

# Nepal Trip Report: Oh Why, Annapurna

Ruta Sevo, May 2013

## The Dream of Kathmandu

I've wanted to go to Kathmandu since the 1960's: remote small town at the foot of the Himalayas, mixing Hindus, Buddhists, mountaineers, Western groupies and NGO-types. Gateway to Tibet.

It is smaller, cleaner, safer, and less hectic than Calcutta, where I'd spent years.

The streets are full of fascinating foreigners very happy to talk: single women planning to hike alone, long-time "hippy" residents, world travelers, people building schools and working in Tibetan refugee camps, people preparing to climb Mt. Everest, trekkers and yoga/meditation vacationers.

The busy, crowded bazaar atmosphere of Thamel, the tourist area, encourages bonding and chatting enthusiastically.

You have to dodge cars, scooters, bikes, rickshaws, walkers amidst chaotic honking. Some people freak out having cars "push" them out of the way.

## Shopping



## Crowded street



## Active Himalayas Company

Jeff and I hiked with Active New Zealand in New Zealand in 2006. When I saw they were in the Himalayas, I thought: now I can hike AND visit Kathmandu.

I had just read 30 books about Tibet and Nepal as research for my novel-in-progress.

Unfortunately, the hike was a killer and three times harder than the New Zealand trip. Also I am 6 years older (68). That turned the hike, for me, into a boot camp from hell.

We were to hike over 10 days to the Annapurna Base Camp at 13,000 feet. There are no roads up the valley, just walking paths, and, especially, STONE STEPS up and down. The Nepalis built these pathways manually, having no tractors.

We would have porters carry up to 28 lbs per each of two hikers. We carried a daypack with water and rain gear.

The guides, Kate and Nepali Sudip, were the super Active leaders I expected. The arrangements were superb and smooth, including medical fixes for diarrhea, altitude headaches, infections.

Our group had 9 hikers, including 3 physicians and one Active guide on vacation. (What are the odds?) Ages 10 years old to 68. Six people from New Zealand, thus super jocks.

Our hearty porters make about \$4 a day and carry 50-60 lbs hanging from a strap on their forehead. They are able to catch you just in case, or take your daypack, with this on their back.

Kate & Sudip in the foreground



The clients



Everybody



Realities of Kathmandu

Power goes out by schedule during several hours a day. (Good food and Internet cafes have backup power supplies.) The country's development is constrained by political turbulence.

I met many smart young Nepalis who cannot get visas to leave because the country does not want to

lose them to emigration, or, receiving countries won't let them in even on a tourist visa. About 22% of the population is getting "remittances" sent by relatives employed abroad. My plane from Dubai was full of Nepali workers coming home for a quarterly visit. Good wages are outside the country.

They learn English in schools so many people speak some English.

I met an American running a technology/web design school, married to a Nepali. I met two others who lived in Nepal to run schools. They return to the U.S. only once in ten years.

You can get anything to eat: hamburgers, pizza, pasta. A meal costs \$3-8. Hotel can be \$10-75. Half an hour on the internet is 60 cents.

The hike – things  
you won't see  
elsewhere

Typical day: 4-6 hours of hiking, steep up and down, with tea break and lunch every 2 hours.

The second day was 3000 feet elevation over 4 miles, mostly via stone steps.

We made new damp and smelly clothes every day.

No open pooping zone



A special road-side plant







### Hanging bridges

In older times, these bridges were made of hemp rope. Now they are reinforced with steel cables. (Phew!) (Third picture is an old bridge; not used.)



### Tea houses

Oh how I prayed to see the turquoise roof of the next tea house on the next ridge. You come off stone steps directly onto their patio. They bring you tea, meals. Showers are \$2. Rooms (booked many months in advance) are about \$5.

Active has a constraint on the number of people in a hiking group: the number of beds in the tea houses at any location. The country still controls the numbers of tea houses, but the trekking industry is BIG now.

We stopped for tea (really). (Tea is safe to drink. You could buy Fanta and Coke for \$2.) We ate eggs and toast, pancakes, spaghetti, pizzas, French-fries, and "dal-bhat" which is rice and lentils Nepali style. Up high we did not eat meat. The food was high carb, low protein and low roughage. Lower down we got delicious fresh vegetables and chicken.

Dal-bhat is the regular daily meal in Nepal.



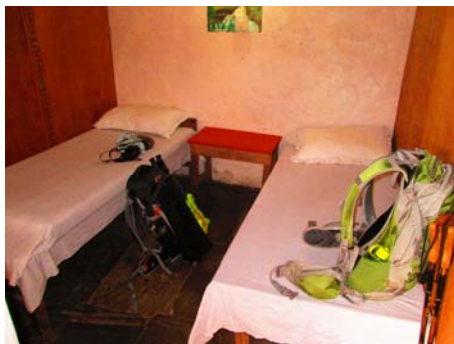
Turquoise roofs



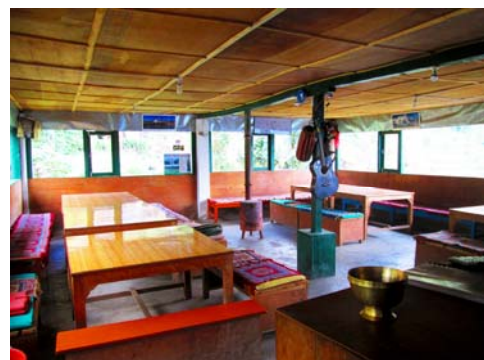
Parking lot



Room & toilet & maybe shower



Water, dining room







Hikers

At base camp just before ABC:



Mountains

Yes, we saw the Himalayas, especially the 3 Annapurna sisters.



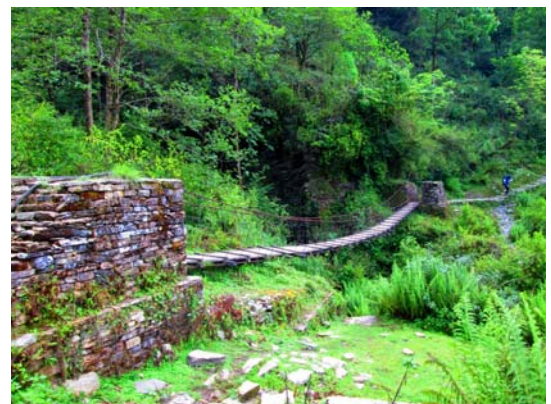




Stone steps

Imagine going up or down 1700 high, steep stone steps, and that is just one hour out of 4-6 that day.

One day we went up 3000 feet in elevation over 4 miles. Going down the Grand Canyon is 3000 feet elevation over 9 miles.





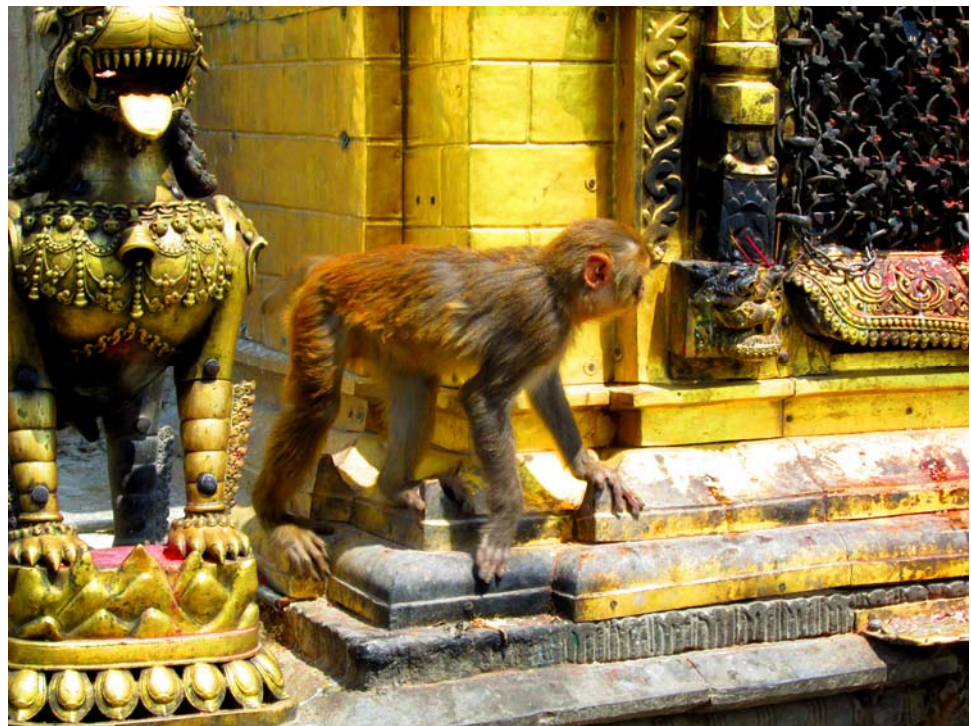


Dogs in Kathmandu    Dogs are sacred messengers and like cows roam free and are fed by everyone. See how comfortable they are inside and outside temples?





Temple monkeys,  
pigeons too



More Kathmandu

Electricity infrastructure:



Dodging cars:



Zillions of signs:

When it rains:





Scenes







## Temples

You've seen the cliché "eyes of Buddha" from Nepal. Temples small and large everywhere.



## Cremation





Hotel

Our hotel in Kathmandu was like the “best exotic marigold hotel.”



Annapurna Base  
Camp - ABC

Yes, it was great!





ABC camp from  
above



Just walk me up  
the valley



Early in the trip; I'm still plump

5 lbs lighter; last 5 minutes; same shirt...



Travellers/  
characters

Elena – from Moscow, drew portraits of Nepali faces on Facebook and came for a week to meet her Nepali fans and subjects, all of whom had used her portraits as their Facebook profile. It was her first trip away from her 2-year-old.

A retired hobby photographer from Vienna, VA who'd hired a guide to take him up to Everest Base Camp, stopping for photos.

A couple who left their round-the-world sailboat in Malaysia. They'd just returned from a week in Tibet, which they said was like a police state, with soldiers on tops of buildings and in the monasteries.

American retiree who ran Christian schools in Bangladesh and Nepal, returning to the US to raise funds for several months every year.

A group of Christians who came to visit their sponsored school, deliver supplies, and meet a Nepali girl they'd sponsored for 10 years.

A German who had hiked Machu Picchu, New Zealand, the Alps, the Rockies and wanted to see Nepal.

Bruiser male Aussies and Germans at the airport, flexing their bodies as they waited for giant bags of climbing equipment at the airport luggage caddy. The bags only arrived the next day; flyDubai just didn't put them on the plane, oh well. It costs \$25,000 for the permit to climb Everest and many people pay \$60,000 for the expedition.