collection throughout Nepal. Most Ne-



palis do not know about the existence of such photographs that have managed to capture a snippet of our history. For instance, I never knew how Chandra Shumsher actually looked like until I saw the above photo. Money cannot replace the value of these pictures. They have preserved what time has obliterated. In fact, Mr. Chitrakar has a vision to open a museum in Nepal dedicated solely to photography. He would appreciate the government or a donor organization's assistance for this project. It would be a powerful initiative to safeguard and showcase history through photographs.

Mr. Chitrakar himself has visited all 75 districts of Nepal and taken aerial shots of 50 of them. He has taken extensive photographs of the devastation wrecked by the massive 2015 earthquakes on our cultural heritages. He was also a part of the entourage of Sher Bahadur Deuba's state visit to Britain in 1994 A.D. as the official cameraman. He has received letters of appreciation

▲ A state event at Kathmandu Durbar Square. An elephant approaches the square as the Gurkha soldiers and locals salute. The background shows Kumari Temple, which houses the Living Goddess. On the left is the original Gaddi Baithak, meaning the "Royal Seat," was where the Kings of Nepal were once crowned and legitimized. An exception to the Newari style architecture in the square, this neo-classical building was modeled to conform to the twentieth century taste in Western architecture by the ruling Ranas. It has been rebuilt and renovated several times over the centuries. It was badly damaged during the 2015 earthquakes and has been restored.

© Dirghaman & Ganeshman Chitrakar Art Foundation. Photo taken by Dirgha Man Chitrakar, 1900s.

from Buckingham Palace on behalf of the Queen, and also from Prince Harry when he visited Nepal. He is also weary of the lax copyright laws in Nepal. His collection can easily be uploaded on Facebook without paying him the rightful royalties. The glass negatives (known as photographic plates) that were in use well into the 1940s (in Nepal) are difficult to preserve, as they are very delicate. Many of his photographic plates were irretrievably damaged in an unfortunate incident, where they were not handled with proper care.

All the accolades aside, Mr. Chitrakar is first and foremost an artist. Yes, his collection is invaluable due to its historical importance, but every kind of art is

important in its own right. What sets his family apart is their continuous dedication to this form of art, generation after generation. They have amassed a stupendous body of work that bears testament to our unique heritage. His son enjoys taking pictures of street life and cultural events. But it is his mission not only to preserve those photographs, but also to let the public know that such photos exist. If the museum were really to be opened, it would instantly become a popular destination for educational excursions, and also, a tourist attraction. But, most importantly, it would make Nepalis feel richer, as we get an amazing opportunity to connect with our past.

Feature

# Panauti City

## The Song of History and Nature

With fresh air and greenery everywhere, Panauti offers a totally different experience of Nepal after merely a one-hour-drive from Kathmandu.

WORDS CHEN WANYU (ARIEL)



Kathmandu is not Nepal. You may have heard this sentence so many times, but you can't agree more when you reach Panauti, one of the oldest cities in the country. With fresh air and greenery everywhere, Panauti offers a totally different experience of Nepal after merely a one-hour-drive from Kathmandu.

The view on both sides of an uneven road starts to change when the car climbs

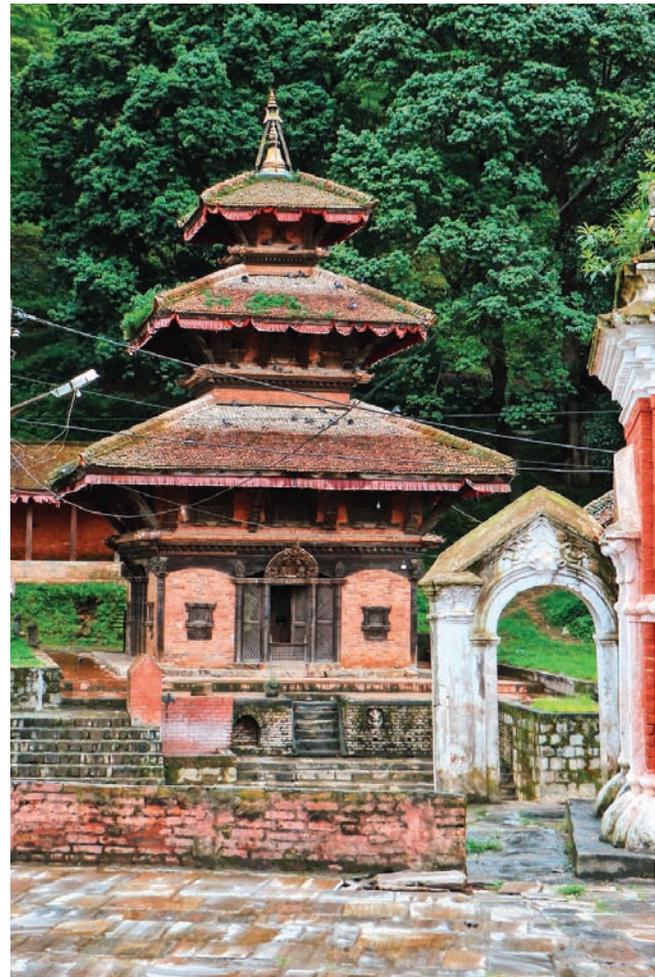
up to the central part of Panauti. What is shown in front of you is no more dust and chaotic traffic, but paddy fields and a clear sky. We may say that Panauti is a worthwhile city to travel in every season. In the rainy season, Panauti looks like a scene portrayed in Andersen's Fairy Tales, you can watch as the fog seeps through the grassy hills and hides the bungalows with a white and hazy veil. At cooking time, wisps

of smoke from kitchens rise into the grey sky and converge with clouds from the remote hills. On the other side of the coin, Panauti is a haven of azure sky in the dry season, from where you can enjoy the stunning sunrises and sunsets.

But, the magic of Panauti does not stop here. As a city that dates back to 13th century, or earlier, Panauti is regarded as an important religious site. More than

forty temples have been built in the central part of the city since the 15th century, and most of them are situated along the Rosi and Punyamati Rivers. A few minutes' walk around the place and you will realize that you are in one of the most ancient Newari towns in the country and you get to see these venerable monuments up close.

It seems like the town preserves the way the ancestors had originally built





it, even the rest stations (sattals) constructed centuries years ago for traders are still used today. When you walk further toward the center, you will realize that hundreds of thousands of red bricks constituted this Newari town, whether for making the houses, the roads, or the temples, giving these archaic structures a sense of majesty. The Newari people living in this town keep their lifestyles and traditions very much alive. If you visit in the early morning, you can see the Newari people come and worship in the temples.

Due to the dominant population of Newars, Panauti is rich in Newari culture and has twenty-eight festivals in one year. One of the most famous and unique ones is Yomari Punhi. In ancient times, a married couple experimented with a fresh yield of rice to make a new delicacy and named it yomari. This delicious dessert is made from a mixture of treacle and sesame seed wrapped in a stupa-shaped rice dough. Because everyone in the village loved it so

much, it was named yomari, or tasty bread. When the festival approaches, children will go around the village, like “treat or trick” in Halloween, knocking on doors and asking for yomari from the housewives.

Panauti is also known as the birthplace of Prince Mahasatwo, and there is a story that you will definitely be told when you reach Namobuddha, one of the most sacred pilgrimage sites in Nepal. It is said that the prince sacrificed himself to a starving tigress. Touched by the kindness of the prince, Lord Buddha bowed before him and offered his namaste to respect him. Though the story happened centuries ago, the Namobuddha Monastery was only built 25 years ago.

Climbing up on a muddy road for one hour from the central part of Panauti, Namobuddha Monastery finally appears half way up on the mountain. Maybe pilgrimages are always difficult—the road heading to the monastery was in bad condition, and one who wants to visit it will have to

walk for quite a while. But, soon, you will realize that all this walking and pain are meaningful and worthwhile, and it can be seen as the intention of Buddha, enabling you to see the gorgeous view of nature. The landscape below glistens verdant like a crystal, and the ridges of mountains resembles a crawling dragon.

Staying in Panauti is like passing through to another space and time; the lovely

natural scenery takes you far away from the busy and stressful world. A sense of peace and serenity comes deeply inside your heart and slow your steps when wondering around the valley. The best thing you can do in Panauti is to take a deep breath and feel the wind blowing gently on your face. If you are longing to find a place to relax, then Panauti will be your best choice.

**Panauti is also known as the birthplace of Prince Mahasatwo, and there is a story that you will definitely be told when you reach Namobuddha, one of the most sacred pilgrimage sites in Nepal.**



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Feature

# Because it's there

## Remeasuring Mount Everest

With a top New Zealand expert working with the Nepali government to remeasure the world's tallest mountain post-earthquake, will 8848 still be the magic number?

EVANGELINE NEVE IN CONVERSATION WITH LISA CHOEGYAL



Last week, I heard the news that the government of New Zealand will collaborate with Nepal to remeasure Mt. Everest, or Sagarmatha. The mountain's official height of 8848 m, or 29,029 ft, was established after a 1955 survey, and while there have been other figures mentioned over the years, it was only really after the 2015 earthquake that those figures were seriously brought into question. So, a new survey is clearly

needed. I was curious to get more details about the plan and the process the team will use to go about their work. Lisa Choegyal, the New Zealand Honorary Consul to Nepal, was generous enough to answer my questions, and I think that you'll find her answers as fascinating as I did.

**Q: I've recently read that the New Zealand government is going to work with the Nepali government to remeasure**

**Mt. Everest. Can you tell us why remeasuring Everest is important?**

It's important to know the exact height of the highest point on earth, don't you think? Mount Everest's height has not been accurately checked in a collaborative effort for some time, and not since the 2015 earthquakes changed the country's horizontal and vertical elevations and disrupted communication points. Last year, the Survey Department of the Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation, who are in charge of such things, called a major international meeting with all the concerned parties and countries to announce their intention to remeasure Mt. Everest. Of course, China and India both have a keen interest. We were honored that Nepal invited New Zealand and Dr. Chris Pearson from Otago University to stand by them as a neutral party to help with their scientific best practice for this ambitious project.

**Q: Dr. Chris Pearson, a New Zealand geodist, will be spearheading the operation. What exactly is a geodesist, and how does he plan to go about remeasuring the mountain?**

A geodist is a specialist who calculates the distance between two latitude and longitude coordinates, the science of measuring and understanding the earth's geometric shape, orientation in space, and gravity field.

"Just to start out with some basic principles," Dr. Pearson told me, "there are two ways that surveyors have to measure the height of a mountain like Mt. Everest. The first is to conduct a triangulation survey where we set up instruments called theodolites on points with known positions (latitude and longitude) and

heights. By measuring angles from at least two points for rays pointing to the summits and seeing where the rays intersect, we can determine the position of the summit. Obviously, it is the inclination of the rays above the horizon that tell us about the height of the mountain. This is the way the height of Mt. Everest was determined by the Survey of India in George Everest's time. There are problems using this technique accurately. First, we need to know the coordinates of points that are close enough to see Mt. Everest, and currently there are no suitable points that are close enough to see Mt. Everest and have reliable coordinates. So, we need to do some surveying to establish coordinates for our set-up points, and this will require surveying, basically leveling from points with known heights in Nepal's sea level datum and GPS. The second way is just to take a GPS receiver to the top of the mountain and use that to determine the height. Of course, that means that someone will have to take a GPS receiver to the top and eventually take it down, which is a non-trivial task in the case of Mt. Everest. Currently, the plan is to use both of these techniques in parallel."

**Q: Wow, that is truly fascinating—I've always wondered how that was done. Now, just how did the New Zealand government decide to get involved with this?**

Being a small country whose aid budget is mainly focused on the Pacific, New Zealand is able to support only carefully targeted programs in which our expertise can be leveraged to make a positive contribution. In addition to the Himalayan Trust, university scholarships, and mountaineering and ecotourism, New Zealand has a long relationship helping Nepal



develop safety guidelines and earthquake engineering expertise for over 25 years.

As you know, New Zealand is also located on seismologically active faults and subject to many earth movements, so we have particular experience in this area. After the 2015 disaster, and at the specific invitation of the then-Minister of Urban Development, the New Zealand government provided several teams of seismic engineers and training in environmental demolition techniques to work alongside Nepal's experts in these fields as part of our rebuilding support.

At the same time, research scientist Prof. Roger Bilham, seismologist from the University of Colorado, and the guru of Himalayan earthquakes, recommended to Nepal's National Planning Commission that the one person in the world who could help realign the disturbed network communication points was geodist Dr. Christopher Pearson.

At the invitation of the Nepal government, and financially supported by the New Zealand embassy, Dr. Pearson led a successful post-earthquake survey mapping project along with Nepal's Survey Department from 2015 to 2017 to help the country rebuild after the two massive earthquakes. The earthquakes caused the ground to move by about two meters in some places, sending coordinates in geographic information system and geodetic databases "well off" their actual locations. Mathematical models had to be developed to correct coordinates and survey measurements for the quake-induced ground movement.

Over the past three years, Dr. Pearson has been working with the Survey Department experts to develop an alternative datum that contains models for the recent



earthquakes and ongoing deformation associated with Nepal's location on the India/Asia plate boundary. Along with the model, he has developed a suite of software to convert coordinates and adjust survey measurements while correcting for the effects of the earthquakes, and these will be employed in analyzing the Everest data. In addition, Trimble NZ, the Christchurch-based technology company specializing in navigation and positioning equipment, has donated a complimentary license of their GPS processing software for use in analyzing the data collected during the project. They also plan to lend two state-of-the-art GPS receivers to Nepal for use during the summit measurement.

During these visits, a close professional relationship developed that led to the Survey Department to again invite New Zealand and Dr. Pearson to help them with the re-measuring of Mt. Everest. We were delighted to accept

## The strength of the Nepal-New Zealand relationship is based on the amazing legacy of Sir Edmund Hillary and his Himalayan Trust.

helping Nepal with this prestigious task.

Mr. Niraj Manandhar, Deputy Director General of Geodetic Survey Division, Survey Department, said, "We are absolutely delighted to have New Zealand's help and collaboration, and Dr. Chris Pearson's expertise has been very valuable to our department."

**Q: Your government has longstanding ties with Nepal; any plans for the future?**

The strength of the Nepal-New Zealand relationship is based on the amazing legacy of Sir Edmund Hillary and his Himalayan Trust. Next year, 2019, is the 100-year anniversary of his birth, so it is fitting

that the results of the re-measuring of Mt. Everest will be announced next year. We are also planning other events to celebrate the centenary, including some high-level visits, arts exchanges, and the publication of an Everest book by photographer Sujoy Das and myself.

\*\*

*Well, we certainly will be looking forward to those events next year for the centenary of Sir Edmund Hillary's birth, and wish the whole team the best of luck in determining the current accurate height of our—and the world's—tallest mountain.*



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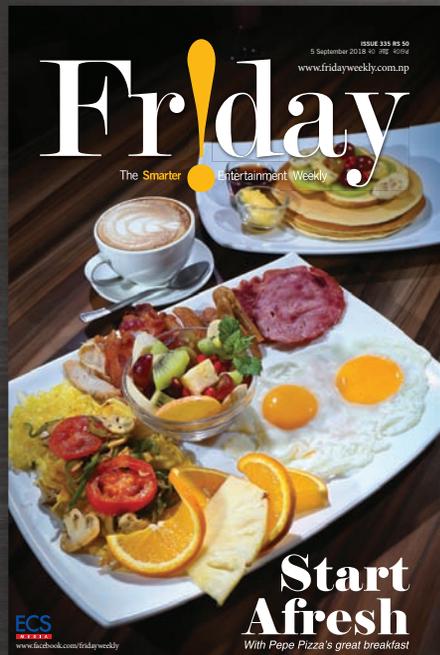


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Feature

# How to Cook Elephant Foot Yam, a.k.a. 'Oal'

WORDS SANJIB CHAUDHARY



Photo Courtesy: Sanjib Chaudhary

As the month of Shrawan begins, you'll see the cycle-wallah and other vegetable vendors selling a round object along with other regular vegetables. I've come across many people asking about this strange vegetable while buying the elephant foot yam, known as oal in the southern plains of Nepal. Oal is a very popular tuber in the Terai, especially among vegetarians, because if cooked well, it tastes better than fish and meat delicacies. Also, its curry is a must-eat delicacy during the Jitiya festival celebrated widely in the terai.

What's so special about this ugly-looking tuber? It can't be eaten raw, and needs either lemon juice or curd paste, even when cooked, due to the oxalates present in it. However, it is a natural medicine for piles and many other illnesses like dysentery, vomiting, stomach ache, and asthma. It grows well in fallow land, as well, and doesn't need much water to grow.

So, how do you cook oal? It's simple, but you'll need to take care while cleaning and chopping it into pieces. You can either wear plastic gloves or apply a layer of oil to your palms to avoid the itching that can come while cleaning the tuber. Wash the tuber properly and scrape the outer layer with a knife. Then, either cut it into small cubes or slices as per your choice.

If you want to go for cubes, fry the chopped onions in ghee till they are brown, and then add the cubes and fry them together. Then, as you cook, add salt, turmeric powder, cumin, coriander, and chili powder and garlic paste. Add a bit of curd and water and cook on low heat. Once it is cooked, garnish it with coriander leaves.

However, if you want to go for slices, boil them and then drain the water from the slices. Then, fry the slices on both



Photo Courtesy: Prashant Khanal

sides in ghee. As in the earlier case, fry chopped onions, and once they brown, add salt, turmeric powder, cumin, coriander, and chili powder and garlic paste to it. Now, add a bit of curd and water and make a thin gravy. As it starts boiling, dip the fried slices in it and let them soak the gravy. Once it gets cooked, garnish it with coriander leaves.

The oal curry can be served with rice or chapatis, but it tastes best when served with puffed rice. And if you want to avoid adding curd, add lemon juice to the oal curry at the end, before garnishing with coriander leaves.

So, next time you see a vegetable vendor selling this strange tuber, buy it and try cooking it for yourself. I'm sure you'll love it!

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**VENUE: Maharajgunj, FEE: Rs.18,000**

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- Child emergency
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- Child hygiene

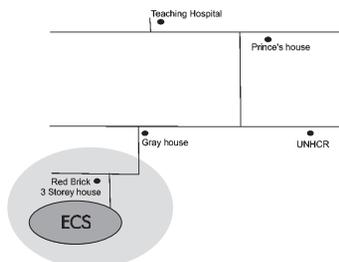
The topics mentioned above help the participants to understand children behavior and how common accidents can be prevented.

**VENUE: Maharajgunj**

**DURATION: 6 days (3hrs a day)**

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# Craft

REVIEW • CRAFT TALE • CRAFT MAKER • CRAFT PRODUCTS



Craft Maker

# Weaving with Hope

WORDS APEKSHA GHIMIRE



In the middle of the factory of Reliance Carpets in Boudha, I stood awestruck. It was an atmosphere I had never experienced before; the room was lively with music, laughter, and murmurs, while the thumps of the comb continued intermittently. The weavers were glowing under the fluorescent lights. Ms. Lobsang was right; when one works in the carpet industry, they get to work with family.

The soft-spoken and passionate Lobsang Dolama is the owner of Reliance Carpets, a company that is renowned for its high quality carpets. She has been keeping the company stable since 1988, when her parents asked her to look after

it. She has used the carpet industry not just as a way to preserve and promote art, but also as a way to do community service. As I observed her interactions with the weavers, it was clear to me that she was quite close to them. It also came as no surprise when I learned that Reliance Carpets is affiliated with an organization like STEP.

STEP is an NGO founded in 1995 in Switzerland that works for the welfare of the weavers and the sustainability of the carpet industry. They ensure that the weavers have living and working environments of good quality, that the production is eco-friendly, and that the companies do not employ children. There are thirteen

companies in Nepal that have their fair trade label.

As Ms. Lobsang gave us a tour around, she informed that Reliance Carpets provides benefits to their weavers like living quarters and health care, as well as their children's school fees. I wanted to learn more about what it was like working here. That is how I got to talk to Sita Tamang. We were seated in a dimly lit room. I was watching a weaver wind a ball of yarn with fascination when Sita arrived. A shy woman with a kind and radiant smile, she is just thirty-two years old. It has been a decade since she started working in this industry. She has four children, aged thir-



industry. She has four children, aged thirteen, eleven, nine, and six. All are getting educated through the company. She told me that what motivates her to continue working in this industry is that she can work even though she has kids. She was beaming when she said that she is content with her working life.

Back in the warm and colorful room behind Ms. Lobsang's home, she said that over the course of her career, she has noticed some changes. She reminisced about the days when they would get the orders for an entire year at the start of the year itself. They would then plan accordingly. However, now that is not the case. They survive on the buyer's interests; encouragement from their customers and satisfaction from their workers keep them going. She says that the value is increasing, but the workers are decreasing. They have about fifty permanent employees, and the rest is temporary, around a hundred to two hundred.

She noted that Nepali people don't understand that carpet weaving is an art, and that the weavers are artists, as they have a lot of knowledge. Instead of going to the Gulf countries to do labor, people can work in the carpet industry; it is a well-respected profession. After my conversation with her, I realized that the tale of the carpet industry in Nepal is an unfortunate one. There is high potential, economically as well as culturally, but there is not much of an audience here.

The industry's narrative began with Tibetan refugees looking for a way to resettle, in the 60's when the Swiss showed interest in the carpets, seeing a future in the industry. The art was exported to many European nations. There was great demand and the profits were soaring, until their decline due to competition with other countries, issues of child labor, environmental concerns, lack of productive involvement from the government, inflation, and unrealistic demands from the labor unions. The good news, though, can be seen in the state of the industry today: even though the volume of exports is lower, the overall value of the industry has not dropped; the carpets are of a higher quality now and the price per square meter is on the rise.

The potential that the Swiss saw then, the carpet industry still has it, and knowing how satisfied Sita is with her work fills me with hope for this future of this industry. Hand-woven art is immortal, and an industry that is preserving something so important should be protected, too.



Craft Product

# Blissful Sips of Golden Peaks

WORDS EVANGELINE NEVE

In researching and hunting down wonderful made-in-Nepal items for the magazine, we might occasionally encounter products that are completely new and original, something that we've not only never heard of, but possibly never even thought of. However, to be honest with you, that doesn't happen very often. Most of the time, what we're encountering is something traditional, maybe even commonplace, but with a creator who has put an innovative, fascinating spin on it—something that takes something we thought we knew and serves it up in a totally new way. It's always a joy to be taken by surprise in this way.

These were some of my thoughts when I met up with Sushmita Agrawal

of Golden Peak Tea. Tea? What's so new and interesting about tea, you might ask? Well, I might have said the same thing, but when I first heard about her business, I was so curious I tracked her down in person, which was a bit of a challenge, as her business is nearly internet-exclusive. But, more on that later.

About two years ago, Sushmita began to get interested in tea; there was already a connection, as her family is involved in the export tea business, which led her to realize that a majority of Nepal's best teas were being sold abroad. She had the idea to start a small business of exclusively curated teas and blends, aimed at those locals and expats who are looking for something special

and different in their tea-drinking. Since December, she's been selling her handmade teas, mostly through Facebook. It may seem strange to call a tea "handmade", but that's really what it is: Sushmita has traveled to eastern Nepal and visited farms and met workers. When the tea she selects arrives in Kathmandu, she carefully mixes it into her proprietary blends—the reason her teas have become so popular—and hand packages it fresh for each order. There are between 10-15 of these blends, and Sushmita works with more than 100 ingredients, all naturally grown and chemical and preservative free. The packaging is all foil, paper and fabric—plastic free and good for the environment, which is a clear plus, too.

**While most of the teas are green or black tea-based, there are several all-herbal blends that have become very popular, such as those aimed at good digestion, restful sleep, etc.**



While most of the teas are green or black tea-based, there are several all-herbal blends that have become very popular, such as those aimed at good digestion, restful sleep, etc. When a customer contacts her, they can either buy one of the already available blends, or else explain to Sushmita what they need, and she'll mix something up especially for them. Even with the established blends, though, each batch is made to order, ensuring maximum freshness.

When I first heard about this business model, I admit to being a bit of a skeptic. I'm old-fashioned and like to walk into a store and look and touch and pick stuff up before committing to a purchase. However, after speaking with Sushmita and learning about the reasoning behind it, I began to come around. Buying directly from Golden Peak Tea online means that customers are getting something that's freshly made, and hasn't been sitting in a shop for months under unknown and perhaps less-than-ideal conditions, slowly going stale and thereby losing flavor and effectiveness.

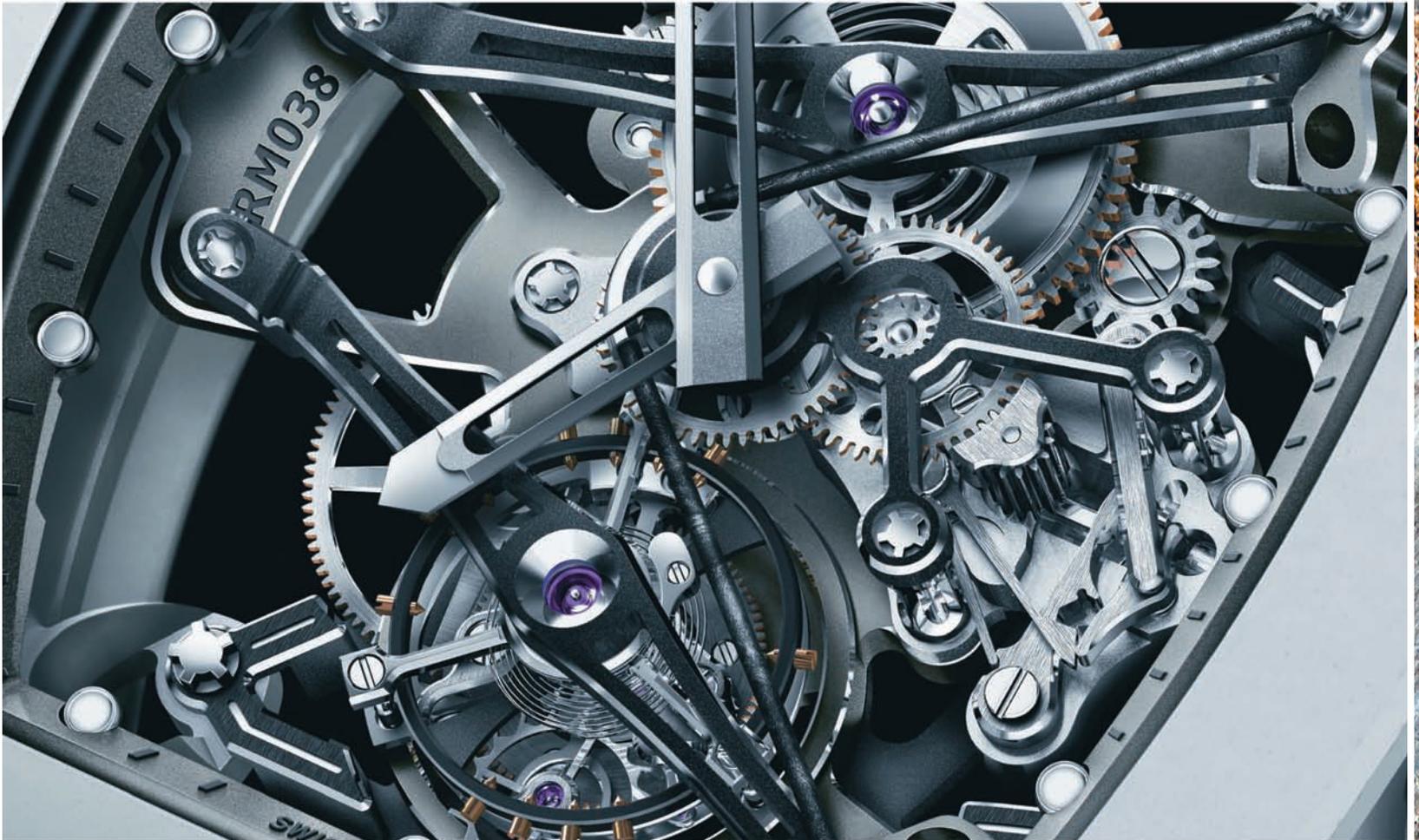
The green tea with lemongrass-ginger blend, both ingredients that are native to Nepal, has been such a hit with customers that there was none left when I visited. I got to taste and see several other blends, though: the Mint Refresh Tea has an aroma that is just out of this world, and Restful Sleep, which includes chamomile and hibiscus, among other things, is a fantastic caffeine-free option.

Sushmita is passionate about Nepal and the future: "Nepal has a lot of potential, both people and resources wise," she tells me, and the joy she gets from putting this wonderful, high-quality, made-in-Nepal product into the hands of people here is clear. While it may have been easier to use the tea network her family already had, she instead traveled to Ilam to visit small farmers and producers herself, see what they were growing and making, and ensure that she could get the best for her business. It's small but growing, and is clearly bringing happiness to many people.

*You can check it out for yourself at <https://www.facebook.com/Goldenpeaktea/>*

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# Adventure

GEARS • EXPERIENCE • PLACE • HOW TO





Experience

# Gliding above Awesome Scenery

WORDS SHRETI PANDEY

We woke up during a drizzling rainy morning in a hotel at Lakeside, Pokhara, on a Monday in April. Oh no! Was a dream adventure going to be cancelled due to the uncertain? Pokhara is so unpredictable when it comes to the weather. There was a high chance our paragliding trip would be canceled. So it was around 8:00 a.m. in the morning, and we were in a less than cheerful mood.

Although, they do say when you want something with all your heart and soul, there's no way you cannot achieve it. So, perhaps thanks to our positivity of getting the adventure done on that very day, the rain stopped pouring. We were informed by the hotel staff that a van was going to arrive and drive us to the take-off point, Sarangkot. It is 2.4 kilometers to the north of Lakeside, at an altitude of 1592 meters. By vehicle, it took us around 30 minutes to get there.

On reaching the place, we felt a real sense of relief. This was really going to happen! With the weather still a little gloomy, we had to wait for the sky to get clearer. With a Real juice in

our hand from a small tea shop, we killed time talking, taking pictures, and chatting with the pilots. Fortunately for us that the weather started to favor us, and the pilots geared up with the gliders and started to issue instructions.

After a while, I heard "C'mon, it's your turn." Yes, now it was my turn to fly. The pilot asked me to be sure to follow his instructions all the way through the flight. And I was like, why wouldn't I be an obedient student to have such a wonderful time? I put my helmet on and got into the harness that was attached to the glider. Now, it was the time to make the jump. 1, 2, 3...run and jump...and I was floating through the cool breeze above the serene Fewa Lake of Pokhara.

"You're a lucky girl," said the pilot, while we flew, taking pictures and videos. Wow! That view of Fewa was so amazing from the sky. I could see the greenery around and other gliders flying below and above me. And, when I was gliding, I was not just flying and observing the scenario quietly. The pilot kept our flight so entertained

by recording every moment and talks we had.

Now, it's time for acro. And yeah, it was a surprise. The pilot swung the glider this way and that, pulling off some awesome airborne tricks and stunts. His skills were definitely worthy of compliments. After the stunts, we flew for around five minutes longer. I asked the pilot if we could glide a little more, but he had to say no due to the unstable weather conditions. I would have flown for hours if the glider was under my control. That didn't happen but I was still happy—my dream of flying had become a reality. We landed on the bank of Fewa Lake and ended our flight with a round of applause and thumbs up pose for the GoPro.

It was 20 minutes of adventure and fun that was completely safe, yet absolutely exciting. I was lucky to fly with a pilot who had over 15 years of experience, and we ended our flights and got into the van, saying our goodbyes and thank-yous to the pilots for such a lovely, once in a lifetime experience.



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# Travel

EXPERIENCE • MY JOURNEY • TRAVELOGUE • PEOPLE • FOOD



Experience

# Journey of a Climbing Family

WORDS JOLANA WHYTE PHOTOS COURTESY OF KANCHI MAYA TAMANG





The journey starts early in the morning. I get a chance to witness the busy local life of those up at the crack of dawn: people sweeping stairs, later, young college students walking to their early tuitions, and surprisingly empty roads.

I'm sitting in a car with two Everest climbers; behind the wheel is Pemba, who has this year climbed the grand Sagarmatha twice in one week, and in the back seat, his sister Dawa Diki, who as a single mother joined her brother for the first time. We are heading towards the bus park, the potholes in the road around Boudha are unforgiving and we get a few bumps. Pemba spontaneously starts humming some Tibetan mantras and seems unfazed by the poor conditions of the Kathmandu roads. I asked him where he learnt these chants, and he responds that when he was a young child he used to follow one of his brothers around who was a Lama, and now when walking alone in the mountains he often recites them. He drops us off at the bus park, wishes us a good journey, and then we are met with the hustlers of bus stations, shouting out names of destinations to attract more passengers. We get our tickets and hang around to be met by the bus conductor, who seems to have a few unfinished words with other rivals, and only then takes us swirling around all the other buses towards ours. The seat is in front, which is highly recommended when taking long off-road journeys. More women push in next to the driver at the front, and bags are piled carelessly behind the driver's seats where our legs meet.

We stop and start for ages before picking up speed, and the view of busy Kathmandu with its clamor and dust changes to green foliage. I ask how long the journey will take, and Dawa Diki just replies, "We will reach by evening." I understand when a time is not given that we are going further than I have ever been, and settle for the joys of changing scenery and sound of Nepali love songs.

We are heading to Dolakha district, and the views are changing to hills of deep green forests and majestic waterfalls. We reach a small industrial village by 6:00 p.m. and start our trek the next morning, entering the Rolwaling valley. Everything looks just bigger. No wonder the Rolwaling valley is famous for recruiting among the best of Everest porters and climbers. Climbing up, to an increasing heart rate, I stop and



look at the beauty around me. There is no need for fitness training, the lifestyle itself takes care of that.

As we climb up, I learn from Dawa Diki that they have two homes, the first in the village of Naa, at 4180 m above sea level, where her mother stays during summer, and the second home in a village called Bedding (3690 m) during winter. Her mother, Kinjung Sherpa, now lives there alone. In my imagination, I wonder what it must have been like bringing up 12 children, the household rituals, and the scarcity of crops, as the summer season is very short.

Their father, Chirang Norbu Sherpa, who worked as a porter for Tenzing and Hillary's famous expedition, was the inspiration for young Pemba, and he told many stories from their journey. His father taught him everything about climbing, and the tough peaks around the village gave him a fitness level many would envy. At that time, school was not available to them there, so the older children's education would be the mountains, valleys, and rivers. I look at Pemba, now 38, with his slim body

and medium height: he holds the Guinness World Record for fastest ascent, and is a seasoned, veteran climber. His nickname is Pemba Speed Sherpa, and truly this man does everything at speed, but never acts like a celebrity. I sense a kindness and humbleness—a lesson I've learnt later on the track, a lesson that only tough conditions teach. If you sit long enough around the mountains and deep wild rivers, values like respect and humility are taught without textbooks.

He encouraged his other siblings to join the climbing industry—two older brothers, Pemba Gyaljen and Phurba Thundu—who climbed Mt. Everest three times. Phurba Thundu passed away in the avalanche on Mount Pumari in 2006. Soon, the younger brothers joined, and Nima Gyaljen has already climbed eight times and Phurpa Tenzing 13 times. Their sixth brother, Phurba Thinley (Thulo Kancha in Nepali), who during off-season lives in Innsbruck, Austria, has climbed it three times so far.

This year, as part of the Women Empowerment Expedition 2018, Dawa Diki, their sister and my traveling com-



panion, stood on the top of Everest for the first time in her life. When I asked her how much she had to prepare and how difficult it was for her, she replied that she did not have much time for training, as she is looking after two sons. Sadly, her husband, along with other climbers, died in the 2015 avalanche. As we continue our trek, she softly encourages me to go further, after I stop and sit and stare. I think it is this quiet strength that all the siblings share: that and the will to go further. I, in the meantime, settle my breath and irritation, and eventually decide to keep going, climbing to instructions, “It is not too far now.”

Drinking milk tea up in the lodge, the views are amazing and pain is far gone. I learned yet more about the family’s climbing records: to date, seven members of the family have summited Everest, and this year on May 23, four stood there together. Pemba has summited seven times without oxygen, and in 2008, summited twice in four days, as well as three times in 10 days in 2007. On May 21, 2004, he became the fastest person to climb Everest—8 hours and 10 minutes. Pemba also reached many other 8000 m peaks like Lhotse, Manaslu, Sishhapangma, Cho Oyu, Amadablam, and many other 7000- and 6000-meter-high mountains. This year, he summited Everest for the 18th time!

His younger brother, Phurpa Tenzing, is also a record holder, as the



youngest person to summit, amongst other records. At the age of 28, he has already summited 13 times. Pemba Dorje Sherpa is proud of his family’s achievements and excited for his youngest brother, Sonam Pemba, 22, who will join in next year’s expedition, which will make it 8 members of the same family to reach the top. For all these amazing records, this family is so supportive, kind, and welcoming, and behaves in the most ordinary manner. Thanks to their

work, they are able to give quality education to their children, and also their youngest sister, only eighteen. Pemba is also working on a campaign called, “We will rise”, to bring new regulations for all expeditions to deal with the increasing level of rubbish on Everest. The aim is to clean up camps 1, 2, 3, and 4, and is planned for the spring of 2019.

Just one thing: never ask Pemba how long the climb up to Simigau takes. What took me three hours took him just one!

Getaway

# Homestay in Panauti

No Better Way to Understand a Place but to Live There

WORDS VENCY LI



It is the green season in the Nepali calendar. I learned this after I arrived at Panauti, and through my eyes, after two days' homestay, Panauti totally defined the beauty of green in Nepal, not only because of the pleasant scenery, but also the unsophisticated folk humaneness of the locals. Though the monsoon season was not perfect for tourists, the misty rainy day highlighted the obscure beauty of this mysterious city.

After around a one-and-a-half-hour drive, we received a warm reception by the local hostess in the community hall. Garlanded with morning glories just picked up from the trees and being given a tika on our foreheads, they greeted us passionately and briefed us about our two-day itinerary.

It should be a sunny noon, but with the dense cloud, only several rays of sunshine peek through. The whole of Panauti is located in a valley that is 36 km away from Kathmandu. In this

supramundane village, within the zone of 120-yard radius, only a rooftop can help you take in everything at a glance. At an elevation of around 1500 meters, I felt like I was on a boundless plateau.

Along the way to my one-night accommodation, green fields of rice and corn pictured this cozy village with overflowing vigor. Girls and women were also seen wearing green and yellow bangles on their hands and their palms were decorated with mehendi. The month of Shrawan is one of the most important months in Nepal, and integrating with the greens of the natural environment, the local females also dressed themselves up to be a part of this picturesque landscape.

Anjana Shrestha was my hostess. Big smile and bright eyes were her signature traits. Guided by her, we strolled on the streets, sometimes greeted and smiled at by locals. The cottages alongside were painted with pink, blue, yellow, and

other colors, looking like the houses in fairy tales. As I was wondering about the color of my accommodation, I saw a comparatively big white building behind a blooming violet tree. A conspicuous yellow signboard hanging on the wall read, "Panauti Community Homestay, Anjana Shrestha"; then, I knew this was the place.

Seven years ago, Anjana's father and his four brothers built their big house, which has five independent but connected buildings. The Shrestha family has been rooted in Panauti for generations. Now, all of their five families still live together, so whenever they need each other, they just need to speak a little bit louder on their interconnected balconies; then they can communicate without any electronic device! "Sometimes, we have a big dinner together. If my aunts don't want to cook by themselves, they will join us whenever they want." As young people born and bred in the digi-



tal age, this kind of original lifestyle was unfamiliar and interesting for me, from which I learnt how close a big family can be, something that I could never learn from a big modern city.

After I settled down, it was already 12 o'clock. Anjana cooked a simple but delicious lunch for me, and accompanied me while I was eating. She sat in front of me quietly and paid close attention to my facial expression, worried about whether I liked the food, and actually, I loved the local food. The conversation ranged around several topics, and it was clear that she was well educated. Before being a homestay hostess, she was a pre-primary school teacher, but she had been suffering from backache when she heard about the homestay program from her friends. It has been five years since the first day she decided to join in. "This program for women really helped me a lot, even if I had a job before. I can earn money by myself and at the same time

look after my aging parents and young sister." In her spare time, her families also sew cloth bags, and even garments, for the guests.

Anjana's mother is now taking care of the small grocery on the ground floor of their house. "I think the whole village benefits a lot from the development of tourism. Small shop owners like my mother sell more products than before, and also, the local markets that we usually go to buy the food for our guests. So, you are always welcomed by the people here as guests."

I lived on the first floor. There are two rooms served for the guests, both of which were decorated with colorful pieces. Sunflower-shaped cushions were neatly laid on the sofa with the background of a pink wall, and through the gauze curtain, I could have a panoramic view of the vast green fields, feeling peaceful and pleasant. Everything was prepared for the comfort of visiting

guests. Fresh coats of paint, comfortable mattresses, Western-style toilets, and hot water were installed, which were also the standard for other hosting families, and it was as comfortable as staying in a hotel.

While hanging out in the busy downtown, travelers from all over the world can be seen on the antique streets. Anjana told me that most of them came from Italy, Netherlands, and other European countries. "Though it is the off season for tourism, Italians now have their vacation in August, so these days the homestay families are full of guests." Obviously, homestay helped her learn a lot from overseas guests, opening her eyes and mind, and she knew much more than the villagers. "Maybe we don't have chance to travel to your countries, but we can learn from you, to know what the outside world looks like and gain more knowledge," she said.



**They never kept a distance with me as a guest, but treated me as their family member. I believed that's the meaning of homestay**



After a half-day tour of the center of Panauti, exploring the ancient Newari culture and impressive temples, and browsing the local museum, the charm and magic of this old city impressed me a lot. Anjana's mother was waiting for us in the kitchen for the cooking-teaching session. Every step of cooking the local dhal bhaat was covered, from preparing the raw material to adding various types of flavors, and also rolling chapati breads. To experience an exotic lifestyle, food has to be an integral part of the adventure. It can't be better than if you get the chance to be instructed by a local housewife. Finally, I had a gorgeous meal with the whole family, and seeing that Anjana's father's plate was filled with meat, exactly same as with my father's bowl, I felt like I was having dinner at home with my own family. They never kept a distance with me as a guest, but treated me as their family member. I believed that's the meaning of homestay, to live like one of them and understand the new place.

# Royal Mountain Travel and Homestay Community

## Future of Tourism Industry in Nepal

WORDS VENCY LI

### Commencement of Homestay Program

The idea of homestay started from a special experience of Mr. Shiva Dhakal, the managing director of Royal Mountain Travel (RMT). Seven years ago, one of his colleagues, who lived in Panauti, invited him to his house. Impressed by the charming scenery there, they started to think about how to bring tourism to this beautiful place. Then, attracting travelers to stay with the local families and experience their lifestyle came to their minds. Beginning with his house, they sent travelers to Panauti, though they were not sure about whether the travelers would think it was good and comfortable to live in others' homes, and surprisingly, they got pretty positive feedback. It was not until then that they realized staying with the local families is an experience that you cannot get from the pictures or video caps on the internet, but you have to try by yourself and then you know about the real life in Nepal. From then on, the promotion of homestay program was initiated.

### Impacts the Local Women and Community

"Women are the ones who really care about others," said Dhakal. When they were thinking who should take charge of this program and get the benefits, the women in the family became their best

candidates. After they joined the program, basic English training was provided for them to learn how to communicate with the guests. From the program, they not only got educated, but also became economically empowered, which could totally change their lives. Besides, with much more income, the villagers were able to donate money to preserve the local heritage sites, and even support the local schools there. "Tourism brought huge potential to these villages. Homestay program is a social enterprise that brings remarkable changes to them." For these developing areas, these changes couldn't even be imagined before.

### Future of Homestay Community

In the future, you can not only live with a local family in the community, but also enjoy mountain biking and yoga courses during the trip. Hiking is already being provided as an optional part of your tour. Currently, RMT is cooperating with Booking.com, trying to build an online platform for homestay program to share information, where you can book your homestay directly, and the host family will know about you before you arrive. "By 2020, there will be more than 20 communities and 400 families in every area of Nepal connected to a homestay network. We want to be the model of homestay," declared Mr. Dhakal.

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Trekking

# A Monsoon Hike from Magar Gaon to Chovar Village & Panga

WORDS AND PHOTOS DINESH RAI



View from the roof of the monastery

During the monsoon it's a good idea to avoid trails that get too muddy and are too narrow. Slipping and sliding is fun as long as you don't hurt yourself, but it's better to be safe than sorry. Taking the broader roads means less chances of attracting those dreaded leeches, which are a nuisance during the rainy season.

I start my hike at 8:20 from Magar Gaon above Bhainsepati towards Chovar, because from here on, there is not much traffic. Soon after, the road climbs a wee bit, and I come across a smaller blacktopped road known as

Shanti Marg that goes left, and I take that route. By 8:30, I come across a group of houses and a broad concrete road climbing steeply on the right. This leads to the Batsala Devi Temple on the hilltop. The road veers left after a short climb, and at the end is a stone staircase on the right that goes straight towards the temple. On my previous visit there was no priest here, but now a young priest and his family live within the premises. "We've been living here for a year now. My house was destroyed by the earthquake and I am rebuilding it," he says, partly explaining why he lives here. The temple is simple but has a large compound with many tiny shrines besides the main temple under a pipal tree. From outside the temple, there are great views of the extensive, verdant rice fields, with Khokana as a backdrop, and across the Bagmati on the right you can see Tauda lake and the surroundings, all from this vantage point.

Instead of following the main road, I take the rough track that goes down from the east side of the temple. There is no clear path, so I walk on the grass to the right to reach it. The path can be seen clearly if you climb a spiral staircase to reach the roof of the priest's house. The path is not very muddy, except for the last portion. You can see the white façade of the Jal Binayak Temple and the Bagmati River soon after it emerges from the narrow Chovar gorge and heads out of the valley. I walk near a cluster of pine trees listening to the sound of dozens of birds and reach the main road coming from Magar Gaon

at 9:00 a.m. It goes on down to the bridge at Chovar gorge, but there is a short-cut to avoid the traffic which gets quite heavy and polluting around here.

A group of bikers come toiling up the hill. "Where are you headed?" I ask, and after a momentary struggle to remember the name, the foreigner says, "To Dhapakhel." You begin to see the birds that flock around the Bagmati River as you look down. I cross the bridge and look back up the hill to see at least half a dozen restaurants on the hillside. They have better food than down below. Here, below the Manjushree Park, there are quite a few cheaper eateries. It's 9:20 am. Several local buses are parked nearby, and one of them has an interesting route. It starts here, climbs up the hill, but avoids Magar Gaon and Bhainsepati and instead goes down and heads straight for the Medicity Hospital, which cuts down the journey considerably, reaching Ring Road, Ekantakuna, in about 10 minutes. From there, it goes to Jawalakhel, Lagankhel, out to the Ring Road again, to Koteshwar, and via Putali Sadak, it heads towards Naxal, Maharajgunj, and goes all the way to Budanilkantha. The other buses go to Ratna Park via Bhainsepati.

The Jal Binayak Temple beside the Bagmati lies below the row of shops. The earthquake of 2015 destroyed the main shrine and it has been torn down to the ground. However, the building that surrounds the temple still stands. It's the outer white structure that we see from a distance. Be very careful while walking down towards the river from the temple, as the large stone



Rice fields on the way to Khokana



steps can be dangerously slippery, especially if you are wearing your hiking boots with tough rubber soles. Further downstream is the remains of the old cement factory that was closed down because of the severe pollution it caused all around.

At 9:45, I start walking back towards Kathmandu along the main road, and it turns sharply right to come up to the top, where there are makeshift shops selling snacks. You can also walk through Manjushree Park to arrive there, but it's steep. It takes about 10 minutes to reach the top. There's a motor road going up on the left that leads to Chovar village on the hilltop. The new monastery that's still under construction can be seen sitting at the top of the hill. It's a short walk to Chovar village past Thapa Gaon. According to locals, the Thapas were brought here by Prthivi Narayan Shah after the invasion, as Chovar is a Newar village predominantly inhabited by Maharjans. The first thing I come across is a tea shop with a spectacular view of the valley. One can truly relax here, drinking the old man's tea and watching the ever expanding city sprawled below. It's 10:00 a.m. now.

Nearby is a white *chaitya* and turning right from the pati you can see the old Aadinath shrine. There are some old Newar folks at the pati playing the ancient game called pasa. The inside walls of the rectangular building surrounding the shrine has metal plates nailed onto them. The belief goes like this: if you give up something that you use every day and is valuable to you, you gain merit by handing it over to the shrine as a kind of sacrifice. The shrine itself was partly damaged by the earthquake of 2015. A large colorful prayer wheel can be seen in one corner and many small ones that have seen better days, around the shrine.

Instead of going back down to reach the monastery, it's easier to approach from behind it. So I walk past the white *chaitya* that one first comes across here and I go further into Chovar; there's a small track going left towards the gumba (monastery). The track goes around the boundary wall of the gumba and reaches the front gate. There's the old smaller monastery on the right which is run by Buddhist nuns alone, which includes blowing the long horns and doing all the pujas on their own. Next to it under construction is a massive monastery which once completed will

completely dominate this little village. I climb up the stairs and reach the roof. What a glorious 360 degree view of the valley below! I'm ecstatic going around the roof from corner to corner taking pictures of the city on one side and the villages on the other. When asked, the senior nun tells me, "This is Chovar Gumba." But I'm sure it has an official name which is usually in Tibetan.

I retrace my steps around the wall and go back to the village but this time I head down and discover Hari's Coffee Shop. Hari Gubaju tells me, "I've been running this shop for about fifteen years now." He makes really good coffee and it's a reasonable Rs 55. Chovar is amazingly peaceful; as I sit on the doorstep of his shop sipping coffee, all I hear is the sound of birds and the distant tapping of a carpenter at work. It's been drizzling all morning, but now the sun comes out for a brief spell. I'm told if I carry on down the road I will reach Panga. One of the landmarks is a large pipal tree along the way. "Go past the big tree and follow the pitched road," says one of the Chovar residents.

At 10:45, I'm ready to move once more; it begins to drizzle again as I bid goodbye to Hari. I follow the pitched road that later turns into a concrete

The busts of the martyrs.



road and it's very steep making me take careful, smaller steps. But the first settlement I reach is not Panga. This is Itagol I am told, and I turn right at the end. Further on I finally reach a four way crossing from where Panga begins. You can walk from Chovar to Panga in less than 30 minutes. The main road is actually a parallel road on the right which meets this smaller road at the next crossing. Next to the large pipal tree at the crossing are the busts of the four famous martyrs who were executed by the Rana regime.

My interest in Panga was aroused by a book entitled "The Newars" by Gopal Singh Nepali as most of his research was based on this settlement. Panga is quite big and many buses arrive here from Ratna Park. But there are not too many quality eateries and the place itself has nothing much of interest. There are better restaurants at the bottom of the hill where the road from Panga meets the main road to Dakshinkali. The first one is called Missed Call Restaurant. The name may be strange but their tea is petty good.

If you haven't had enough walking for the day, a hike up to Kirtipur is quite interesting. There is a direct road going up to the Bhairav temple



Aadinath shrine in Chovar

in the town. A Thai temple known as Shri Kirti Bihar has been built just below the city which is worth a visit. At the top of Kirtipur are located some remarkable pagoda-style temples among which the Bagh Bhairav temple is distinguished by the weapons nailed to the walls of the shrine. These weapons were used during the epic battle

against the invading Gorkhali forces of Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1767. Kirtipur is one of the historic places in the valley as it put up a strong resistance before it eventually capitulated and surrendered to the Gorkhali troops. The town is also known for good Newari food and great views of Kathmandu.



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# The Buzz

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## Ramen Tasting at Park Village, Buddhanilkantha

On Friday, 17 August, 2018, the Park Village Resort in Budhanilkantha hosted a ramen-tasting event with the KGH group's new partners, Hokkaido Nepal Pvt. Ltd. The Japanese company plans to open a ramen shop inside Park Village in January 2019. The freshly made ramen and other Japanese delicacies were a big hit with the crowd, and the opening will be eagerly awaited by those of us in the city who are Japanese food lovers!

## Polish Art Posters by Lech Majewski

Organized by the Polish institute New Delhi in collaboration with the Nepal Art Council, the exhibition titled 'Visual Language of Lech Majewski', was inaugurated on Friday, 17 August 2018 at NAC, running till 30 Augusts. The display showcased thirty Polish Art Posters, made for a number of purposes including theater plays, festivals, and even a book cover! The images were bright, quirky, and definitely make you think. The opening was followed by a concert featuring local musicians performing Polish jazz tunes.





## Dalai-La Art Space Opens

Haptic Perception, an art exhibit opened on Wednesday, 22 August 2018 and featured work from Asha Dangol, Bidhata KC, Sandhya Silwal, Manish Lal Shrestha, Roshan Bhandari and Erina Tamrakar. This is the first event held in the newly opened elegant little gallery at the Dalai-la Boutique Hotel in Thamel; we hope it is the first of many!

## 'Panorama 60's: Pioneers of Nepali Modernism'

This exhibition, featuring the work of eight of Nepal's modern art pioneers, was held at Bikalpa Art Center from 3 August 2018 through to the 31st of August. Its aims were to provide a showcase of Nepal contemporary art from the 1960s, and to 'to educate the general public on the emergence and development of modernism in Nepali art.' Featured artists: Manuj Babu Mishra, Shashi Bikram Shah, Batsa Gopal Vaidya, Krishna Manandhar, Ramananda Joshi, Indra Pradhan, Gehendra Man Amatya and Shashi Kala Tiwari.

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Where am I?

# Mar-a-Lago of the East

WORDS AMAR B. SHRESTHA



Once upon a time (about three decades ago, to be more specific), the valley of Kathmandu was a veritable Shangri-La. Flights were few and far between, and most tourists were backpackers who traveled through India and made their way here on diesel fume-spouting buses via the old Tribhuvan Highway that climbed up and up and up, traversing many hairpin bends on the way. I remember consoling a long-haired hippy while traveling on one such journey by saying, “You know, the road to heaven is a rough one, so too is the road to Shangri-La!”

Well, the other month I traveled to another place, not far from the city, that is also a sort of Shangri-La, and yes, reaching there was also a pretty hectic affair. I went there on my trusty Honda bike, and I can tell you, although it has seen

me through many trials and tribulations through the six years it has been with me, this time around, even its sturdiness did not seem up to the task it was put through. However, it did not let me down (Japanese machines are the best!), and I arrived at my destination safe and sound.

And, once I started up the gently climbing private road to this modern-day Shangri-La and beheld all that lay before my eyes, I knew I would be willing to make many more such trips anytime I had the opportunity. In other words, the vista was simply wonderful. It’s actually a famous forest that’s been tamed by the hands of man. Once upon a time (again, some three decades ago, to be more precise), I had come here with a few friends in a taxi. At the time, armed guards stood at the gate and the road led

to a lodge that was mostly used by folks to conduct amorous activities. In fact, I had heard that the protection offered to amorous adventurers was royal courtesy of the youngest prince of the time. We had spent the night at this lodge, and I still remember the crisp and refreshing water that was served to us in a large jug. And, oh yes, there was even a tiger, a Royal Bengal, no less, in a fenced-off area in the jungle.

Perhaps the lodge is still there (the tiger is definitely not!), a part of the current modern resort that is world famous not only for its scenic location, but also for its great golf course. This resort is one of the few such resorts so close to the capital, and given a better road (it has been repaired to some degree, even as I write this), many more will flock here



for a great weekend or two. Fact is, the road was just fine before, and plenty of weekenders made their way to this bit of heaven on Earth.

The verdant surroundings and the vast green fields give this site a truly reinvigorating air. Stay a night or two in the resort's well-furnished rooms, and in the evening, as dusk falls, you may see deer grazing and monkeys come out of the forest, prowling for any edibles around. There's an outdoor seating area overlooking the lovely golf course where you can sit comfortably sipping wine or beer or scotch and snacking on some of the resort's many scrumptious delicacies. Cooler days, it's ideal for basking in the sun in the afternoon, and warm evenings, it's just great for catching the breeze with a chiller to help you along.

If golf is your big thing, then this is where you'll find paradise. What if golf is little more than just a four-letter word for you? Fear not, my friend, the resort not only has enough golf equipment, it will also arrange lessons for you by well-versed professionals. There are stories of guests staying far beyond their planned stay because they got so infatuated with the sport, and you may, too. I'm fibbing, of course, but couldn't resist it! Actually, being a man of action myself, I would love to spend a month or two in this wonderful resort, and say adieu only after I'm ready to swing the iron with at least as much swagger as Mr. Trump when in Mar-a-Lago.



## Team Building

The challenges we face today are increasingly demanding, complex and often unpredictable. They require individuals and teams to change - to think and work in new and effective ways.



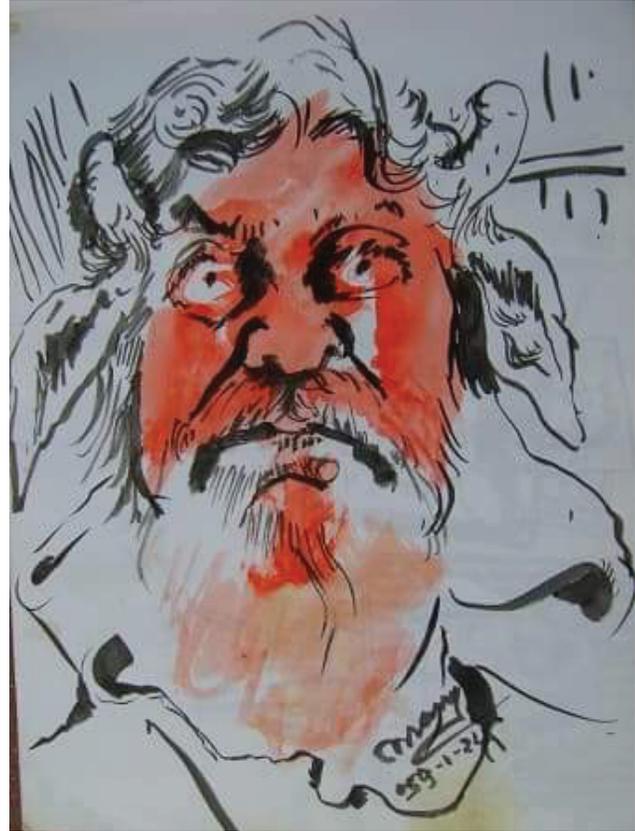
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## Heritage Tale

# Passing Away of a Hermit

WORDS SWOSTI RAJBHANDARI KAYASTHA

ART MANUJ BABU MISHRA PHOTOS ROSHAN MISHRA

Almost a year ago, in November 2017, I went to meet Manuj Babu Mishra to talk to him about an exhibition of Nepalese contemporary art to be held in Europe in 2019. A signboard at the entrance of his house has the word 'Hermitage' on it. And as we all know, hermitage is an abode of a hermit. And, a hermit is a person who has retired from society or someone confined to solitude. This is exactly what the Manuj Babu Mishra did almost 30 years ago. And he had his reasons...

Orphaned at a very young age, Mishra saw life closely at a very young age. He and his younger brother, aged eight, were left to fend for themselves. Every help offered seemed to have ulterior motives. Through the hardships he faced, he lost faith in God, thus giving

birth to the rebel and atheist that we all know Manuj Babu Mishra as! Being the older brother, he took full responsibility of his younger sibling, and even completed his SLC later than his younger brother. After completing his BFA from College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka, in 1969, he took up a government job at Janak Siksha Samagri Kendra. However, he gave up a good government job and the comforts that came with it to continue his art. He always felt that his life was more meaningful than the mundane office routine and signing papers.

He started teaching art at Lalit Kala Campus, Kathmandu, where emerging artists adored him. During that time, there was a political change in Nepal, the democratic movement...with many unfulfilled promises. Unsatisfied and

distressed by the course of events, he confined himself to the boundaries of his home, specifically the studio, on the ground floor of his house. This was a rebellious reaction against the socio-political structure, and his stubborn nature gave way to this confinement that he lived in for the rest of his life. However, the brilliant creations that came forth, I feel, are the result of his withdrawal from the selfish, superficial, and corrupt world, which gave him time to reflect and give full expression to his thoughts.

A very disciplined man by nature, he followed a strict routine thenceforth. He usually woke up at 2-3 a.m. every morning, but of late, around 4 a.m., took a short walk in the garden with a couple of stretches, and then seated himself in his chair and started his engagement with art. He ate his breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner in his studio, not disturbing his artistic productions. Painting for him was a medium to release the discontentment of his mind and heart. Unlike many other Nepali artists, he painted a lot of self portraits, mostly with horns. One would think of the devil, but his son Roshan believes the horn to be associated to that of the bull, who is characterized by a stubborn nature. The bull is the mount of Lord Siva, a common subject in his paintings. Other subjects being: Lord Siva as the destroyer, the trident,

demonic figures, missiles, bombs, war, destruction, and other horrific objects.

In the late 1990s, a particular workshop asking artists to paint their version of the Mona Lisa, opened another chapter in his life. His obsession with Mona Lisa led to innumerable paintings of her, sometimes alone, sometimes with him, and sometimes with his devilish creations. His passion for her compelled him to make an extensive research on Leonardo da Vinci, the creator. Although many writers have their own interpretation of his relationship with her, his younger son Roshan mentions this relationship to be the unexpressed love and affection for his wife. Roshan sees in Manju Babu's Mona Lisa, a reflection of his mother, her jewelry, her beads, her clothes, and her nuances. And, if one observes closely, it seems true.

Roshan also expresses that, his mother was Mishra's muse, every female image his father has ever drawn or painted are in some form or other expressions of his mother. During the times when Mishra was young and just married, it was not socially accepted to express love

and affection, verbally or physically, in the presence of others, so just as his other paintings are the expressions of his mind, based on his experiences in life, I believe his obsession with Mona Lisa could be the visual expressions of his unspoken love for his wife. He lovingly called her 'Pokchi'.

Mishra often expressed that no one would buy his paintings, because they are reflections of his dissatisfactions and filled with subjects and objects of violence, injustice, and other similar topic. That was modesty speaking, however. The truth is that, his paintings are in high demand and famous in Nepal and beyond. A true artist, his expressions also found ways in essays, all related to art. With almost 20 books to his credit, his books are much sought after by the art students for their academic course.

He passed away on August 8, 2018. Being an atheist, he wanted a simple cremation, without ceremonies. However, a five-day mourning ritual was conducted, and now Mishra rests in his heavenly abode.

Roshan, who is currently the director of Taragoan Museum, had been living with his father, and because he chose to take the profession of his father, stayed the closest to him, although he has two older sisters and an elder brother. He says that his father was more of a mentor to him than a father, and thus sees the artist in himself. He has plans to memorialize his father's art and contribution through a museum. With him are almost 150 paintings and numerous sketches. He plans to build a narrative around each painting that will connect the viewer to each object depicted. He is aware that this project should already be making headway, and definitely all those in the art field and beyond can't wait to see this project materialize!

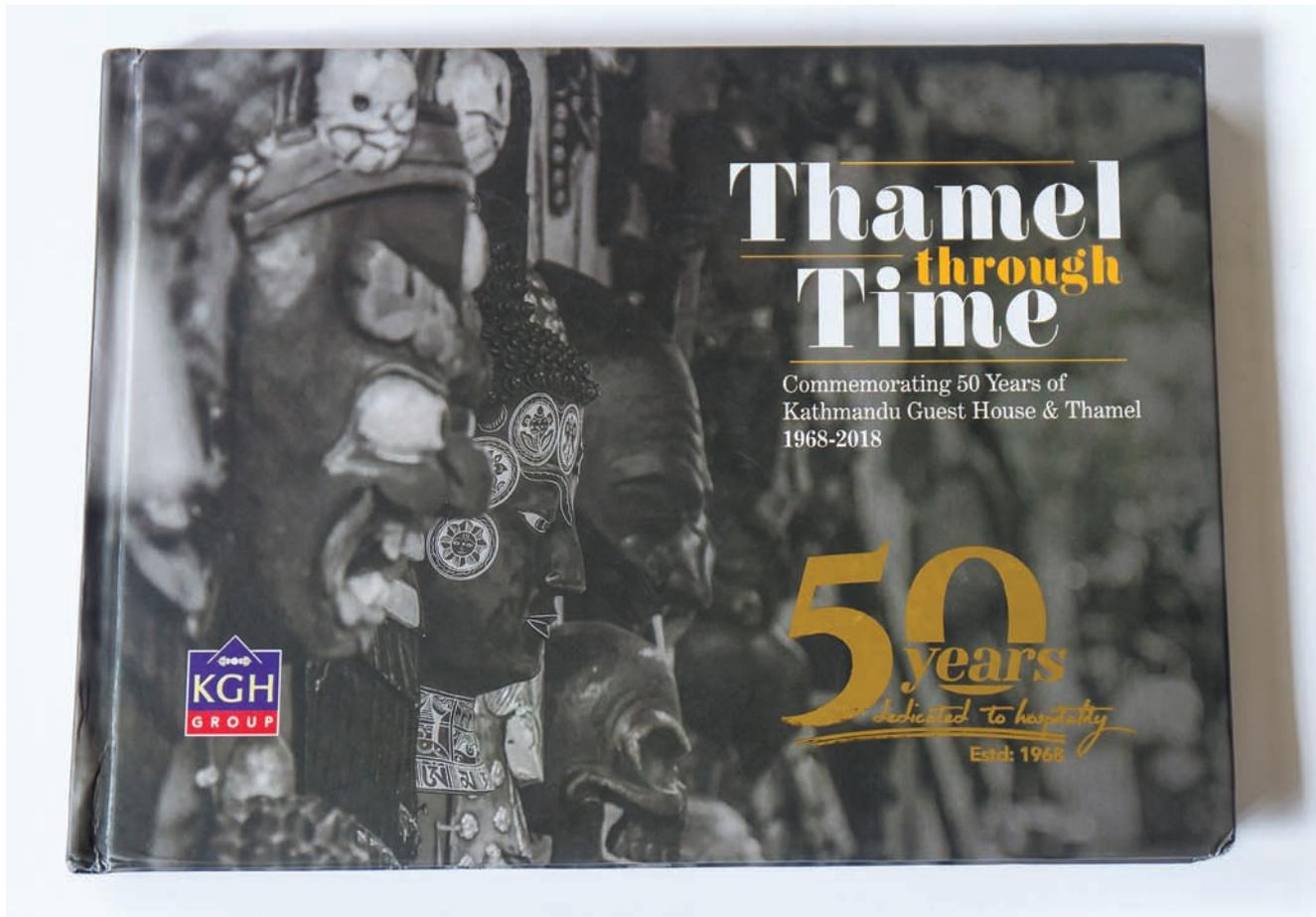
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## Bookworm

# Thamel through Time

REVIEWED BY AMAR B. SHRESTHA

Thamel's growth through the years has been an extraordinary one, so much so that now it has achieved international recognition as one of the world's exotic tourist hubs. Going through Benjamin Linder's entertaining account of Thamel's evolution from a sleepy locality to an easily recognized tourist center in *Thamel through Time* takes you on a rollicking journey through the tourism history of Nepal. It will also make clear the vital role of Kathmandu Guest House in the making of Thamel as it is today.

The time period in this case is fifty years, for that's how long Kathmandu Guest House has been running now. This beautiful coffee table book has been published by the iconic hotel to mark its golden jubilee. And, because it is an icon that has been instrumental in the birth and development of Thamel as a focal point of tourism, as much can be written about its history as can be written about Thamel, which is what Benjamin

Linder does. In fact, the stories of both are so closely intertwined as to make one incomplete without the other.

It is to be expected that such an intertwining is bound to result in helping the account to be more informative, exploratory, and comprehensive. I would go so far as to say that *Thamel through Time*, as of today, is the definitive book on one of the most popular tourist-centric hubs in the world. However, it must also be noted that the only constant is change, and since the changes today happen at lightning speed, one can foresee many more in the coming days. However, history is important, and so we have to thank the author for his painstaking research in making it so refreshingly clear.

Of course, the last five decades has also proven to be a definitive period in the country's movement forward in all spheres, encompassing far-reaching changes, politically and otherwise.

The author has made the task of telling the story (stories) of Kathmandu Guest House and Thamel easier and more concise by dividing it in five main sections, viz. 'The Newars and Thamel', 'The Ranas and Thamel Before Tourism', 'Kathmandu Guest House and The Birth of Thamel (1968-1990)', 'Modern Thamel (1990-2015)', and 'Earthquakes and Beyond (2015-Present)'. With the great earthquakes of 2015 still quite fresh on our minds, we can say that it is a contemporary book, as well.

The excellent collection of photographs do justice to the extremely well-written (and well-researched) text, and this is the highlight of this fascinating book— that the research, copy, and photographs are so supportive of each other. All this makes *Thamel Through Time* a valuable source of information, and a captivating read for travelers old and new.

# "I spend entirely too much time thinking about Thamel!"

A chat with the author of *Thamel Through Time*

WORDS EVANGELINE NEVE

Recently, I had the chance to meet Benjamin Linder; the American has just written *Thamel Through Time*, put out by the Kathmandu Guest House this year to celebrate their 50th anniversary. Benjamin is also in the process of doing his PhD on Thamel, so he's rapidly becoming quite the expert on the subject. We sat in the garden of another old Thamel institution, the Pumpernickel Bakery, to talk about the book, his future plans, and all things Thamel.

**How did you become involved and interested in Thamel in the first place?**

I came to Thamel for the first time in 2008 as a tourist, and I remember even then, I was a freshman in college and I was really struck by Thamel. Because, at that point in time, I had all the mediated images of Nepal in my head; I had come here for this particular imagery or imaginary [view] I had around the country, and Thamel just flew directly in the face of that. I wasn't staying in Thamel, or spending much time there, but I always did remember it.

Then, when it time that I decided I wanted to study anthropology as a doctoral student, I started coming back with more academic eyes and trying to think, is there a project about this place? I started with a project about tourism, and then when I got to grad school at Illinois, Chicago, my advisor quickly suggested that tourism was maybe the least interesting thing about Thamel. Since then, it's been 'off to the races.'

**When you say 'the least interesting thing,' do you mean that in your studies you're focusing more on the cultural anthropological aspect than the tourism?**

Yes, I think that what Nepalis get up to in Thamel—which is a whole diverse array of things; reputable and disrepu-



table, high-class, low class, all these things—whatever differently situated Nepalis are getting up to in Thamel has received so much less attention than the tourist dimensions to the neighborhood. I'm interested in demonstrating that there are many different significances among differently situated Nepalis about Thamel. So I quickly became very interested in how differently situated Nepalis along class, caste, levels of mobility, levels of how long you've spent abroad or not - where you went abroad or where you didn't go abroad, whether you're coming from the village or whether you're an urbanite in Kathmandu, all these things...data that is for the larger project I'm working on shows that depending on who you are, where you're coming from, the space means something quite different. And so, I'm

interested in exploring these different experiences of the same material place.

**When I've mentioned to a few people that I heard someone is doing a PhD about Thamel, everyone is quite amused, and a little puzzled, like 'why would anyone want to do that?' I'm sure you've had that reaction too...**

I absolutely have. Oh yeah. It's also funny the way differently situated people react to my dissertation. I remember once before I ever got funding, I was interviewed by a panel of grant people in the States—and I didn't end up getting the grant—but one guy in the interview sat there, he was looking at my application, and then the only question he asked was, "So, you're applying to go hang out in bars for a year." And I really didn't have a good answer, because in some sense,

yeah, I mean, but I really do believe there's an academic and ethnographic value to highlighting these experiences of—certainly not what most Nepalis are getting up to—but this sort of other way of being Nepali in the 21st century that I think Thamel is really interestingly significant of.

**And how did you come to be involved with the Kathmandu Guest House and the Sakya family, how did that come to be?**

So, others had written about the history of Thamel, but I of course needed some kind of historical background in my dissertation, and I'd been trying to meet Karna Sakya, as a pioneering entrepreneur, for a long time. And, of course, he's a busy person, and there was an acquaintance I knew from other research that I'd been doing in Thamel, and he said, 'Oh, I'm related to him, I can get this off the ground.' So, one day he set it all up, and before we went to meet him—I did end up doing a long interview with him that day—but I met Rajan and Saguni, his son and daughter-in-law who run the flagship Kathmandu Guest House now, and when I explained what I'm doing, they said that they were interested in commemorating the 50th anniversary in some way, and that maybe I could write it. So, it was this nice dovetailing of both of our interests, where I had to write this history that I probably wouldn't publish outside the dissertation, and they wanted this history to commemorate this anniversary, and it really just kind of came together.

**How do you see the Kathmandu Guest House in the context of the development of Thamel as a tourist hub?**

It was the first in this area and it did spark a new, not only a new space, which it did, but also, and this is something my advisor Mark Lichty has written about, it changed the kind of tourism that Nepal was focused on. They absolutely were pioneers in the sense that, up until they started, Freak Street and high-end tourism were the only two dynamics that were going on in Kathmandu, which had really only been going on for less than 20 years. You had these sort of high-end retirees and alpine climbers on the one hand, these sort of high-class people staying at Boris's Royal Hotel, and then on the other hand, you had this now-mythologized Freak Street and pig alley crowd, the Cat Stevens of the world, the hippies that were

washing up in Kathmandu at the end of the trail, whose whole ethos was not to spend much money and live as one with the city, or whatever. The Kathmandu Guest House, when it opened, appears to have been really kind of in the middle between those.

There was a lot of serendipity in what the Kathmandu Guest House did. There was this perfect moment [at the time they opened] .... this is mostly the work of my advisor Mark Lichty, who's written about this, and Rabi Thapa talks about it in his book also (*Thamel, Dark Star of Kathmandu*), there was this backlash against hippy culture in the late 60's; at the same time, around 1972, the late King Birendra decided, 'Tourism is going to be a big part of our economy. I want to do this actively,' and that couldn't be only people who could climb the big peaks, and then these hippies who are not really reflecting well on the city anyway. So, what do you do? Well, we've got all this beautiful nature. So there are these other kinds of machinations going on, creating the possibility of trekking tourism for middle-class Westerners who want to go and hike but don't want to climb Everest. And the Kathmandu Guest House really specialized in Thamel, or what was then not Thamel but a sort of backwater on the north of the city. And, of course, they weren't alone, there were other people who were serendipitously involved as well, like the Hotel Utse people, it wasn't a hotel then, but they were there in 1971 right around Narshing Chowk and they helped popularize Tibetan style momos in the city, which are of course now ubiquitous. It was certainly not one person's effort, and Karna Sakya will be the first to tell you that, but, yes, Thamel [and the KGH] represented a new kind of tourism in the city, namely middle-class trekking tourism.

**You're also obviously continuing on with your studies—so when are you planning to publish the result of that? Something else about Thamel?**

Yeah, absolutely. I'm hoping to finish my PhD dissertation within the next two years. That's a much more contemporary project. So, this project with the Kathmandu Guest House is more or less the historical background, with more detail than what will be included in the dissertation. The long-term history going back to Manjushree, basically, will be chapter one in my dissertation, and then

from there I launch off to say that, yes, Thamel developed as this place catering to a new type of tourist, but really—and I start the transformation with 1990, but it really doesn't take root until the last ten years—since then Nepalis have steadily [claimed it]. I'm much more interested now in what particularly Nepali consumers, but also laborers at all scales from the entrepreneurs to the hash dealers and rickshaw drivers, I'm interested in the different ways that Thamel gets experienced by different subjects, and really just trying to reclaim Thamel as more than just this kind of unimportant foreign scab on the city. I really see it as more than that, and I think increasingly, Nepalis, particularly younger, middle and upper class Nepalis, also see it that way.

**Anything final to add?**

For how famous or notorious Thamel is, it hasn't really received much concerted [literary] attention, particularly the ancient history, with the exception of Rabi Thapa's book and Shiva Rijal's essays on Thabahil, where Thamel gets its present name from, as far as I know.

In the book, the tourism begins in part three, so there are a lot of interesting developments in what we now know as Thamel, well before a tourist ever set foot here. It begins on the line where mythology and history gets blurry, in the time of Manjushree, when Gunakam Dev founded the Kathmandu Mandala, and when Atisha Shreejana ventures en route to Tibet to spread the Buddhist dharma, stops in Kathmandu and establishes Thabahil on the northern outskirts of the city, what he thought would be an international center of Buddhist learning...

If most of my dissertation is talking about the contemporary cultural politics of Thamel and this sort of contestation around identity and national culture, then this book gave me the opportunity to take it from the other side, and show that in this other way, Thamel has always been kind of imbricated in bigger political demographic shifts going on in Kathmandu, so I'm happy I had a chance to do this book.

I spend entirely too much time thinking about Thamel! It's fascinating, you see the history not just of tourism and not just of Thamel, but you can kind of see the broader history of Kathmandu reflected and refracted in the building of Thamel, if you know where to look.



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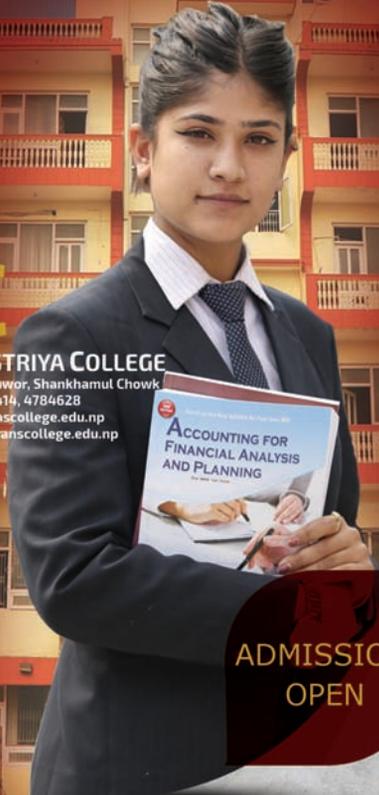
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# An 'Oddball' in 'The Camp of Jung Bahadoor'

WORDS DON MESSERSCHMIDT

Sometimes you encounter strange and unexpected oddballs on the sidelines of history.

In December 1850, while returning home from their historic tour of Victorian England (the first by a Nepalese ruler), Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana and his two youngest brothers, Jagat Shamsher and Dhir Shamsher, along with an entourage of Nepalese officials, personal attendants and servants, met one of the oddballs during a brief stopover in Colombo, Ceylon. His name was Laurence Oliphant, the 21-year old son of colonial Ceylon's Chief Justice. Laurence was invited to accompany Jang and party on their way home to Nepal.

After traveling and visiting Kathmandu as a Rana guest, Oliphant published *'A Journey to Katmandu (The Capital of Napaul), with The Camp of Jung Bahadoor'* (1852).

Of Jang Bahadur he wrote -

"While smoking his evening pipe he used to talk with delight of his visit to Europe, looking back with regret on the gaieties of the English and French capitals, and recounting with admiration the wonders of civilization he had seen in those cities. He was loudest in his praise of England. This may have arisen from a wish to gratify his auditory [audience], and it certainly had that effect. He had not thought it necessary, however, to perfect himself in the language of either country beyond a few of what he considered the more important phrases. His stock consisted chiefly of—How do you do?—Very well, thank you—Will you sit down?—You are very pretty—which pithy sentences he used to rattle out with great volubility, fortunately not making an indiscriminate use of them."

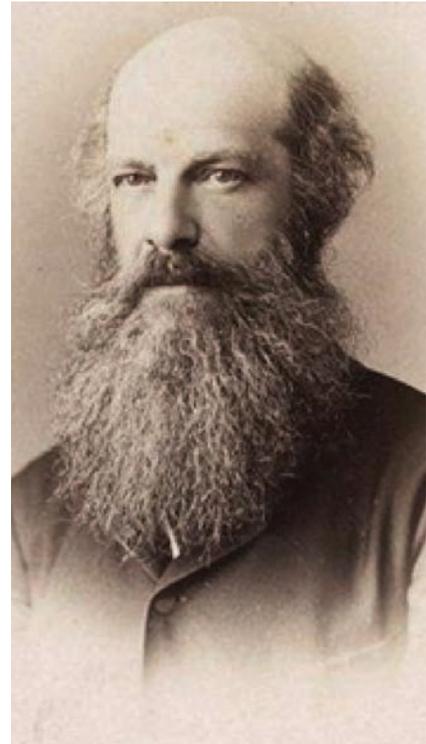
Of Jang's two brothers, Dhir Shamsher captured Oliphant's greatest attention. Dhir was his "particular friend" and "the youngest of Jang's two fat brothers" -

"Colonel Dhere Shum Shere, such was his name, was the most jovial, light-hearted, and thoroughly unselfish being imaginable..., always anxious to please, and full of amusing conversation. ... [And he] was in his manner more thoroughly English than any native I ever knew."

Dhir was someone -

"whose thoroughly frank and amiable disposition endeared him to every one, while his courage and daring commanded universal respect. I know of no one I would rather have by my side in a row than the young Colonel... Cheerful and lively, his merry laugh might be heard in the midst of a knot of his admirers, to whom he was relating some amusing anecdote, while his shrewd remarks were the result of keen observation, and proved his intellect to be by no means of a low order."

After Nepal, as a privileged member of British high society, Oliphant went on to live a veritable "mosaic of improbable adventures" around the world, first as a junior diplomat then as a war correspondent, barrister, spy, Member of Parliament, novelist, spiritualist and mystic. In 1879, he became known in high society for his satirical novel *'Piccadilly: A Fragment of Contemporary Biography'* described at Goodreads.com as "One of the strangest books I have ever read..." It's about a rich, vain, upper crust Englishman who thinks highly of himself and dabbles in off-piste religious fantasies. (It sounds biographical.) His most serious book was the spiritualistic *'Sympneumata:*



*Evolutionary Forces Now Active in Man'* (1885). Queen Victoria was said to have been impressed by it. Oliphant claims that his deceased wife, Alice Le Strange, 'dictated' it to him from the afterlife. (You can't make this stuff up!) No wonder London's Spectator magazine recently dubbed Oliphant as "the oddest of Victorian oddballs."

Was he an oddball when he joined Jang Bahadur's entourage from Colombo to Kathmandu? Probably not but we'll never know, for no Nepali wrote about him.

After 1868, Oliphant was a member of the Brotherhood of the New Life, a group of Victorian Era mystics who believed that by deep meditative breathing one could communicate with angels and fairies. Upon his death in 1888 later, at age 59, Laurence joined his wife Alice in the hereafter where, perhaps, they met some of the angels and fairies they had contacted.

**Sources:** • Laurence Oliphant's *A Journey to Kathmandu* (1852); • Bipin Adhikari's 'Laurence Oliphant on Jung Bahadur' (a review), in Spotlight News Magazine (Kathmandu, December 28, 2012); • Adam Stevenson's of Oliphant's 'Piccadilly' (a 2-star review) at [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com); and • Benjamin Beasley-Murray's, 'Laurence Oliphant: Oddest of Victorian oddballs' (a review), in *The Spectator* (London, March 12, 2016).

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# Flying To the Top of the World: A Buddha Air Story

**This is the story of how Buddha Air came to be the most trusted and recognized airline that soars the Nepali skies**



Mr. Birendra Bahadur Basnet, Managing Director of Buddha Air remembers 7th October 1997 like it was yesterday. He was rushing towards Tribhuvan International Airport and upon reaching Minbhawan, he saw it: A Beechcraft 1900 D, with Buddha Air's logo glimmering on the aircraft's tail. This was Buddha Air's first aircraft, and it was about to land on Nepali soil for the first time.

Over the next two decades, Mr. Basnet went through a lot with Buddha Air. Buddha Air has been through turbulent times but has also cruised the Nepali skies with utmost brilliance. He recalls how it all started, "Buddha Air was made possible because of my father, Mr. Surendra Bahadur Basnet. Our family comes from an agricultural background. My father had traveled to Varanasi for education and had worked in Nepal as a politician and an agricultural businessman. He had been running

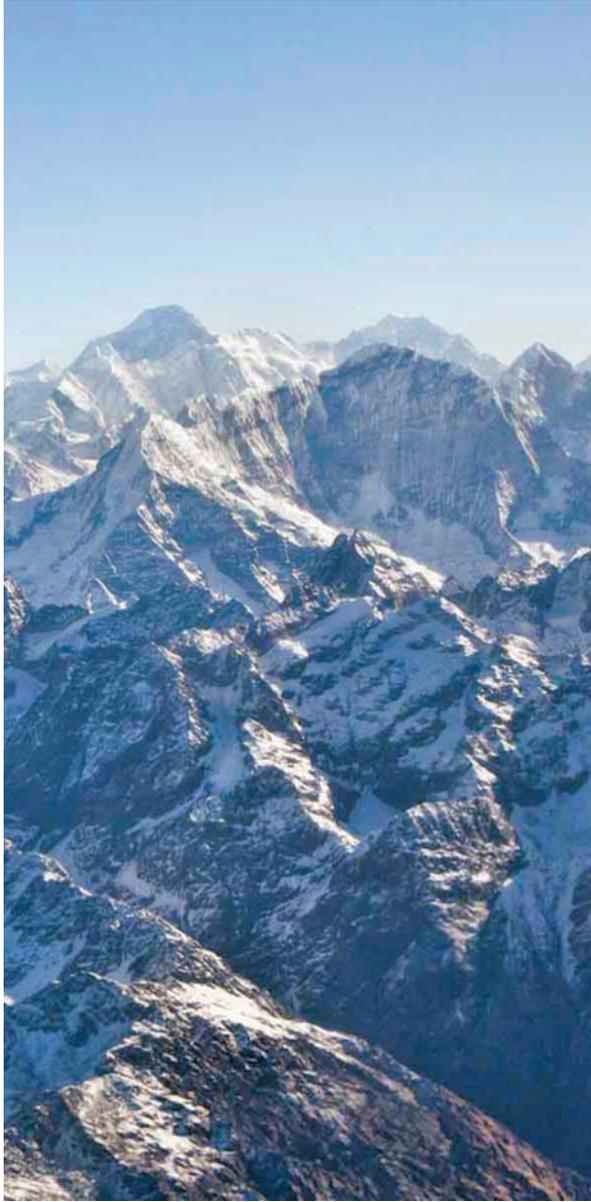
a farm in Morang and I managed a fish farm. My father wanted to take a new step in business and came up with the idea to launch an airline company."

With the determination of Mr. Surendra Bahadur Basnet, the family declared everything they owed as collateral to Nepal Bank of Ceylon to acquire the loan to purchase Buddha Air's first aircraft. The commencement flight was an hour-long mountain flight on 11 October 1997. It was also the day of Dashain Tika. Captain Ranjan Sharma and American pilot Captain Kevin St. Germain took off with 16 people on board.

Captain Sharma remembers how he immediately wanted to join Buddha Air when he found that it was buying a brand new aircraft. "I was flying a second-generation aircraft for Everest Air. Buddha Air seemed like they had a fresh perspective on things as they were

bringing in a third-generation aircraft to serve Nepali passengers," says Captain Sharma, who is still working with Buddha Air and is designated as Director of Safety Department. "Since then, I have flown every single aircraft that Buddha Air has brought. We were a small team of five pilots when we started, but now, we are a massive crew of more than five dozen pilots."

The transition from being a small aviation company to the biggest private airlines of Nepal has not been smooth. "The first five years were the most difficult times for Buddha Air. We started operation when Necon Air was the most popular airline company, and there were about a dozen more companies to compete with," says Mr. Basnet. He remembers how airlines used to lure passengers with different advertising schemes, something Buddha Air could not do as it was just starting out. "There



inevitably came a day when we could not even pay the employees. I called everyone to let them know that their salaries might be delayed for as long as three months, and that a third of the salary might be deducted. I requested them to help out. Everyone put in extra effort and what you see now is the result of the hardships we've faced at that time."

Buddha Air is currently the most popular domestic airline in Nepal with over 55% market share (according to a survey done in Buddha Air operated sectors only). It currently has 11 aircrafts in its fleet with more being added in the future. Since the start of operating until 2017, the numbers of passengers annually have grown 10 times to 1,000,000. While the company had flown 3,916 flights in the first year of operation, the number has now reached 27,295 (2016/17). The airline is also the only one in Nepal to conduct two-yearly

## **Buddha Air is currently the most popular domestic airline in Nepal with over 55% market share (according to a survey done in Buddha Air operated sectors only).**

safety audits based on safety standards set by International Air Transport Association (IATA). It operates flights to 15 destinations around Nepal and India (Varanasi). By 2021, Buddha Air plans to operate international flights to New Delhi, Bangkok and Guangzhou after upgrading its fleet to include jet aircrafts. The flights will be operated from Pokhara International Airport, slated to be constructed by July 2021.

Mr. Basnet credits the employees for the success of Buddha Air. "Buddha Air has not only helped me earn

money in the last 20 years; I have earned something much more precious: the dedication of the employees to work hard every day to take Buddha Air to higher reaches of the sky. I couldn't ask for more," he says.

And for all these years, Buddha Air and its team have worked hard to make flying accessible to all Nepali passengers. They hope to do so for many years, and considering the fact that they are constantly striving for more, it will not be long until Buddha Air will fly Nepali passengers to destinations around the world.



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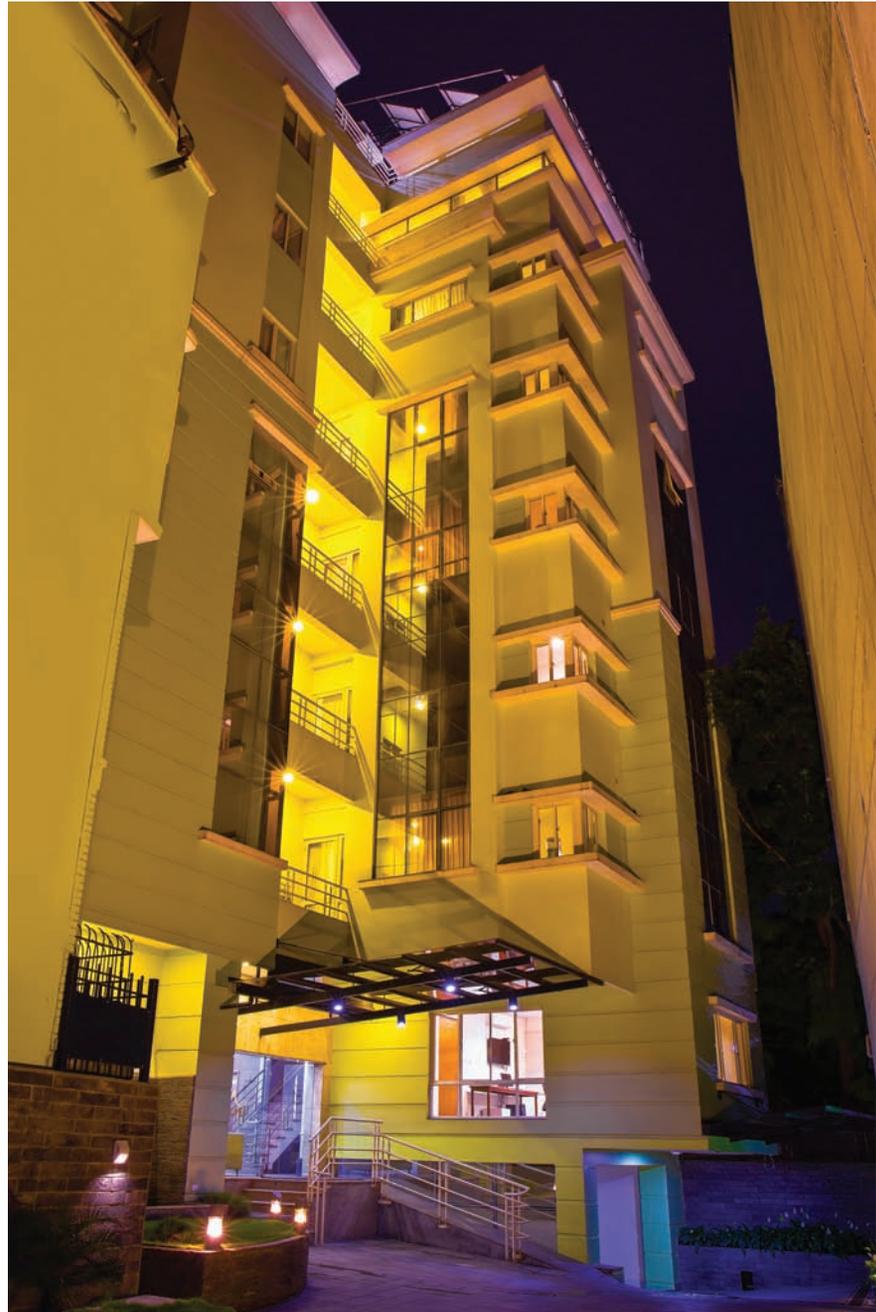
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Likewise, Suite Homes provides various services like complimentary breakfast every morning with homemade breads, served in the rooftop restaurant overlooking the spectacular mountain ranges of Nepal and the city itself. As the Managing director says, "Nothing beats starting the day with our healthy and sumptuous breakfast, one of the USPs of our apartment." Moreover, a well-equipped conference room, laundry services, basement parking, and housekeeping ser-





The brains behind Suite Homes

vices wrap it up to be the perfect package that ensures guests a comfortable, high class stay.

The one-bedroom suites give a cozy and warm ambience. Each includes a large living room-cum-dining room adjoined to an impeccably equipped kitchen. Similarly, the suites are designed with elegant and modern bedrooms and bathrooms. To cap all this, they give a spectacular view of the city through their large glass panels in the bedrooms and balconies.

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The third option is the sophisticated and radiant studios. Each studio comes with a spacious drawing room connected with a well-facilitated kitchen, leaving a vast amount of space for a comfortable double bed. Furthermore, the balcony provides a refreshing environment with an incredible view of the city and distant mountains.

To sum up, Suite Homes provides an immense range of services, including 24-hour electricity and water supply, and ensures intensive security measures in the building. It is equipped with CCTV, fire-fighting systems, and fire alarms in each room. Overall, the two-and-half-year-old Suite Homes is the most luxurious apartment in town, with all modern facilities, thus making it the perfect amalgamation for a comfortable and lavish stay in Kathmandu. Seismic vulnerability assessment test has been done by CORD Nepal and hence it is safe to stay in the apartments.



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