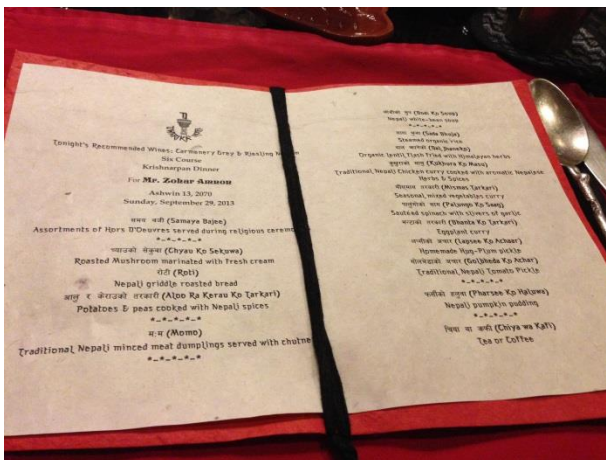
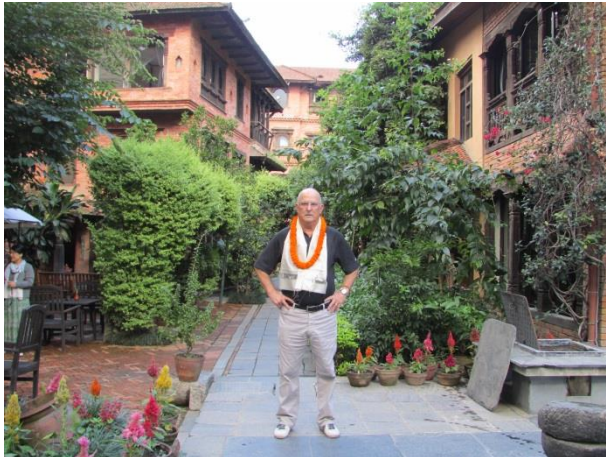


Travel Log – Nepal

Coming in to Katmandu from the airport is like what we heard from people about New Delhi: hot, muggy, and polluted. The dirt road is full with kid roaming the street, cheesy stores and a taste of the old and poor refugee camps in Gaza. Yet not a mile away we checked into Darwinka's Hotel or better yet resort let's say Oasis. Our suite is traditional wood, newly renovated and modernly attired. Go figure.



They say that it is difficult to change first impressions. Admittedly we came here with an attitude that this is a mini-India, polluted, crowded etc. On our drive back from touring the market and Durbar Square we changed our mind as far as the value to us as tourist of the Himalayans. This is Hindu country with its 32 million gods (give or take a million) but there are many Buddhist and as usual Muslims but in a real minority. Nepal we're told is most tolerant towards other religions than the dominant Hindu and that tolerance also exist amongst the hundred or so different ethnic sects.



On this trip we are not only seeing places, we experience them and we learn so much about religions, traditions, cultures and present day societal trends. In that latter respect very much like in the West: secularization, materialism, social media obsession, Westernization.

We understood Hinduism to be a class system with no upward mobility and indeed it is except that they call it Cast system as distinct from Class system which is a societal stratification. As our guide Archea explained in Cast you can only go down and in Class you can only go up. However inter-cast marriages are common except that the lower cast prevails e.g., if you are first cast and you marry a third (out of 4) your children are third cast. In Durbar Square there is a huge concentration of temples and interesting ways of worship and sacrifice. It is also a huge Bazaar with thousands of pedestrians, motor bikes, tricycles and with the rain even more colourful with all the umbrellas.



At 4 O'clock we saw the 8 years old living goddess. She appeared in the window for not more than a minute (no photos allowed). The living goddess is chosen by a committee. The girl has to come from the top cast and there are 16 physical and 16 personality criteria by which she is judged. Nominations can come from anywhere in the country. Once selected the girl is separated from her family home and moves to this temple where we saw her today. The parents can come and visit her anytime, she has a tutor but she has religious and ceremonial duties. I wish I could write in pictures but that we will do back at home in a blog style. Mom is having stomach issues no matter what she eats. But in typical mom fashion she soldiers on. Me, I only had one bad night where I thought that my spirit is leaving me as I found it difficult to breathe and it scared me. We're now at "normal" altitude 7600 feet which is a breeze compared to Lhasa. As you know I was the reluctant bride as far as this trip and particularly the duration are concerned. But at the end of everyday so far I could only say: It would have been crazy to miss it. Today is no exception.



September 29

We are in Katmandu. What a difference does 5000 feet of altitude make. We slept like babies to the humming sound of the ceiling fan. This morning we went to a cremation complex and watched with awe the death and "burial" rituals from family members bringing the deceased covered by a traditional blanket on a stretcher to the actual cremation and to memorial rituals of the deceased. The complex is huge with tribunes for spectators and tourists watching the rituals and offerings. It is built on both sides of what we would call a polluted stream. There are sacred cows all over the place and believe it or not free roaming monkeys. This whole experience may sound dreary but in fact it is fascinating and educational and visually colourful and vibrant.





The market square is actually a circle built around a huge Buddhist Stupa the largest in East Asia. We also bargained on gorgeous hand painted (we saw the masters doing their craft right there)





We are now in the "beautiful city" of Patan Darbar. This is yet another but just as beautiful cluster of shrines top billing to a 2000 years old palace. There is a pillar in the square which a group of Israeli travellers one of them Eyal confirmed is the subject of a popular Israeli song: The bird of Nepal by a singer called Atari (?).







One of the most fascinating experiences throughout this trip and mainly of course because we are the group is to talk to our guides (all women) about life and family and relationships and perceptions and aspirations and compare their life stories to ours or at least our norms.

Archea is a property inheritance lawyer and has a Master degree in political science married with a 9 year old daughter. She is very soft hearted by her own admission and dealing with property inheritance legal issues did not give her any personal reward. She decided to find a new career and became a freelance licensed tour guide. She loves it and it shows. Our conversations are direct, open and candid especially when comparing life in the West versus the East.

She has an excellent grasp of Western society and pointed out the good and the bad without trying to be nice. Mitzi and Tracey and Sharon count your blessing for not living in Nepal. By tradition strongly enforced Archea her husband and daughter (have to) live with her in-laws even though the latter have their own home and Archea and her husband own their home, i.e it is not an economical consideration but rather a cultural imperative. So imagine you living with your mother-in-law 24/7. Yet family dynamics and in-law relations are universal. You're not alone. Off to the Monkey Palace. This is another place of worship with a twist. It is common to both religions especially to followers of Hindu Buddhism. It sits on top of a hill overlooking Katmandu Valley. From atop the valley looks so picturesque while with the mountains in the background the colourful houses. It's beautiful from atop. Once you're at street level, let's face it Katmandu is a stinky dirty place but in a good way when you consider the places we saw and the place we stay in. No need to go see India. Same thing but more crowded. Tomorrow we are flying to Bhutan. How come I didn't know the place existed before we saw the brochure? Tonight we dined in a posh authentic Nepalese restaurant on the premises of our hotel. Shoes are left in the lobby, hand washing over a brass basin and a 6 course meal of

many things that we know: lentil, rice, cauliflower, beans etc., but in a form and texture we haven't seen before. The verdict (mom included) excellent.



September 30

Israeli drivers will feel at home in the countries we visited so far: traffic is chaotic, survival of the fittest and most familiar constant honking horns. Canadians are still at the starting gate giving way to everyone who cuts them off or honks behind them. You cannot survive here if you are nice and polite. Canadians: hire a driver or stay at home. It took some convincing for Archea to believe that we are Israelis. She said that "some of her best friends are Israelis" and then proceeded to describe the typical pushy, whiny, aggressive, impatient, distrusting, junk shopping Israeli tourists of which she sees many. Of course the worst of the group is the tour leader himself. This is our reputation world-wide and they have to live with it. We saw the palace in the city of devotees Bhaktapur. But by now it's almost same o' same o'

