

Nepal Odyssey 2019 Reflection
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As I sit here two months later, reflecting on my journey to Nepal, words almost fail me. How do you capture such an intimate experience? I will try my best....

I discovered Tumbuh through a former high school soccer team mate, Lindsay. I stumbled across a Facebook post in early 2019 and had always wanted to travel to Nepal, so why not this year? I knew before I left for Kathmandu that Tumbuh was a well thought out and organized experience. There was YouTube packing videos, Slack chat rooms, a Passport Portal, access to ask questions leading up the trip. This preparation demonstrated that Tumbuh was a class act and I was in for a treat.

My journey began at a local municipal airport. I flew from Fayetteville, North Carolina to Atlanta, and then to Doha, and finally to Kathmandu. While I had plenty of cushion between flights, there was an issue with the plane in Fayetteville and I still had to hustle to my gate in Atlanta. I thought to myself, “please let’s not start this trip out on a travel snafu,” followed by the thought of gratitude, “how many people get to check something off their bucket list and travel to Nepal? Quit complaining!” The plane trip was long, but with a nice layover in Doha, Qatar that may or may not have included a hot tub, I arrived in Kathmandu with no delays. Instantly, all of my senses were awakened. It was a joy to be greeted at the airport by old (Lindsay), and new friends (Mary) who draped a traditional Tibetan khata around my neck. This bright yellow scarf and a few Namaste greetings from Gerry the driver and the hotel staff were indications that I was welcomed and a great introduction to a magnificent part of our world.

Our fellow travelers arrived shortly after I did. I met Karin and Melodi at the Doha airport during our layover and chatted with my soon-to-be roommate Millie in the months leading up to the trip. When we met in person, a relationship had already been forged, so the group dynamics were easy. Hotel Ganesh Himal was our oasis in the middle of a busy city. There was a serene courtyard with a Buddha stupa and marigolds and all of the divine imagery you can imagine: an oasis! The hotel rooftop provided morning views of the Himalayas, with their bold peaks appearing from behind the clouds and sun, and opportunities to stretch and breathe before starting our day. The rooftops of Kathmandu are part of the city, perhaps even more so than the streets themselves. You could view women hanging clothes, children playing, morning prayers being offered with incense and flowers, and of course plenty of cafes where we spent many meals.

Perhaps my most memorable meal was on top of the Swayambhunath Monkey Temple. We climbed up several hundred stairs to the top of this Buddha Stupa, and then ate lunch at a café on top of a roof on top of this mountain. We were joined by some monkeys when the waitress gave us a sling shot to keep the monkeys away (This was just to scare them off, nothing was actually slung). The next week offered so many new experiences. We celebrated the Tihar festival with a local jewelry shop owner. His wife expressed what all mothers say during the holidays with an exhausted sigh, “I am ready for this to be over!” She was tired from the celebrations just as any

mother maybe during the holidays. This small expression made me realize that we are more alike than different. Throughout our visits to the different Hindu and Buddhist temples, I also connected several common rituals and symbols to my own Judeo-Christian upbringing. This journey confirmed what I had long suspected, that no matter what we believe in, or where we live, we are all connected by a power greater than ourselves.

Namaste.