

ProjectsAbroad



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OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF PROJECTS ABROAD NEPAL



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Nepal from Start to Finish

Margaret Suarez – United States of America
Chitwan Medical Teaching College

After having completed a medical placement in Tanzania with Projects Abroad in 2010, I knew that if I was to travel again, I would choose Projects Abroad to experience the full extent of not only volunteering overseas, but the amazing cultural experience that comes with being embraced as part of a family and community.

So in 2012, the week after completing my Masters, I jumped on a plane to Nepal.

After having experienced the culture shock of Tanzania I was ready for anything – or so I thought. Arriving in the middle of the night, I was met at the airport with a traditional welcome scarf and bundled into a van for a drive through the insane traffic to my hotel room in Thamel. As I tried to put on a seat belt in the hopes of surviving the trip – the driver said, “Don’t worry, it doesn’t work.” Oh God! – I thought I may die before I even get to the hotel. At the hotel



we were met by security and ushered to my room where they made sure I bolted the doors for safety. Once again I thought, “What have I done!”

The next morning I was met by Projects Abroad staff for the induction process. In the light of day Thamel was a colourful, bustling tourist area. Trying not to get lost was the first lesson.

I was then driven to Jorparti, where I would be staying with my host, Madhav. There were already two other volunteers staying there. The meals were simple and consisted mainly of lentils and rice. The showers were cold but we had many laughs under the

light of our torches during the electricity-controlled blackouts, which occurred every night.

My first placement was at Shankarapur Hospital where it was pretty quiet due to the fact it was Dasain (the longest festival in Nepal). The nurses were friendly and welcoming but after two weeks, Madhav said I needed to experience more of the ‘Nepalese Culture,’ and not work. He placed a call to the hospital supervisor and took me on the most magical cultural experience of my life.

Madhav was right – working was one thing but experiencing this culture was a once in a lifetime opportunity. He took me to share a wonderful feast with his family in the country, visit a Tibetan Monastery on the mountain top, witness a cremation ceremony by the river and see every important temple in Kathmandu.

Nepal Fact #8

In the most recent 2013 government election, there were 6,128 nominations for the various positions of various elected officials, 12 million voters, and 9,732 polling centers.



After three weeks it was time to say good bye and catch the bus to Chitwan, where I would spend the next five weeks with my new host family (Gita and Rimka), living in their 'pink palace' and sharing a room with Delphin (a nurse from France). We both worked at CMC Hospital and would walk there every morning, which would take 45 minutes. I would then spend the day in theatre. I got to observe operation after operation ranging from neurosurgery to gall bladder removals and cesareans. The doctors were great, and the experience was amazing.

A number of medical outreach programs were organised including a major Health Project at the big 'Cleansing of the River' festival in Triveni- with milk from 150,000 cows poured into the river and blessed by the Guru. We worked all day giving free health checkups before heading back down to the river at 6pm for the closing ceremony lit up by a million candles. We then headed home on the bus having a singing competition with the Nepalese doctors. They were much better singers than us.

Of course throughout the month the festivals continued. The Festival of Lights was in mid November. Delphin and I were up at 5:30am, on the roof helping Rimka put up fairy lights. We laughed and laughed. It was just like Christmas back home. We left work early and caught a rickshaw home to help cook and decorate for our big night of celebration, where the other local volunteers were invited to share the feast.

The weekends were filled with travelling to places like Chitwan National Park, where we went on an elephant jungle safari and Pokhara where I went paragliding over the snow-covered mountaintops.

I ended my time in Nepal by trekking to Everest Base Camp from Jiri. It was another amazing three week adventure to spend Christmas in the most beautiful mountain range in the world. Words alone cannot describe the experience.

With such incredible experiences behind me, I cannot wait for my next adventure to begin.

Thank You from Projects Abroad Nepal!



Projects Abroad Nepal would like to thank all of our amazing volunteers who have donated countless books in the last few months. Last week, we gave over 100 children's books to the Nutritional Rehabilitation Home, or NRH. With these resources, local Nepali youth will have access to reading materials previously unimaginable, and will have a great start at their education.

If you're coming to Nepal, don't hesitate to bring a few books locked away in your closet! Every book helps, and every child could use a literary boost.

Projects Abroad Nepal Photography Competition

Congratulations James Olmsted on winning the January 2014 monthly Projects Abroad Nepal Photography Competition! James, 19, from Canada, volunteered this fall at our Conservation Project, located in the village of Ghandruk, nestled in the Himalayas.



James took this shot in Pokhara, a lake-side town three hours south of Ghandruk, and almost nine hours west of Kathmandu. Fishing boats such as this one roam the lake from dawn to dusk, searching for fish to sell in the local markets. What stands out the most is the contrast of the piercing red boat covering with the lush green mountains, excellently highlighting the impossible plethora of colors Nepal offers in a single glance.

Congratulations again to James, and look for his photo in our special section of the monthly Nepal newsletter! Next month's submissions will be accepted until February 7th, so start shooting. And remember, the more creative, the better. Good luck!

Places We Love: Begnas Tal Lake

*Harriet Horsfall – Australia
High School Special Volunteer Coordinator*

Projects Abroad Nepal is starting a new blog series, highlighted in the monthly newsletter, #PlacesWeLove! The premise is simple: write about your experience at a Nepali location that you love, that stood out to you, that you'll travel back to while daydreaming at your school desk or office cubicle. The place can be your favorite cafe, your host family's home, or even a dusty road in the middle of Nepali nowhere.

The idea is to be able to see how your experiences in a place compared to someone else's, and to gain insight into places you haven't yet explored. I hope many of you decide to share, and they can be emailed to me at iansandler@projects-abroad.org

Pokhara has always been an incredibly special place for me. There is an unbelievable calm that comes from being there. The Fewa Tal, dotted with coloured boats and surrounded by the Annapurna and Fishtail mountains, is such a beautiful thing to arrive to, away from the hustle and bustle of metropolitan Kathmandu. But, it gets better....

While Pokhara by no means feels like Thamel by the lake/mountains, it's still appropriately touristy with men touting mountain posters, taxi drivers constantly offering their services, and of course the ever present hawkers selling those quintessential Nepali violins!

Enter Begnas Tal Lake. Begnas Tal is how I imagine Pokhara might have been before every man and his hiking poles jumped in on the secret of its beauty and serenity. The lake is situated a bumpy 30 minute taxi ride away from Lakeside Pokhara, but if you're feeling adventurous, and/or as though your hazard perception skills could use a brush up, you can hire a bike and take it for a 1.5 hour ride down the Privati Highway to get there.

I ventured to Begnas Tal on an overcast and chilly January day, on my rented bicycle, which, thankfully, donned a

generous amount of suspension. Future travellers take note: a good, well suspended mountain bike is certainly a must for cycling in Nepal, especially if walking normally is on your agenda for the days which follow your ride!

After a 2 hour jaunt down the highway, including several stops to look at our map and a quick stop at a Nepali bicycle shop to mend a broken chain, we arrived at Begnas Tal. The route to the lake is a little complex for the directionally challenged such as me, but very beautiful riding all the same, and Nepali people are generally only too happy to assist with pointing you in the right direction!

When Begnas Tal itself pops into view, its glassy, calm waters are incredibly striking. On a clear day, the lake is said to perfectly reflect the Himalaya Mountains, and the distinct lack of fellow tourists make this a perfect destination to experience where local Nepali people come to relax.

A short walk towards the ridge on the side of the lake will take you up to a small array of guesthouses and restaurants that deliver stunning views of the lake; a considerable reward for an undulating hike up the hill to get there! Serving an array of traditional, delicious Nepali food, lunch at



Nepal Fact #9

During the peak of the monsoon season in July, Nepal gets an average of 378 millimeters of rain. That is equal to about 60% of the total precipitation London gets in a year.

one of these guesthouses made for a wonderful reward after a hard morning's cycling! If you have a little longer than we did to spare at the lake, I imagine a stay in one of these guesthouses would not disappoint; the views out to the Begnas Tal every morning make this an ideal authentic Nepali relaxation location!

When it comes to getting onto the Begnas Tal itself, there are boats you can rent to row out to the middle of the lake: simply hand over the hourly fee (300 rupees), and a handsome yellow and red boat will be all yours! In truly one of the most relaxing moments of my time in Nepal, we rowed our boat out to the middle of lake and sat reading for a hour, feet up on one of the boat seats, fingers trawling in the calm waters of the lake. If you're lucky, you'll see some of the exquisite coloured butterflies this region of Nepal is so famous for, which for me topped off a completely perfect day.

All too soon, it was time to make the journey back to Pokhara, which by comparison, feels like a busy metropolis. Begnas Tal lake; it's a place in Nepal I love, and definitely claims my top spot for a relaxing, non-touristy chill out location!

A Volunteer's Perspective

*Franziska Gartner - Germany
Chitwan Medical Teaching College*

Heute war ein schöner und entspannter Tag. Aufgrund der Wahlen am kommenden Dienstag und den daraus resultierenden Streiks ist wenig los. Es fahren keine Busse und Tuk Tuks. Wir versuchen die freie Zeit gut zu nutzen und uns zu entspannen. Beim Frühstück mit Mina und Anna (meiner Gastmutter und Mitbewohnerin), gab es leckeres Daal Bhat und wir haben die nächsten Tage geplant. Das ging dann etwa so: sleeping – eating and finished! Wir hatten wirklich unseren Spaß. Mina ist für uns einerseits eine richtige Mutterfigur und andererseits wie eine Freundin, da sie nur zehn Jahre älter ist als wir. Wir unterhalten uns immer gut. Mina hat schlussendlich auch Anna überzeugt der Faulheit nach zu geben. Ich war heute sowieso zu Hause um mich von den



Nachtschichten am Montag, Dienstag und Mittwoch zu erholen.

Aus diesem Grund haben wir uns wirklich entspannt und sind zum Lesen nochmal ins Bett gegangen. Um halb elf habe ich mich mit Kristina (einer anderen Freiwilligen) getroffen, ich verstehe mich sehr gut mit ihr! Wir sind ein bisschen herum gelaufen. Ich habe mir einen Schal für 550 Rupien gekauft (nicht mal vier Euro) und auch wenn er sicher nicht aus echter Pashmina Wolle ist, finde ich ihn schön. Durch Zufall haben wir dann noch einen tollen, neuen (FAST schon westlichen) Supermarkt gefunden, in dem wir auch gleich ganz viele Süßigkeiten gekauft haben. Auf dem Weg zum Falcha, unserer Stammbar zum Mittagessen oder wenigstens auf etwas zu trinken, haben wir dann auch noch einen Tempel entdeckt.

Zögerlich sind wir langsam hineingegangen (übrigens natürlich immer ohne Schuhe) und haben uns das schöne Tempelinnere angesehen.

Man sieht viele bemalte Statuen von Göttern, die mit Blumen und Farbpulver geschmückt sind. In einem angrenzenden Raum saßen relativ viele alte Frauen und einige ältere Männer, alle in orange (das ist die Farbe der Witwen und Witwer, ich finde das viel schöner als unser Schwarz). Die Frauen haben sich sehr gefreut uns junge, westliche Mädchen zu sehen und haben uns gleich zu sich gerufen. Sie haben uns sehr freundlich willkommen geheißen und ein wenig auf Nepali mit uns geredet. Ich habe mich wohl gefühlt und wurde sofort ruhig. Wir haben erst eine rote und dann eine schwarze Tika (aus Reisasche) auf die Stirn bekommen, als Zeichen dafür, dass wir im Tempel waren. Die Frauen

haben danach angefangen Musik zu machen und zu singen. Das war extrem schön und ein tolles Erlebnis. Sie haben uns noch eine Art Reisbrei angeboten, den wir abgelehnt haben. Die haben wir im Nachhinein bereut. Als die Frauen das gesehen haben, haben sie uns sofort eine Banane und eine Orange gebracht. Einfach nett! Ich schaue da sicher noch einmal vorbei! Es war so schön.

Anschließend waren wir im Falcha und nach und nach sind fast alle anderen Freiwilligen vorbeigekommen. Irgendwann haben wir uns leckerstes Gemüsecurry bestellt und uns einfach gut unterhalten. Um drei sind Anna und ich noch zum Supermarkt und danach nach Hause.

Nach einer Stunde relaxen (wir sind heute einfach alle faul), sind wir mit Mina zur Schneiderin, weil wir uns endlich unsere Sari Oberteile nähen lassen wollten. Wir haben noch schnell Gemüse für's Abendessen gekauft und dann hat uns Mina beigebracht wie man Daal Bhat kocht. Es ist eigentlich sehr leicht. Ich warne Euch alle gleich vor, ich werde es zu



Hause oft kochen, denn ich liebe es inzwischen! Eben kam Mina nochmal zu uns ins Zimmer und hat uns Tee gebracht. Sie ist einfach so eine Liebe! Wir drei verstehen uns sehr gut. Morgen gehe ich wieder ins Krankenhaus und es geht endlich in den OP. Nachmittags wollten wir mit Mina vielleicht nach Narayangarh (die Zwillingstadt von Bharatpur) ein wenig shoppen... Die Tage sind aufgrund der Wahlen, den Streiks und den daraus resultierenden Ferien ziemlich entspannt, aber das ist auch total ok. Ich fühle mich hier wie zu Hause und bin sehr glücklich!