







[Day Zero]



The Journey Begins

I love being at the airport. I've always loved to sit at the gate and observe the passengers that will be taking the same plane and are going to the same destination as me. Thirty minutes before boarding time, a group of people sat in front of me. They were a group of doctors going also to Nepal to preform voluntary medical practice. Since 2007, over 200 volunteers have joined their program, serving and meeting more than 10,000 local patients. These doctors decided to sustain this activity and thus built a medical center in Chitwan last year and brought in even more medical resources to the local people.

When I got on the plane, I started chatting with the lady sitting next to me. They were a group of tourists traveling around Nepal for sightseeing. Just then I realized that Nepal even as a developing country has attracted people around the globe who not only are willing to serve but also willing to sightsee and travel.

11:45 pm, we arrived at Katmandu airport and, having our luggage picked up, headed to Samara Resort for the night. On the way, I found that the city doesn't seem to have many streetlights and had armed man on the streets. I wondered how this journey would go.



Await to approach the immigration counter at Tribhuvan International Airport of Nepal

[Day One]



Arriving At the Village

Standing on the roof top of Samsara, early in the morning, I looked over Katmandu. The entire city is continuously being broken down and rebuilt. The capital is surrounded by mountainous terrain. With our bags packed, we left for our targeted village, Tripureswor. On the highway, I chatted with Dan, who mentioned his experience of meeting a henna women in Katmandu who could speak several fluent

languages, yet, her revenues were extremely low. I scribbled down on my note: "does this mean good education, or does it indicate tourism?"

On the highway, there were also a lot of trucks. Trucks in Nepal are usually decorated with tapes on the front, back and especially the windowsills. Phrases such as "ROAD KING" or "SPEED CONTROL" were put in front of the truck and "HORN ME" or "BLOW HORN" at the back. Even though the traffic in Nepal was rather "crazy", but when I saw the ways people pass their cars over narrow roads, together with the different horn sounds and the way the drivers drove, it really



Decorations of Trucks

does represents a special culture. At noon, continuing our bumpy ride to Tripureswor, we stopped by a small village after lunch. The small village was located at the top of a hill. I observed that the village people are usually elderly, women and very young kids. Elderlies gathered around the village tree to star as us. This might indicate that men work outside the village. On the way back to our coach, I asked Ranjit about



Watching the city from the rooftop of Samsara in Katmandu

how the government hired civil servants and armies, told me that most vacancies are not opened to the public, only people with wealth or power could get the chance to apply. I wrote down on my note: "'Education' is an incentive for people to get jobs in order to change their social status, if there is no chance for such, education pushes people to only little opportunities." Arriving at the village, we placed our bags in our tents and went for a swim. Dal-Bhat, the traditional Nepalese food was served for dinner and then we had "debrief time" around the campfire. I remember how I once dreamed of swimming in the river and that I finally realized my dream. The trip started off with excitement and tomorrow the work begins.



On the way toward the village, from urban to rural

[Day Two]



Enjoying the Village

Awakened by bird chirps, I crawled out of my tent and the sky was still dim. Bryan invited me to go for a swim by the riverside and I grabbed my camera with me. I asked Bryan about the temples I saw yesterday. He explained that most Nepalese believed in Hinduism, thus, caste system and



gender inequality is still a big impediment for society progress. Then we discussed about how a service trip meant to the village itself. I questioned whether we are bringing help to the village or are we making the villagers depending on outer resources. I mentioned about the possibilities to select villagers and train them to train other villagers. Bryan share with me the experience of a group of NGO serving another village and taught some village farmers how to plant papaya, which is rich in nutrients that they lack. Several years after, the NGOs went back and there was no more papaya trees. They searched for the reason and found that because the villagers had never seen and eaten papayas, the farmers cannot sell them so they went back to plant their original crops. I explained that maybe by bringing villagers into a developed country for him or her to learn the techniques and decide what to implement in a village might be a good idea. We came upon the agreement that despite the lack of resources, culture differences will be the greatest barrier after this villager return, resulting ideas unlikely to spread and use the knowledge cannot be performed. When Bryan and I returned to the campsite, breakfast was served with



tea and coffee. I help to purify the water and had my breakfast. After that all of us went to Dragonfly's building site. We will be painting two buildings for the next several days. Splitting into two groups, our group will first sand the cement walls and then apply the prime to the wall. At noon, we went back to the

campsite to have lunch, and then headed for the daily swim in the river. A discussion was shared as we got back to the campsite. Microfinance was explained and deliberated first. The way microfinance works is to provide a relatively small amount of funding to a group of people for them to start their business. After a short period of time, they would earn the money to return the money and the interests back to the people that lend them the money. For example, local farmers might be able to borrow money to buy seeds and plant them. After selling their crops after harvest, they can return the money and the interests. The main concern for microfinance is the lack of



revenue and efficiency such that the incentives for the money to be loan is low in the first place. Furthermore, Sam pointed out that he didn't even see many banks in Katmandu, Ranjit added that it is extremely hard for people to borrow money from the banks in Nepal. After that, I shared my research on education in Nepal with the group pointing out the three main aspects to focus: Quantity, Quality and Equality. Health and gender inequality issues are also raised. Dan said that we will visit local school the next day and also the clinic if possible. Twinkie, Bryan, Brian and I played Frisbee with local kids before dinner. Camp fire debrief time ended the day.



Playing Frisbee with local children









[Day Three]



Interview at the village

For the morning of our second day at the village we headed back to the village buildings to continue our paint jobs. Our group finished priming the building. In the afternoon, we went to the local school: Shree Achane Higher Secondary School. We get to meet with the school principal and teachers. Shree Achane High is a community school that has over 500 students from kindergarten till grade twelve. Students from five to six kilometers away would come to study in this secondary school. Since it is a community school, no tuition fee is needed and textbooks are provided for the students. Students started their class at 6 in the morning. Younger kids will study five subjects and end school before noon. Older kids have eight subjects and end school in the afternoon. Though the school have infrastructure such as solar panels, computers and wireless internet from private donations, many infrastructures such as the classrooms were still poor. The school representative pointed out that the lack of fences around the school not only allow strangers to enter the school, but also live stocks and animals causing the school many problems. Students on the other hand, though coming to school every day, have limited time to study due to house chores. Lack of studying causes learning outcomes lower than expected according to the teacher. Teachers also think they lack training of new teaching methods and use of technologies. One special fact we realized was from the teacher is that the school owns a higher proportion of girls than boys in the school.







Education in Nepal (Left: students eager to get on a leaving bus; Right Bottom: classroom in school)

Since many boys do accept better education resources, such as going to private schools in the city, or boys working at a young age in cities, girls remain in the village to help the family, resulting in such a phenomenon. After the interview, we had our dinner and debrief fire camp time.



Careless children, where is their future?

[Day Four]



More within the village

Having an early morning, I headed to the small "kitchen" that has been supplying us food. The "chef" told me that what they are doing is a special job in Nepal where several people form a group to take care of camp food for clients when going on hiking. They will buy ingredients and hike up to the designated place and prepare food several hours before the clients arrive.

Governments do provide some basic training for them, yet no schools or courses are provided for this kind of jobs. The chef thinks that this kind of techniques requires more experience than anything else. He has been following another chef that does similar job after working in a restaurant in Katmandu for many years. Later the day, we



The chef making breakfast

shipped several hundred of bricks to the camp site and went for lunch and swim. Through the process, it's significant how difficult it is to carry items without improved transportation networks. Before dinner, we split into groups to discuss our group topics. We looked through the things we see from observations and interviews we



Transporting the bricks

did the past several days. This time, we tried to analyze Nepal's education for youngsters and adults. The lack of vocational training is one of the core ideas we worked on. Incentives for children and villagers to learn is another issue. We prepared several other questions for a visitor from a local NGO the next day. Rain poured down before we could conclude entirely. We hid inside a large tent to play "the killer" and had pizza for dinner after the rain stopped.

[Day Five]



There is a way

Last full day in the village. Waking up again for an early morning, I went for a short walk before breakfast. The warm breeze and the sound of nature makes me feel refreshed. Looking at farmers in the field, people building new houses, smoke coming out of chimneys, children working on their homework and women



taking care of livestock, the village is functioning smoothly.

Later in the morning, soon after breakfast, a representative from United Mission to Nepal (UMN) come to talk with us and shared what they have done over the past years. The representative gave us a brief over view what different NGOs have done and their outcomes. Some successful projects included implementing suitable desks



Local farmer looking over corn field

and tables for younger children and establishing teacher training centers. He also mentioned about the system of community schools run by community people who might not be educated. He also mention high dropout rate of students which conflicts with our interview at the secondary school. I also asked about the details of the

acceptance of newly brought training

sessions and technologies for the villages. He brought me new perspectives and understandings of how different plans are working in Nepal. After the representative left, we headed to the Dragonfly Buildings to finish the paints. In the afternoon, we headed for Janajyoti lower secondary School. This school has a private donated library that includes English children books and a DVD playback screen. One thing that kept in my mind is the first time looking at a chart on the classroom wall with records of the number of students from different castes within the classroom. After leaving the school, we headed for the clinic. The nearest clinic is on the other side of

the river, which is approximately two to three kilometers from the primary school we just visited. At the clinic, it handles mostly small diseases. Supported by Rotary Sweden and several other NGOs, villagers can get cheap medicines. Looking at so many supports from international organizations, the question



The beautiful sky as sun sets

pops out again in my mind as I wrote down on my note: "will these result villagers relying on outer resources, are we causing more problems or are we helping them?"

We headed down for the last swim in the river. Lying on the bedrock, looking up toward the sky, yesterday's rain cleared away most of the dust and the sky was clearer than ever. Without the need to worry about any phone calls and email, time ran reasonably slow. The only sound I heard were our voices and the sound of nature. Later in the night, we had the usual camp fire debrief. This time, we also got barbeque with some villagers joining us. I learned how to add wood to the camp fire. After the fire, stares flickered in the sky, and I thought I ended that day. Several hours I was woken by my tent-mate, Sam, "Ken, I think I've been bitten by something, can you open the flashlight?", I got up and we looked for the "invader". "I hope it's not a scorpion", Sam said as we glimpse at the little scorpion with its tail already up



between me and Sam. Sam flicked his lunchbox over the Scorpion as Dan and Bryan ran to our tent. I've never seen a scorpion before. Besides waking up several times as Sam does his regular checkups over the night, thankfully everything else was fine.



[Day Six] / Leaving the Village

Early in the morning, we said goodbye to the local villagers and handed them some gifts. Each group shared their conclusion and proposals and we cleared away the tents. Headed to the bus that will bring us back to urbanization. The feeling is complicated and hard to describe. I questioned myself if I have really understood



enough to help the village. I asked myself the same question every time I finish a volunteer job, "Did I help or did I disturb?" I try to put myself into the villagers shoes about making a choice between urbanization and not. I enjoy the nature of the wilderness yet I also wanted the convenience of modernization. On the way back to Katmandu, I told myself, despite education issues, there are so many issues such as waste managements, water resources, gender inequalities, and sanitary issues still await to be solved. Yet, I should not only put all these questions in front of me, but also look at the other side of Nepal; the beauty, the culture and the people is what builds up this country. We had our dinner in Katmandu, I ordered the traditional food, dal-bhat, again before leaving the country tomorrow.



[Day Seven]



Site seeing within Nepal

Last day in Nepal, we visited three sites in Katmandu. Boudhmath, Pashuputmath and Durbar Square. Boudhmath is one of the world's largest stupa for the worship of Buddha. Katmandu was once a large city on a trade route connecting Tibet and the other



countries. This stupa was built to wish the travelers safe when travelling. We circled the temple in a clock-wise direction following the tradition of Buddhism. The stupa was said to be a holy place for Buddhists. The top part of the stupa, the eye of Buddha is drawn on four directions representing all-seeing. It is said that the eye represents wisdom and peace and the nose drawn like a 1 to represents unity of the universe. The colorful prayer flags were hang from the four corners of the stupa. Believe to originate from Tibetan Buddhism, it symbolized the spread of wishes to all when wind blow and the flags flatter in the air.

Leaving the stupa, Boudhmath, we headed to Pashuputmath which is one of the most important Hindu temples in the world. This temple is built to honor Shiva, the god of "destroyer" as well as "creator". On one side of the temple are pagodas for religious people to meditate. Inside these pagodas you will find the symbol of Shiva, the sculpture of the combination of lingam and yoni. Nandi, the animal that Shiva rides, stands outside these pagodas. On the other side of the river, The Bagmati River, the sacred river in Nepal, runs right beside the main temple of Pashuputmath. This river carried ashes of deceased person where he or she is cremated by the

riverside.

Finally we head to Durbar Square to have lunch. Then we shopped the streets near the Square. I bought some cashmere, hand drawn tea bags and hand weaved carpets.

Later that night, we headed back to the Hotel and headed for the airport.

What will you choose? The stars or the internet?