

## TREKKING WITH TERESA

### Muktinath – November 2012



This was a great trek, as ever, but an especially friendly, easy-going group made it more so. Hope you find a quiet time during summer to put your feet up and travel round the Anapurnas with us.

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 8:

I easily found Samadhi (Shanti) and Moya (Maya), to give them their new Nepali names, at the Kathmandu Guesthouse at nine this morning as arranged. It was a lovely morning and the two women were relieved to be getting out of Thamel which has become a bit of a backpackers ghetto (though not without

its attractions). I asked Susma, Netra's 16-year-old niece, to take them up to Kapan Gomba; they loved it. The walk takes you right out to the edge of town for a glimpse of rural life, yet it only takes about 40 minutes.

Meanwhile, I did the airport pick-ups with Dorje. It was a bit of a wait but at least they were all on the same flight. After a cuppa and feet up for a while at Muna Cottage we regrouped at five for a walk over to Bouda for dinner. We were joined by Isabel, whose projects at Bright Future (see [www.bright-future-nepal.org](http://www.bright-future-nepal.org)) draw us to this part of Kathmandu. Sue McIlhinney is here – not trekking (until further notice) but here as a volunteer at Bright Future. Noelene is back and so is Liz Sparkes. Sue had just returned from a flying visit to Africa where she cared for her daughter who'd been unwell. Doing fine now you'll be pleased to know. (Hey Jo!).

It was almost dark when we got to Bouda but the atmosphere was buzzing as we swirled around the ancient stupa with the chanting Tibetans. We took our own wine to dinner (the house wine here is of the 'barely-bloody-drinkable' variety though the food is always good. Firm mattresses and barking dogs did not deter these tired, jet-lagged travellers from a good night's sleep.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 9:

A crazy day in Thamel getting our permits, banking and trekking gear sorted. It went rather smoothly this time. Libby's sunglasses were returned to her before she became aware that they were lost. Shanti and Maya didn't need to be back in Thamel today (they'd just spent a week here) so Dorje has taken them for a hike down from Changu Narayan to Bhaktapur. Once again, they loved it. We had a quiet dinner at the Shambala. It was quite an effort to repack our luggage with all the new stuff we got today.

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 10:

Anything that didn't fit into our luggage last night was thrown into the back of the minibus this morning. Too warm for boots today. Muna made us an early breakfast in the garden and before 8 am we were off to Pokhara in Deepak's lovely Toyota Hiace. If you don't spend much time in Nepal the vehicle is probably unremarkable. I count it as a blessing. It was a Saturday so traffic was a breeze. At our cute little new morning tea stop the Rivertop View we

dove into the Danish pastries and sipped our tea with a great view down to the Trisuli River. Ten minutes past The Hamlet on the river side of the road for anyone who is navigating themselves. Lunch was really late, we even passed Danauli but I was looking for the nice, clean place we'd stopped at in March with Ken and Jan's group. We found it and climbed up to the little Kala temple while the food was cooking. Local youngsters were enjoying a picnic with loud pop music in the fields below. Aloo Paratha is becoming a favourite lunch food for 'on the road'.

Cruised into the Lake Diamond at 3.30. Rooms were ready with some nice renovations; big mirror in each room, new quilts in some (mine anyway). Enjoyed a cuppa on the terrace; it's always good to be back here. Warm (not hot) solar hot water but dunny enough to dry your hair on the terrace. Some of our group have gone down to the Lakeside area for a look around. I had to let them off the leash sooner or later. The generator is a bit noisy but at least we have power and it goes off at night.

I tried phoning Lizzie Dobson but it was easier to just call out her name. Sure enough she popped her head out of a window at the adjacent hotel. She joined us for dinner, along with Liz Sparkes at La Pizzeria. .

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 11:

We scored the first really clear day for a while but it was not quite crystal clear so no need to rush. Boating on an empty stomach is no fun. By 8 am all six customers are out on the water with Lahar in charge. I struggle to get connected to the internet till I realise that the power is off and the router is down. Duh! Back on at 10 am so I am sitting at Cafe Olive awaiting my Mediterranean omelette with pesto and fetta, writing my diary.

Tham called by this morning. His timing was a bit out for inclusion on this trek. Pity. I like Tham Rai. We've made a firm date for April 2013 for Gokyo. He is selling Danish pastries on the street between treks. It is surprisingly lucrative. I've made an order for tomorrow morning. He hadn't heard about Ram so we shed a few tears together. They were good friends on trek.

The pre-trek briefing went well and all the porters have been assigned. Bir with Jean, Sunder (Sundance) with Mike, (he is returning in time for the start of

classes) AG is to help Shanti, Maya has Subas, Julie has Dorje (we are expecting them to be way out in front), Libby has Bharat and I have Lahar, as always.

MONDAY NOVEMBER 12:

Although the day started out cool and cloudy the weather cleared while we drove to Nyapul so it was warm and sunny for our first tea-break at Birethanti. We ate our Danishes (thank you Tham) in the delightful little lodge on the edge of the village, overlooking a gully full of bambu and screeching cicadas. The jeep road now pushes a long way up, however, hardly any jeeps passed us on the way and it is certainly easier going on the level track. We made Sudame quite early. They have done a great job in re-establishing their garden after the road was bulldozed through. Boots and socks off while we waited for our lunch. This afternoon was similar as the jeep track extends almost to Hille. Lahar and I have been scouring the hillside for an alternative trail on the other side of the valley. The little stone path that leads onwards from Hille is probably hundreds of years old. It would be sacrilege to push the jeep road over the top of it. By the time the road reaches everywhere the area will be so unattractive that the trekking business will move elsewhere. Nepal is full of beautiful, unspoiled, clean areas. Areas like the Tamang Heritage Trail are taking over from the dusty jeep roads of the Anapurnas. Pity. I keep thinking we can get one more lovely season. These days there are miles and miles of alternative trekking trails so things are improving. I'll get off my soapbox now! Overnight at Susma Lodge was pleasant. Warm evening, great chips and a bit of singing in the kitchen before bedtime.



TUESDAY NOVEMBER 13:

There is no way to prepare yourself for today. There are well over 3,000 stone steps and it feels more like 30,000. The first section was ok on fresh legs and very beautiful over the two waterfalls at Tikedungha. We were more than ready for morning tea. The group soon split into two parties. Julie, Libby and Mike were at least half an hour ahead all morning. We took it easy at the back and I was very glad I had just come off 16 days training in the Langtang and managed not to embarrass myself at the first hurdle. Since I had been unable to put a shoe on my injured toe till a few weeks prior to trekking, my fitness was abysmal when I got to Nepal in mid-October. I actually enjoyed the tough climb today and lunch was a treat at the newfound Kamala Lodge. The daal bhat was perfect and the rooms looked great if you wanted to stay at Ulleri.



Jean and I walked (climbed) together most of the afternoon with Shanti and Maya not far ahead. We stopped to look at everything. Freshly cut buckwheat, kids playing (fighting) on a bamboo swing, baby goats, baby chickens, baby rabbits (all white), mad Christians (nah, nah, nah-nah-nah-nah), a strange assortment of fellow trekkers from all over the world, exotic plants, handsome roosters and always that plunging valley of terraced fields below us. Our starting point at Hille was just visible as a tiny cluster of tin roofs in the far distance. (I looked down at it all later that night and the lights in the valley were beautiful). The Green View was as welcoming as ever. As I write this in my room overlooking the trail, all I can hear are a few roosters, the distant roar of the river and kids calling out to each other in the fields above the lodge. Sometimes I love my job!

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 14:

No pressure for an early start today so we lingered over our rice pudding with red jam this morning. Warm sunshine and a beautiful view.



The walk through the rhododendron forest was tough but lovely. The gnarled old trees, some of them hundreds of years old, conjure Tolkien's fabled lands. I walked at the back this afternoon with Bir, Sunder and Lahar behaving like 'cheeky monkeys'. The Sunny Lodge was anything but. Gorepani was totally engulfed in cloud and the white-out was cold and damp as we dressed for a stroll around the village. This strange royal blue Colourbond village. We soon scuttled back to the lodge and settled around the stove in the dining

room. We've eaten chips with our rum and coke and are awaiting our veg curry and rice as I write this journal. The music is pulsing....

The last day of the festival of Dashain and Diwali was upon us. The lodge was giving the porters free raksi (local hooch) and the traditional folk music was pumped up after dinner. We danced our socks off for what seemed like hours but the lodge was silent at 9.30. A great night. I will put AG's video on facebook at 'slowtrekkingnepal' and the website at [www.slowtrekking.com](http://www.slowtrekking.com).

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 15:

PHOTO OF THE WOMEN OUTSIDE SUNNY LODGE

Pun Hill was as tough as ever but of course we made it. We were lucky enough to have a perfectly clear morning (one of the best I've seen) and I think the view may have overwhelmed one or two of our members. A lovely morning followed by a huge breakfast sitting in the 'box seat' in the dining room.

By ten am we were trotting steeply downhill through more rhododendron woods. The trouble with down-hilling is it doesn't hurt that much at the time. It hurts later! We had a cuppa at the immaculate Daulaghiri Lodge at Chitre and then lunch at Serendipity, the first lodge in the long village of Sikha. It is not really up to scratch as a lodge but the garden full of marigolds was an ideal place for lunch. We devoured huge plates of potatoes cooked with onions, tomatoes, garlic, chilli, spinach and omelette. It took ages to cook from scratch but we polished off a piece of local cheese with crackers while we waited. Very civilized.

Another hour or so brought us to Sikha proper. Our lodge – Moonlight – was decked out with garlands for the last day of the festival. Shortly after we arrived hordes of local youngsters in traditional clothes descended on the lodge. The boys carried drums which they danced with. The little girls were exquisite in various kinds of red costumes. They came equipped with an i-Pod and a huge speaker. Times are changing.



We danced with them a little and gave some small donations then retired to the warm stove in the dining room to await our dinner. We turned in fairly early but, unfortunately, the kids just moved on to another house. A house not that far down the hill from ours. They cranked up the volume till very late. The folk songs and Bollywood hits were quite nice but there was a fair bit of 'duff-duff'. The luckier folks had a room at the front of the lodge.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 16:

Another perfect day of weather. Clear and cool in the morning so we made an early getaway with fab views of Daulaghiri in front of us for the first hour. At harvest time the villages were a delight. Lots of strange vegetables drying on rattan mats. Morning tea was taken in a little teashop almost hidden under pyrostegia. Really warm as we reached Durbin Danda and had a cold drink and a rest on the ridge. More down, down, down until we reached the last little Hindu temple on the ridge, from where the trail descends like a spiral staircase. It was almost too hot at Ghar Kola and we didn't stop. We jiggled over the scungy old bridge and then I was expecting the huge new bridge across the Kali Gandaki. Of course it was still there. However, it was leaning horribly open on one side. I hated every minute of it. The exit steps leave a lot to be desired too, especially as the topmost step is level with the handrail. We will walk a few hundred metres downstream to the road bridge next time. At Tatopani

we had the best rooms in the best lodge. I love the Trekkers Lodge. The sunny afternoon meant we got our hair and our washing dry. The hot springs were a hit and some very nice jewellery was bought in the village. We ate Mousaka and Lassagna for dinner – with fresh orange juice.

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 17:

I am writing this journal in my very posh room in the Eagle Nest at Ghasa. I've had a very hot shower (I know, I had one yesterday). Dinesh (the owner) and his son Simon just came up to say hullo. Simon is a beautiful boy.



Dinesh, daughter Sophie and son Simon

This morning's walk on and off the road to Rupse Chahara was fairly easy. We took an inordinately long time at the Rupse Lodge. The lunch took an hour to prepare and then another hour to eat, sitting in the shade of the big old apple tree. Our best daal bhat so far.

The afternoon was tough. Crossing the river just after Rupse Chahara, where we got up close to the big waterfall, we wished for a bit of cloud cover. We got none. Clear skies all day today but the breeze did freshen as we climbed up to Pairo Tapolo. There was a bit of a detour where some of the trail had slipped away since last season. I hoped the snickers and tea at Pairo would give us the

energy we needed for the last climb and the big bridge. The biggest, highest bridge on the trek and, I am happy to report, in perfect condition.

#### SUNDAY NOVEMBER 18:

Today was much easier. The road is the only option here but there wasn't much traffic at all. We were in no hurry so enjoyed a decent breakfast and a late start. The advantage of walking on the road (and it is just a dirt jeep track) is that it is easy; you can hold your head up and look around at the magnificent scenery. And it doesn't get much better than this. After about half an hour of walking on the old paved trail through the village of Upper Ghasa Tukche Peak came into view dead ahead. We walked between whitewashed houses with carved wooden window frames and notched logs forming ladders between the courtyard and the roof. As we ascended beyond the village Daulaghiri itself came into view. Soon we could look back over our shoulder and see Anapurna 1 and Nilgiri South, then the tip of Anapurna South. Anapurna and Daulaghiri are both well over 8,000 metres and we were between the two at about 2500 metres. I am writing this in the courtyard of the rather luxurious See You Lodge at Kalopani. Though it is only 2.30 in the afternoon the sun has already dropped behind the nearby ridge – actually the ramparts of Daulaghiri. It is cold. Time to head inside for a hot coffee and a bar of chocolate.

Dinner was cosy around a 'hot table'. A coke brazier is put into a little pit under the middle of the dining table. Warm blankets cover the top and extend over your legs. Two Danish girls were good company – twins? Friends? Sisters? The matching fleeces had us confused.

#### MONDAY NOVEMBER 19:

Taking full advantage of our good rooms we had a bit of a lie-in today. Two days later than planned we are finally taking our much-needed day off. After a late breakfast some of us set off on a day-walk to Titi Lake. It took about two hours to get there through fields and some fairly dense bush on a very slight trail. As we reached the first crest the view back to the Ice Fall was spectacular and the many branches of the Kali Gandaki sparkled in the sunshine below us.

We entered a dark pine wood which smelled heavenly as the pine needles roasted where the sunshine penetrated. Pretty soon the woods opened up onto a 'hidden valley' containing a small village of whitewashed stone houses and a small lake which was home to various ducks. The view over the lake to the Anapurnas was breathtaking.





Items of note in Kalopani: A new footbridge at the end of the village, just above Sweetie's old lodge. The Kalopani Lodge of Laxmi Gauchen Thakali has been demolished and replaced with two hideous buildings – hotel and restaurant respectively. Kalopani is becoming an overnight stop for jeep traffic. Alternative trekking trails are being well-marked these days. The alternative trail off-road from Kalopani to Ghasa goes by Titi Lake but is

apparently very, very hard. ACAP and Lonely Planet are recommending you to walk from Kalopani to Marpha, completely skipping Larjung and Tukche. Seems a shame. We will ask the locals if we can use seasonal bridges to reach Larjung for an overnight at Tukche tomorrow.

TUESDAY November 20:

We had a great night in the lodge last night. Some kind of festival had drawn a group of well-known poets, writers and musicians to Kalopani. One of them had brought Brandon with them; a young guy from Austin, Texas. Between them all we were fabulously entertained. We sang Western songs with Brandon alternating (very fairly) with traditional Nepali folk songs and Hindi pop songs – all very dancable tunes. I loved Sunder's rendition of Rishan Phiri Ri on the flute. We ended the evening with Mongolian Throat Music from Brandon. A great night.

Not a trace of a hangover this morning; we must have danced it all off before we turned in. Today was our first really easy day – not a hill in sight. We were able to take the long level trail out through the pines on the East bank of the Kali Gandaki. We crossed on seasonal bridges (some more substantial than others) to Larjung for lunch, scouring the stony river bed for potential fossils along the way. Finds included a gold-specked saligram (Sunder) and a perfect trilobite (Libby). I found a couple of smooth, river washed pieces.

Lunch was in the lodge where some of the Camel Active catalogue was shot. They had never seen it even though the family were featured in some of the photos. It was a lovely catalogue, all shot on location in Nepal. Some of the clothes were quite nice too. A windswept walk along the river banks brought us to Tukche. I love my cute room in the old part of the house. The 'solar room' on the roof was a haven from the chill wind and the view was rather good too. Nice hot table in a cosy dining room. Stewed apple with custard for desert was a treat. I think we played some cards.

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 21:

I loved today. We started with another serve of stewed apple for breakfast. We went for a bit of a 'cook's tour' around Tukche. We visited the distillery where 'madam' is still in attendance; though planning to retire soon to her kids

in America. We visited the largest gomba with its great views over the river and then the little, old red-washed gomba with its circular wall of prayer wheels around an old apple tree.

The road was a bit dusty as we set off out of Tukche but it was only half an hour to the bridge where one leaves the road. En route we saw a group of lammergeir feeding on something dead in the riverbed. When one flew over us we could see just how big they were. They can reach 3 metre wingspan.

The old gomba being renovated at Chairo was open for a change. A lama was present and two monks were in the chamber housing the huge, old Guru Rimpoche statue. As they chanted the room was filled with smouldering fresh juniper incense. A shaft of sunlight illuminated the scene beautifully. A magical moment. Tea took a while to prepare so we wandered around the camp which is now a well-established village. It has been here for almost 50 years now. The village school with 46 kids and 6 teachers is a gem. Kids as young as 5 are learning in English, Tibetan and Nepali. The young kids, especially the little monks, were adorable. As we left the camp we had to run the gauntlet of souvenir sellers who had miraculously appeared. We each found something nice amongst the junk. I bought some beautiful old malas, Tibetan prayer beads.

Marpha was a respite from the windswept trail. Lunch was ok, though the chips were inedible. We mounted the stairs of the huge monastery – mainly to get a great view of the village from above. The wind howled as we were swept along the track to Jomsom. The Marco Polo made us a dinner of veg curry and roasted potatoes. After a bit of persuasion a hot table was set – it was very, very hot indeed. We packed away all the gear we don't need for three nights at altitude. I think we left about 20 kg behind, between seven people. Good effort.

**THURSDAY NOVEMBER 22:**

The sun shone though it was cold as we set off from the Marco Polo with a big breakfast on board and fresh apples to eat along the way. It was almost totally flat all the way to Eklai Bhatti and then Kagbeni. We were passed by a fair few jeeps though not that many trekkers. Not half as windy as usual today. Just

prior to our tea stop at Eklai Bhatti we watched huge lammergeirs tearing at some kind of dead animal out on the river flats.



After lunch we walked up to Thiri. Again, not too cold or windy this afternoon. We saw the lonely retreat cave, the ancient trees on the water storage pond, the tiny little donkeys and the dear little village of joined-up houses. I loved walking back into the wind in that bleak yet stunningly beautiful landscape. Buffeted across tiny bridges, just inches above the fast-flowing river, we scuttled into the new coffee bar Applebees. Located to overlook the best view in Kagbeni, making excellent coffee it can't fail. Expensive but worth it. Great food and hot table at the Asia Lodge tonight.



FRIDAY NOVEMBER 23:

I was up early this morning, though the weather looked a bit 'iffy'. Libby, Julie, Shant, Maya and Lahar wanted to ride up. Their ponies were ready just after 8.30. I followed them up to the 'mounting yard' where they seemed ok with the Tibetan-style saddles and sturdy ponies – once we got some stirrups lengthened. Meanwhile Dorje had headed the negotiations for a the jeep – always a delicate business. The owner reckons we should pay the equivalent of twelve bideshi (foreigner) fares though in practice this never happens. Nepalis pay half fare. In the end an amicable compromise was reached – as always. I rode up in the jeep with Jean and Mike, Dorje and Bir, a couple of paying guests and their guide and a woman called Dawn who thought she had met me here last year. Perhaps? The ride up was great. Bir and I got down at Jarkot with all the bags. Dorje took Mike and Jean on up to Muktinath. Bir and I stashed the bags and then walked the steep trail up to the

village. It only took half an hour. An hour or so later everyone converged on the Mona Lisa for a yummy daal bhat.

I took the horse-riders up to the temples after lunch. We climbed a fair way up behind the Hindu temples for a good view of the base of the pass and just to say that we had hit the 4,000 metre mark. Shanti and Maya strung up their prayer flags. Libby and I made small stone chortens in memory of absent friends. The little ani gomba containing the flame and water in the rock was rather special. A gentle-faced middle-aged ani was chanting, accompanying herself with a drum and large cymbals and, occasionally, on a conch shell. I was drawn, as I often am, to the devine Buddha statue here. A countenance of perfect compassion. The walk down was easy and joyful. Everyone in high spirits. We had made it!!



The New Plaza in Jarkot did a great job on the fod and hot table. We had four 'boys on bikes' for company. A good night.



Saturday November 24:

A very easy day today. After a latish breakfast we took a short stroll about the old village of Jarkot (pictured above). It is a bit of a crumbling relic but I love the Tibetan feel of the place. Every house is still lived in or used for grain storage or animal barns. The locals are speaking tibetan and their religion is totally Tibetan Buddhist in nature; though the old Bon religion lingers on in some of the animist traditions (dream catchers over the door).

The trail back to Kagbeni is so easy that you can easily look around at the scenery as you stride along. A bit of a luxury. At one point we stopped to gaze in awe at the vast valley below us. We could plainly see the Thorong La to the East, almost all the way to Tibet to the North, Daulaghiri sparkled to the West while the tops of the Anapurnas showed over the ridge to our South. I took a few photos but pictures can't really capture the scale of this scenery.

I am wirting this in the snug upstairs dining room at the Asia Lodge. Outside the wind is howling though the sunshine comes and goes as clouds scuttle across the sky at an alarming rate. Outside our window farmers are ploughing in the field below us with a wooden plough drawn by a pair of oxen. They are singing as they work. Did I mention that I love my job.

The weather turned to rubbish during the day but stars were out when I went to bed.

Sunday November 25:

It was an easy jaunt to Jomsom. It took just under two and a half hours as we paused just once on a sunny group of rocks.





One again the weather turned horrible after lunch. We saw off the porters with a touch of sadness as they crammed into the rickety little 'school busses' which now ply the road down to Tatopani. Of course you have to change busses at Ghasa, courtesy of the local 'transport mafia'. We saw one of the lammergeirs up close today.



The famous Jomsom wind howled so we mostly stayed inside – though a few brave souls rugged up for a spot of retail therapy. I needed to go and visit a little girl called Ishneha at her boarding school for Howard; I took Jean and Mike with me and it really was a treat.



With a few rums – to keep us warm of course – we were all ready for an early night when the wind finally stopped. As we climbed the stairs to our rooms stars were popping out here and there and Nilgiri was glowing softly in the moonlight. Bodes well for tomorrow.

Monday November 26:

Perfect day for flying. No wind. No clouds. The plane arrived just 15 minutes after the scheduled flight time (some kind of record). We were soon cruising at an altitude of 'not much' between Daulaghiri and the Anapurnas, both laden with fresh snow. The overnight snowfall had taken every speck of dust out of the atmosphere for crystal clear views. Flying smoothly, we were so low over Gorepani we had to look up out of the right hand window to see Pun Hill.

A lazy day in Pokhara ensued – though somehow shopping seems like much harder work than trekking. The porters had all arrived home safely so we got

together with them all and Lahars gorgeous family for dinner at La Pizzeria. Even managed to put in an appearance at the Busy Bee

Tuesday November 27:

Mike, Libby and Julie have gone off with Dorje to see the view from Sarankot. Apparently this morning is the clearest they have had since we left on trek. I shared a lieisurely breakfast on the terrace with Jean and an entertaining Scots fellow called Tommy. Shanti and Maya have headed out for breakfast overlooking the lake somewhere. We had a fairly intense day of shopping and then a good curry dinner upstairs at the Once Upon a Time restaurant with the big log fire taking the edge of the chill evening.

Wednesday November 28:

When Deepaks shiny bus showed up at the Lake Diamond Maya had still not received a copy of her flight tickets – domestic or international. Not good enough. I stormed off to Rishi's office only to hear that they had not even printed it and the power was off till 9 am. It was 8 am and Maya was due to fly out at 9.30. We heard there was a 'live printer' at Buddha Airlines own office so we headed there in our loaded bus followed by Monkumar and Maya in his car. Of course it was fine. Tickets printed in under a minute. Maya happy. We hit the road.

Although the Anapurnas were a stunning sight on our left for the first half hour we were then enveloped in a thick fog over the first range of hills. After 10.30 the sun gradually burned away the cold mist and we had a cuppa at th Akala Teashop. Our driver took us to a great lunch place for a top daalbhat. We were in Kapan before 4 o'clock; pretty good considering the delay in the morning. Muna cottage's clean rooms and electric hot showers were WONDERFUL. Mountains of washing were farmed out. Dinner over at Bouda was a nice stretch after sitting in the bus all day. We all slept like 'baby logs'.

Thursday November 29:

I was up at the crack of dawn to make sure Jean and Mike connected with Dorje for a mountain flight to see Everest up close. They were back before we needed to head into town. They loved the experience.

We shopped like hell. I mean we really hit Thamel hard. We took a longish pizza lunch at the Roadhouse, where my friend Julie joined us, and then Dorje. Really good food, especially the smoked chicken, olive and jalapeno pizza.

Shanti got a ride home on Dorje's motorbike and the rest of us were home in time for a quiet dinner at the Shambala with some quite drinkable Cabernet Merlot (Hardys). A bit of a find considering where we were.

Friday November 30:

Mike and Jean went home this morning – though they managed to walk into Bouda with Libby for some last-minute souvenirs. Dorje's motorbike was put to good use again as he ferried Julie over to immigration for a visa extension. Some of us had a decent lie-in. Shanti has found a lovely hotel in Bouda. The Khumbu Hotel. It has Tibetan murals on the walls and charges \$22 with breakfast for a single. I would recommend it.

We went to Dorje's rooms for daalbhat in the late afternoon. It was Laki's birthday and we had a cake with candles. Sonam and especially Lakpa showed us their dance moves after tea. Adorable. Walking home in the moonlight was a delight – though I would have done much better if someone had mentioned that I was still wearing my sunglasses! I just thought that my torch batteries were fading.

Saturday December 1:

A busy day. Had breakfast in Bouda with Shanti, AG and Dorje. We had kind of weird Sherpa potato pancakes. Not really my thing. We saw Bir's wife in hospital. She has had an apendectomy (sorry Jules) and it appears to have gone well. The local hospital was not as gruesome as I expected. I then headed off to Swayambu, Thamel and Durbar Marg to pay some bills and pick up my lovely new dress from Grace.

The four of us left – myself, Julie, Libby and Shanti gathered at Shanti's hotel for a drink and then dinner. It was a nice 'last supper'. It was a bit too cold to walk home as the winter nights are lengthening in Kathmandu. A taxi took five minutes.

Sunday December 2:

I didn't write any more in my diary. I know that Libby and Julie headed off for a few days at Chitwan. I took Shanti to the airport. When I went to pick her up I found Dorje, AG and Laki all there. Sad to say goodbye to customers who've become good mates during the trek but I think Shanti and Maya are the sort who will come back. I do hope so anyway.

Each group has its own unique vibe but every now and then a trekking team really fits well together. It goes a fair way beyond just liking each other. This was such a group. You weren't just easy-going, you `treated our lovely staff with kindness and respect. You get extra points for that. Thank you. I would welcome any of you back to Nepal, anytime.

Till then, you can tell your friends that we plan to do the same trek at the same time next year and so far there is plenty of room.

Happy New Year

Namaste

Teresa didi









