

Nepal Travel Journal – Volume 1



Golden Thumb Statue in Doha, Qatar

Friday, October 18, 2024 – Kathmandu, Nepal

Namaste from Nepal, a landlocked country in Asia situated in the Himalayas which contains eight of the world's ten tallest mountains, including Mount Everest, the highest point on Earth. I'm traveling with my daughter, Julia; her friend Hogan; and my brother Jerry. There was no possible way to talk Lori into this trip, as we'll be trekking to Mount Everest Base Camp (EBC), situated at an altitude of 17,598 feet above sea level, over the course of eight days. I think we'll be hiking between six and eight hours a day. Like most questions about trekking in Nepal, there are no straight answers. Everything depends on something else, such as the weather, the conditions, your attitude, etc.

We'll be staying at mountain teahouses and lodges along the way that get more basic the higher we go, not the luxury that we're accustomed to. We've prepared for this trip by getting a handful of vaccines to protect us from diseases in this area, including Typhoid; Polio; Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR); Hepatitis; Diphtheria, Tetanus, and Pertussis (DPT); and Meningitis. I know, at this point you're asking yourself why the fuck I wanted to do this.



Momos (stuffed dumplings)



Garden of Dreams

EBC is one of the most popular trekking routes in the Himalayas. About 40,000 people per year make the trek there. To put that in perspective, about two million people visit Machu Picchu every year, and about forty million people visit Venice annually. EBC is a rudimentary campsite at the base of Mount Everest used by mountain climbers during their ascent and descent to the summit of Mount Everest. Climbers of Everest typically rest at base camp for several days for acclimatization, to reduce the risk of altitude sickness. We'll be taking drugs to reduce our risk; hopefully they work, as acute altitude sickness can be serious.



Patan Complex

We're starting our trip in Kathmandu, Nepal's capital and largest city made famous by Bob Seger and the Silver Bullet Band. Kathmandu is set in a valley at 4,593 feet above sea level, surrounded by the Himalayan mountains and in a time zone nine hours and forty-five minutes ahead of eastern standard time, rendering my travel-time watch useless. The city is one of the oldest continuously inhabited places in the world, founded in the second century AD. We arrived this morning after a two-day flight with a stop in Doha, Qatar, where we did a city tour during our eight-hour layover. We visited the National Museum of Qatar and the Souq Waqif, a huge market that sells everything from spices to fabrics to jewelry to falcons and camels.

After checking into our Kathmandu hotel around noon we went straight to bed. Later in the afternoon we got up



Monkey Temple

and walked around the corner from the hotel to The Garden of Dreams, a neo-classical garden built in 1920 where we had momos (stuffed dumplings) and tea while admiring the gardens with pavilions, an amphitheater, ponds, pergolas, and urns. We then walked around Thamel, the area surrounding our hotel known for its narrow alleys crowded with various shops and vendors, buying some last-



Nepalese Fashion Statement

minute trekking supplies that are easier to get in Nepal. Dinner was at a traditional Nepalese restaurant where Hogan upset the owner by not finishing his chicken that took her one year to prepare. Or maybe she said no one's ordered that chicken in a year because they don't eat chicken in Nepal. We're not really sure what she said. I'm going to stick to my vegan diet while in Nepal to avoid similar situations and as a way to stay away from questionable meat. Dinner for the four of us was a total of \$23, even more of a value since the waiter kept coming over to refill our plates (but not Hogan's chicken).

Saturday, October 19, 2024 – Kathmandu

We spent today sightseeing around Kathmandu, visiting various cultural sights, Buddhist temples, and Hindu stupas (shrines). Of course we went to Swoyambhu Mahachaitya, more commonly known as the Monkey Temple, an ancient religious complex that is the most sacred among

all Buddhist pilgrimage sites. The place is inhabited by monkeys which mingle freely with all the human visitors.

After the tour we met up with our tour operator for instructions on preparing for our trek. Tomorrow we're supposed to fly from Kathmandu to Lukla (elevation: 9,383 ft) at 6am, where we'll begin our trek to EBC. That, of course, depends on a lot of things, most importantly the weather. I'm not sure if I'll have any internet connection for the next week, so I'm sending this journal now while I can. I'll send updates if and when possible.

Stephen

Nepal Travel Journal – Volume 2

Sunday, October 20, 2024 - Kathmandu to Lukla, Trek to Phakding

Namaste! Our day began with a 4:45 am pickup at our hotel for a 6:00 am flight to Lukla to start our trek to Everest Base Camp. Our flight took off at 8:30 am, which delighted us to no end since ours was one of the first flights to take off to Lukla in four days due to cloudy weather. How lucky are we? The Tenzing-Hillary airport in Lukla is a small single-landing-strip airport high in the Himalayan mountains at an elevation of 9,400 feet, which has a reputation as one of the most dangerous airports in the world. Therefore, weather conditions must be perfect for planes to approach and land. The flight passed over one isolated mountain valley after another. There are no roads from Kathmandu to Lukla; therefore, the only way to get there is by plane or helicopter. The Himalayas are beautiful; it's easy to understand why people

worship them.

Between the time we left Kathmandu and the thirty minutes it should have taken to get to Lukla, clouds had rolled in, forcing us to divert to Ramechhap, a tiny mountain village close to Lukla as the crow flies but with no roads between them. But luck was still with us. After about two and a half hours conditions improved enough for us to fly to Lukla, so all fourteen passengers on our plane rushed back to the plane, and we flew to Lukla. We arrived safely and felt like we were the luckiest people in Nepal, both for getting to Lukla in the first place and living to tell about it.



In Lukla we met up with our guide, Mingma Sherpa, who will navigate for us along the trails. Mingma has summited Mount Everest five times and operates a teahouse with his wife on the trail about a thirty-minute walk from Lukla. We can only understand about half of what he says, and that's pushing it. We also have an assistant guide and two porters to carry our luggage on their backs, two duffle bags per porter. We

only need to carry daypacks for our essentials on the trail. As typical Americans, we even overpacked our daypacks. After lunch and a walk around Lukla, we began our trek to EBC.

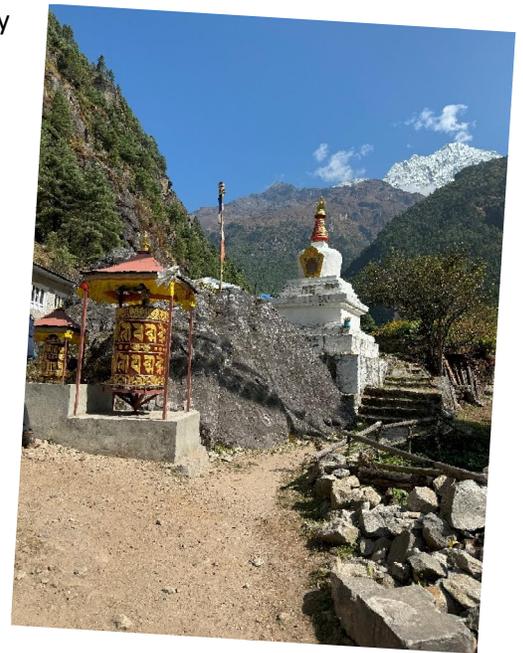
Our destination today was Phakding, a small village in the Dudh Kosi river valley at an altitude of about 8,600 feet and with a

population of 550 locals. We arrived around 5:30 pm, covering about four miles while sharing the trail with trekkers from around the world, porters of luggage and goods needed throughout the area,





donkeys, and yaks. Avoiding the donkey and yak shit scattered everywhere on the trail is a challenge. We passed many Buddhist heritages and monuments along the trails, including monasteries, mani walls, chortens, stone inscriptions, and prayer flags. Our hotel was beautiful, far exceeding our expectations for mountain lodging. The food was delicious, and the electric blankets kept us warm in our unheated rooms.



Monday, October 21, 2024 - Trek from Phakding to Namche Bazaar

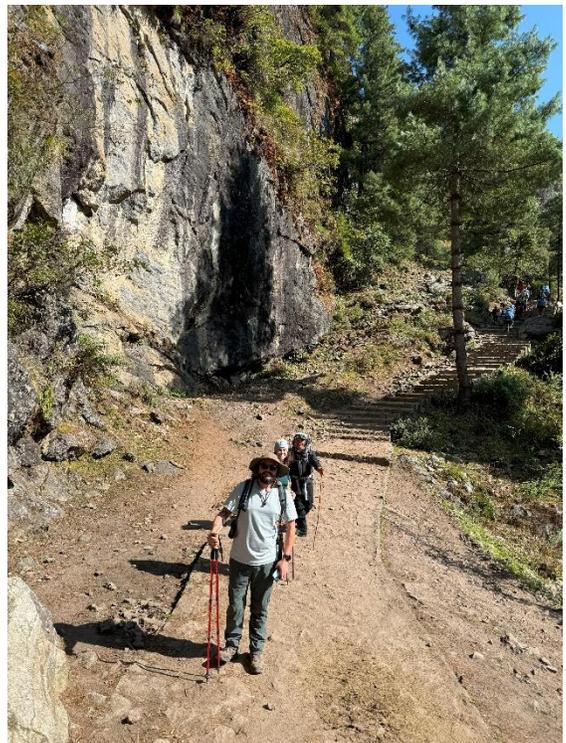
After breakfast we headed off for Namche Bazaar, a town at 11,286

feet populating the sides of a hill. Namche is the main trading center and hub

for the region. It's a popular spot for trekkers, especially for altitude acclimatization, and is the gateway to the high Himalaya. Before lunch I was navigating a downhill trail full of rocks and suddenly it felt like someone whacked me in the back of my leg with a stick. We rested a while, and I hobbled to



the next village where we had lunch. I think I pulled a calf muscle, which doesn't hurt unless I'm standing

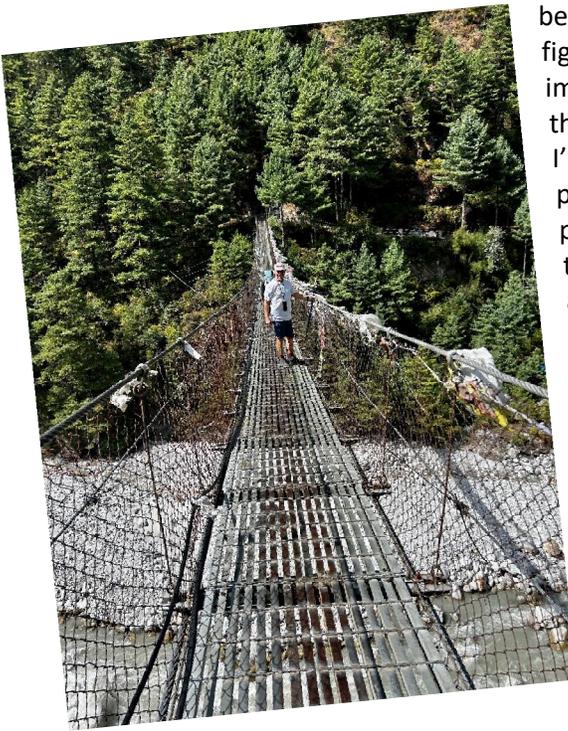


up or walking. Instead of hiking the last three miles when I could barely walk to the toilet, I hired a guy with a horse (I think it was really a mule) to take me to Namche. That was a scary experience as the horse/mule navigated up and down hills amongst rocks and steps, but it beat walking, and we made it. Some of the best money I've ever spent! Jerry, Julia, and Hogan arrived not much after me and we all had dinner and went to bed.



Tuesday, October 22, 2024 - Namche

Fortunately, today is an acclimatization day with just a "short" four-hour hike to give our bodies a chance to get used to the higher altitude and thinner air



before we ascend higher. I figured it's more important to rest my leg than to do the hike since I'm already taking the pills for altitude sickness prevention, so I skipped the hike and hung out at the hotel all day, writing this journal. How lucky are YOU?

The internet is starting to get very hit-and-miss, so I'm sending this out while I can. Thanks for keeping up with us.

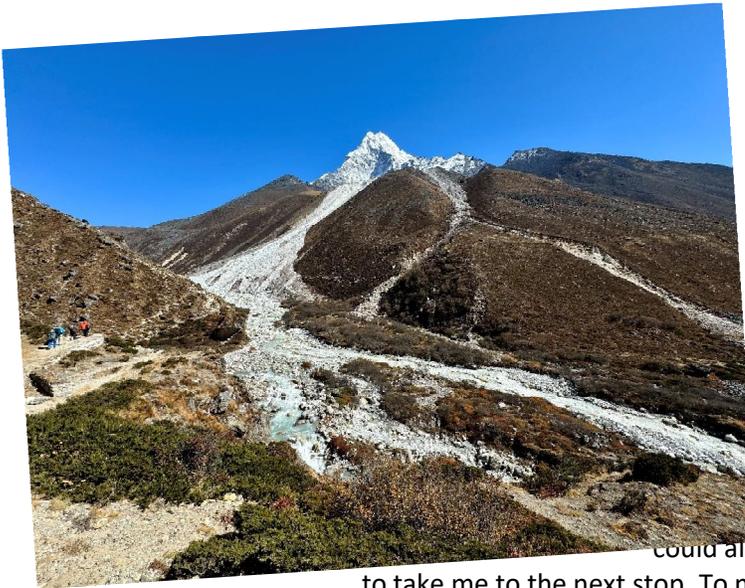
Stephen



Nepal Travel Journal – Volume 3

Wednesday, October 23, 2024 - Namche to Pangboche

Today we trekked about eight miles, mostly uphill, in eight hours to Pangboche, a village in the Khumbu subregion located at an elevation of about 13,500 feet. My leg was feeling a little better, so I decided to try to walk, knowing we



could always call a horse to take me to the next stop. To make a long story short, which if you're still reading these journals probably isn't very important to you, I walked the entire way. The scenery along the way was beautiful, and we got a glimpse of Mount Everest and majestic mountains.

We arrived at the 360 View Mountain Lodge around 3:30 pm, but we were so exhausted we didn't take in the view. Note to self: do that tomorrow.

Accommodations at 13,500 feet drop off considerably. There are no towels (we

brought our own), no toilet paper (the sprayer works remarkably well), the warm water takes five minutes to arrive and at such low pressure it's not worth the wait, and no heated blankets (we slept in multiple layers and hats). And it's going to get even more basic than this! Personal hygiene is definitely going to suffer the next few days. After dinner I was sound asleep by 8:00 pm.

Thursday, October 24, 2024 - Pangboche to Dingboche

I woke up morning to a frozen tube of toothpaste after having had the best sleep I've had in months. The view that we missed



yesterday was magnificent. Before leaving Pangboche we visited a 16th century Buddhist monastery where we crashed a

wedding of an Australian couple whose Nepalese friend gave them the idea to get married in

Nepal. We then hiked about three and a half hours to Dingboche, a Sherpa village at an elevation of 14,470 feet. Its population is a few hundred people, and that's pushing it. There are no roads that go to the village, only trails, and



this

except for some agricultural products produced around the village, yaks and mules carry in most of what is consumed there. The “hotel” is very basic: two beds in a room, toilet down the hall, no shower on premises.



I'm able to send out this journal because we bought a 48-hour internet package that works great, so far. Thanks for keeping up with us.

Stephen



Nepal Travel Journal – Volume 4



Friday, October 25, 2024 - Dingboche to Lobuche

Before I get to today, I want to tell you about last night. We slept in sleeping bags because there was no way to know the last time the sheets were changed. It could have been yesterday, or it could have been last year with equal probability. The room was freezing, so I had three layers of clothes on inside a down sleeping bag. I also had my own pillowcase to cover their pillow.

We're taking

Diamox for altitude

sickness prevention, which is a diuretic, which makes you pee A LOT. The four times I had to pee in the night meant unzipping the sleeping bag, putting my shoes on in the dark, and going down the hall to the toilet. Needless to say, I didn't sleep very well last night.

Today we hiked through beautiful landscapes to reach Lobuche, a small settlement (notice I didn't even call it a village) located near the foot of the Khumbu Glacier at 16,300 feet. We've been above the tree line for a couple

days, so the

vistas are wide

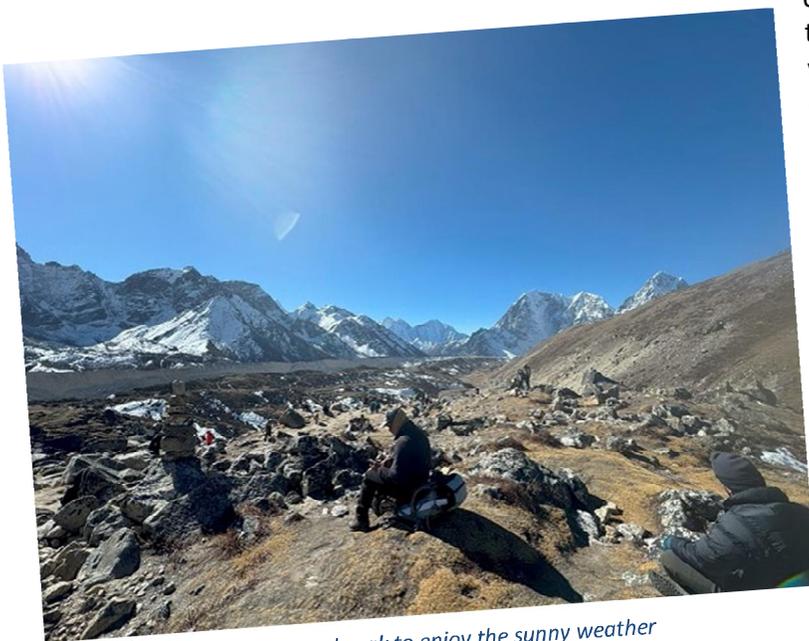
open. I forgot to mention this earlier: our guide is somewhat of a celebrity on the trail. He knows EVERYONE. It's like walking around Parkland with Lori. Everyone says hello and shakes his hand.

At this point I feel we're all becoming serious trekkers. We've started purifying our own water instead of buying bottled water, and we don't mind stepping in horse and yak dung on the trail. If there's a pile that's where we intend to take that next step, so be it. We only avoid the really fresh piles.

Saturday, October 26, 2024 - Lobuche to Gorak Shep to Everest Base Camp, then back to Gorak Shep

We left early this morning to hike to Gorak Shep, a settlement nestled on the periphery of a frozen lakebed blanketed with sand.

Situated at an elevation of 16,942 feet, it remains uninhabited for most of the year, reopening only for the Mount Everest trekking season. We stopped there for tea and snacks, dropped off some gear, then trekked another two hours



Trekkers taking a break to enjoy the sunny weather



We made it! Mount Everest Base Camp

to Everest Base Camp at 17,600 feet. This is what we came here for! When we arrived, the place was packed. Hundreds of people were celebrating their accomplishment and taking photos, obviously to post on social media. We stayed about thirty minutes, taking in the view of the Khumbu Ice-Fall and other snow-clad mountains, including Nuptse and Lhotse and the peak of Everest in the distance, then returned to Gorak Shep to spend the night.

Sunday, October 27, 2024 - Fly to Kathmandu

After breakfast we returned to Kathmandu by helicopter. it took about an hour to fly the distance that we spent six days walking. We'll spend the rest of the day today and tomorrow in Kathmandu, probably in a hot shower, then fly home on Tuesday.

I've wanted to do this trek for forty years; I should have done it before I was 61 years old. It was tough. The air is thin, and the path is steep and tricky. As I approach the end of the trip, it was a terrific adventure, and I have a great sense of accomplishment, which is what it was all about in the first place. The memories and bonds that Julia, Jerry, Hogan, and I developed trekking through Nepal will last a lifetime.

I'm looking forward to getting home and sleeping in my own bed. Also, if anyone wants any of my hiking gear, you can have it.

Stephen



Khumbu Ice-Fall from Everest Base Camp

