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Ex Tiger Venturer Zenith Nepal Trip

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Nepal Trip Report

Day 1

Arriving in Cheltenham and then travelled to Heathrow, flight to Delhi, India then for the connecting flight to Kathmandu, Nepal

Day 2

Travelling from India to Kathmandu for arrival at 1200 hrs, this was due to the 4 hrs and 45 minutes time zone change. We left the airport at 1400 hrs (0900 English time), due to the security and baggage collection that was carried out. Then when we walked out we were greeted by the manager of the tour company that we were staying with, this is also where we meet our trip adviser called Sunil. There were people that were asking to carry our bags, most of the group thought that they were with the tour group, until later they were asking for a tip, and not just any tip, £5 per person tip, which was a week's wage of the average Nepalese person. So then we realised that they were not with our tour company, after many of the group had handed between £5 and £40 to them.

We then travelled to our 4 star hotels which was called Hotel Grand. At this point we are already at 1100 metres, which is the same height as Snowdonia. There we had time to unpack and freshen up. This then led us to a meeting in the hotel lobby, where a tour of Kathmandu had been arranged, this tour was a real culture shock for all of us, as there is so many things that we take for granted. The biggest thing was rubbish; we are lucky to have a rubbish collection, as in Kathmandu, they don't, it's everywhere! We didn't know where the pavement stopped and the road started. But other than the sight of rubbish, there were many other things that were different to England. They don't have many road rules, the bigger the vehicle the more priority you have on the road, the roundabout direction of travel is reversed, you have to give way to people coming on the roundabout, which confused many of us.

After the tour we then went out for a traditional Nepalese meal, which includes some similar foods such as pop-corn and wedges, to other foods that were, not similar such as Nepalese Curry and Nepalese pasta. There was entertainment every 5 minutes which varied from dancing to singing and an average time of dining about 3hrs. This made it a nice experience as it gave us an early insight as to what the rest of our time will be like in Nepal. We then went back to the hotel and then retired to our rooms, for reveille for 0700 (0315 English time).

Day 3

Breakfast started off with; guess what, another curry, where many of us decided to give it a miss as we could still taste the last one we had! Before going anywhere we had to pick up our visas, so we went to the British embassy. This set us up for the journey to Pokhara, which took us 8 hrs, but not 8 hrs of straight, smooth roads, calm drivers and not much danger. It was 8 hrs of windy, bumpy roads, crazy drivers on

the edge of the road, which finish after the edge of the valley did. In addition to that, the driver was still determined to drive at a constant speed of 60mph...that journey will stay with me forever.

When we were about a third of the way there, we stopped off to have some food, where it was a hot plate buffet, where you can help yourself, but the meat choice were limited to, chicken curry or chicken curry. Here the price of a glass bottle of fizzy drink (Coke, Tango, Sprite) was about 25p when converted to Pound Sterling from Nepalese Rupee) which we were really shocked at, as we thought it would cost more. So we decided to stock up.

After we finished eating, we then continued on the journey to Pokhara, and the place where we were staying was a hotel called Hotel Meera. Here we thought was more than a 4 star hotel, but it was only a 3 stars. This took use by surprise, as the groups opinion was it was superior looking and had better facilities than the one in Kathmandu, which we were more than pleased about. A bonus, as we were going to be staying there a few days. A relaxed afternoon and an early night as we were informed the sunrise could be seen from the hotel, so my brother and I decide that we were going to view this for ourselves...

Day 4

My brother and I woke up at 0500 hrs (0015 English time) so we could experience the sunrise, as we were told that it was a nice view, they were wrong. We were up and ready, sitting on the roof of the hotel at 0515 hrs, with plenty of time to see the sunrise which was at 0603 hrs and the view was amazing! The sky turned orange, with the Himalayas in the background, with sun spots over parts of the city, the lake illuminated a sparkling blue/orange colour with the reflection of the mountains which were surrounding the lake, and the only drawback was that it barely lasted a few minutes, but it was remarkable! After the astonishing view my brother and I, went back to our room, and, fell asleep, which then followed by a wake-up call by Sunil, our tour guide, for breakfast.

After breakfast we had the day in Pokhara to acclimatize as we were currently at 900 metres and 20-25°C, we went shopping. As the hotel we were staying at was by a 2 km long strip of shops either side of the hotel, we broke into small groups between 3 and 4 people, and headed off. This occupied us up to lunch which was no surprise, a curry! We then, after lunch, started to pack for the beginning of the hike. This took us up to 1400 hrs. After, we went shopping for the next 5.5hrs, where we bought many things that we were going to use on the hike, and gifts for family and friends, by this time we had covered about 80% of the strip. We then had dinner at about 1930 hrs and then finished off our shopping, and then to bed to retire for 2200 hrs (1715 English time) as we were getting up early to travel to the start of our hiking trip.

Day 5

We got up and had breakfast at 0730 hrs (0245 English time) and ready to move out at 0800 hrs, the vehicle that we had the pleasure to ride in, was a hot, sticky, cramped bus. Lucky this only took us 2 hrs to get to the start of the hike. Which was a small village call Nayapul, which was the start of the hiking phase of our trip, where we were suited, booted and began, we were blessed with an incredible view while we were walking (which didn't stop until 12 days later where we would get picked up). In the first hour we could start to feel the heat, as it was between 25-30°C and many people in the group thought this was a hard day, as we had walked for 2.5hrs and 1000 metres up. We had lunch half way through the day, which lasted 2hrs, as they only had one chef, and we had ordered about 7 different meals.

Throughout the second half of the day, after lunch, we newly discovered the meaning of, "its 15 minutes away " as it really wasn't, it was 15 minutes till the next 15 minutes, which means it was actually about an hour away. We arrived at Gandruk at 1700 hrs (1215 English time) where we de-kited and relaxed in our room until dinner was served... which was not curry (hooray) it was Del Bhatt, which is the local every day meal, consisting of a local meat (if they had any) lots of rice, and some lentil soup. Soon after, we went to a traditional Nepalese evening, which ended about 2300 hrs (1815 English time), then retired to be ready for another day of hiking.

Day 6

We got out of bed and breakfast by 0730 hrs (0245 English time) and ready to move at 0800 hrs. The journey today was from Gandruk to Chomrong. This was the hardest day, as we did 6 hrs of walking, 3 hrs down-hill and then 3 hrs of up-hill walking. Where at the bottom of the valley, we ate food after crossing our first river (and it was definitely not the last one we would come across) where this time, it didn't take 2hrs for the food to arrive. This time for our lunch, it was again Del Bhatt once more. We arrived at Chomrong, and by now, we have been up 9 hrs, and its only dinner time! We had dinner at 2030 hrs (1445 English time) and our height was now 2150 metres above sea level. After dinner, we then attended another Nepalese event, where there was dancing for all, we then retired at 2100hrs (1615 English time) for a rest period as we had a long, hard day and another one all over again tomorrow.

Day 7

Today, we hiked from the Chomrong to Bamboo. It was a 150 metres ascent, but that was just the difference from the high of the two villages, but in fact, we had about 800 metres ascent altogether, so another long day. We had to cross another river, so we drop down to cross at the bottom of the valley, and then after that (and a tea break) we started to hike back up to our days destination, this was one of the hardest parts, as it was mostly uphill, with the average flat part some times, this then led up to arrive at the Bambo at 1500 hrs (1015 English time). By this time we had walked for about 6 hrs and now at a height of 2300 metres above sea level. To complete the day nicely, was to have a warm shower to freshen up after the long hard day that we

has just had, but that didn't happen, as we had found out there was no hot water at this village! And even worse, beyond this point! which is the last thing you want to hear when you have a hard, tiring day, and to add to that, we now have to sleep in "all weather" sleeping bags, but I don't think they were "all weather" in the fact that they have probably never been used in such a climate and at such an altitude, but, we did manage to shower under ice cubes and sleep in the "all weather" sleeping bags.

Day 8

We managed to have a good night sleep given the conditions, and a good thing we did, as we had a slightly shorter day, as it was between 2 and 3 hrs, for this part of the trek was from the Bambo to a village called Deralih, which meant by the end of the day we would be at 3200 metres above sea level (nearly three times the height of Snowdonia). We were all pleased when we were hiking to hear that we would have the rest of the day off and the next day off as well, so we could acclimatise to the altitude and the weather (which had started to dramatically change from 25°C to 0°C, and that was just during the day (it was even colder at night)).

When we were at Deralih, we managed to wash our clothes and have a shower (cold one anyway) with some time left over to play some card games, relax, and look forward to the R&R day, which would soon come to the end, sooner rather than later, and were we right, or were we right...

Day 9

The day where we get to have a lie in, the rest of the day to ourselves and to relax, or so we thought. We had breakfast at 0830 hrs (0315 English time) due to the lie in, and after we had finished breakfast the adults announced that due to our hard work and effort throughout the last few days (which started us thinking of what delights they might have in store for us due to the hard work) we were going to...hike to the next village...what a shock that was. The one day of the hike that was intended to be the R&R day, was ruined by hard work, now that was a different experience, instead a reward of more hard work, I had never come across that before, but we pressed on and made it to Machapuchare Base Camp (M.B.C) which was lucky as it was another fairly easy day, where we only climbed 500 metres, with very little downhill. This meant that by the end of the day, we were looking at a height of around 3700 metres above sea level.

We had the rest of the day off, where we all sunbathed and played some games. We settled in for the night as we were getting up early the next day, the earliest I had ever been up before in my life...

Day 10

The group woke up at... 0330 hrs (22:45 English time) breakfast at 0400 hrs and out walking at 0430 hrs, where the temperature was just in the minus side of the scale, at around -1°C and due to get colder, so we wrapped up warm ready for the 2hrs of

walking. When we got to Annapurna Base Camp (A.B.C) the temperature had dropped to a staggering -5° (without wind chill, and we had a lot of wind) and a new height of 4130 metres above sea level. We arrive with time to spare for the sun rise to be seen over the mountains, which was another wonderful and spectacular view, where we could see not just Annapurna, but the whole Annapurna range which is a group of five mountains which surround the base camp. My brother and I must have taken about 100 photos, as we didn't want to miss anything and we wanted to show everyone what we seen, as it was breath taking and moving. In my opinion, there was no better place to be. We wanted time to look around, so we took a few hours where we could observe it all and take in what we had seen. It was starting to get warmer than the -5° from when we reached A.B.C, and we did take some time to sun bathe and to relax, as we were proud to think that we were the highest Cadets in the history of the City and County Of Bristol, Army Cadets Force...

Day 11

We woke up early and headed down to the village called Himalaya, overall the descent was fairly steady, not too much downhill too quickly, there were a few humps and bumps but nothing too bad, we also passed over plenty of rivers and rock falls. For most of the hike from MBC we had the main river on our left and we were hiking in the valley between two very tall, steep mountain sides. The temperature started off cold but as we got further down the valley the temperature rose. This was nice because we could then take off all of our hats and gloves and go back to observing the wonderful scenery. The paths were quite narrow and rocky to start off with but got quickly wider, rockier and more descending. Along the way we had two major stops: one was a cave where we stopped to refill on water, a bit of food and cooled off; the second stop was at a town called 'Deurali' where we stopped to have tea and coffee. At one point, there were loads of steps which we had to climb down. This was a relief in multiple ways, 1st, we had to climb up every step on the way up and finally got to go down them (which was much easier), and 2, it was a break from the undulating paths. Eventually after 8 Hours of travelling and around 11 kilometres travelling (where our descent was around 600m) we arrived at the town Himalaya, where we had free time to eat and rest and in our case play lots of card games!

Day 12 - 14

We descended down through the villages that we have hike up on the way to A.B.C firstly Himalaya to Chhomrong 700 metres decent duration 6 hours, this was a fairly good day as it was mostly down-hill, then we travelled from Chhomrong to Ghandruk, which took us a total of 4 hours of trekking and a 230 metres descent. The

next part of the trek was to cross the Kimrono Kola River, which then made it a steep ascent to Ghandruk, where we stayed in a Lodge called Milan Guest House. When we left Ghandruk, where we were to arrive at Birethanti, this part of the expedition 5 hrs with a height loss of 915 metres

Day 15

When we arrived in the town of Birethanti we had the rest of the afternoon / evening to separate our kit; one lot to take to Langdi village and the rest to go back to our hotel. My brother and I decided it would be most efficient to put all of our clothes in one bag; the other bag could then be used to take all the unwanted kit back to the hotel in Pokhara. Once we finished without kit we went out for a little walk to see all the different shops and what was being sold, at one point we saw a spider that had a body and leg span of your palm, dangling in his web that was suspended by the electric cables, we were fascinated with the spider it had a bottle green body and long thin legs, we were quite startled when Sunil said to us "awww man, don't let it touch you, its poisonous!" (It would have been difficult to get anywhere near it as the web was in the air with a significant drop beneath it.) We then moved on and found a way down to the river, there we sat looking at the currents and the crystal clear water, we even tried throwing stones in the river to cause ripples through the water that shined as they caught the light. When it was close to meal time we headed back to our hotel.

Later on that evening there was an enormous thunder storm with sheet lightning illuminating the sky, it was astonishing, because I had never seen real sheet lightning before and the short time gap between the thunder and lightning was so short it was an adrenaline rush to experience a storm in such close proximity.

Day 16

After our exciting night we woke up the next morning ready to start our trek to Langdi which we were all looking forward to. This was the second most defining point of our trip and we couldn't wait to meet all the children of the village. The walk was a pleasant speed and ascent at first, which gave us the opportunity to view the scenery and talk to any locals we came across. At one point the guide decided to take a 'short cut' so we would get there quicker, well if it was a short cut, I'm glad we didn't walk the long way, it might have been more pleasant because the short cut had yet more steps. For this part of the journey we only had a few porters to carry our kit, which was a lot lighter than days before due to us separating our kit. Along the way we managed to see a wild monkey in some bamboo trees swinging around. We stopped to take some photos of the monkey and have a little rest in the shade to

avoid the midday sun, we hiked a total of 1800 metres to Langdi village and we ascended 400 metres.

When we arrived in Langdi we were greeted by a unique local band, the instruments were hand crafted by tradesmen in the village. The band were playing a long time before we arrived, this was how we knew we were close to the village, the adults even made a joke; “there gun a be fed up by the time we get there, were not travelling very fast and aren’t going to get there any time soon”, but they were still playing when we got there and were very cheerful and greeted us by giving all the adults a gurung style top (a fully material hood like design on the back with the straps crossing over at the front) and the cadets a handmade wreath. We then continued to walk through the village, with the band at the front guiding us to the village where all of the local school children were lined up behind a handmade welcome banner all holding individual flowers or wreaths. At this point we could put our well-rehearsed “Namaste” into practise along with having very emotional smiley faces. To get such a warm welcome from, the locals was just incredible and, at that point made the whole trip worthwhile. If that wasn’t a nice enough welcome, we were then sat down in seats and the school children then performed a little native dance getting us to join in later on. This was made some cadets embarrassed at first but once ‘king’ Bikhram got up to show them how it’s done; all the cadets soon got up and join in.

Afterwards it was getting quite late so we set up our bedroom which was the school’s year 5 class room, had a late-night feast (under dim candle lights) then settled to bed on a very Bumpy floor !

Day 17

The next morning we got up to a very smoky start because the kitchen was in the year 6 class room adjacent and as it was a class room not a kitchen there was no ventilation so the smoke filtered in through a nice, brick size hole in the middle of the wall, this problem was then solved quite hastily by someone packing the whole with clothes to reduce the flow of smoke. After this we had a quick breakfast before the kids arrived in full uniform, which we found out later in the day this would usually be their only day off. When all of the kids arrived they all sat down outside of the Principal’s Office in there year groups. Each year group had a wide range of ages because they could only go to school once their parents had saved up enough money to pay for each child’s education. We were shocked by this and though “wow, how lucky are we that we don’t have to pay to go to school”. There was even a kid in year 5 that was 16 and I had to remind myself of my fortunate childhood to

have completed all school education at this age. It made me realise just how fortunate I have been.

All the children, before school did basic drill, standing at ease and at attention and counted from 1 to 16. However today when they finished, they sat back down and then (Major) John Osborne got out the gift bags and laid them out on a table, ready for each cadet to hand out gift bags to each child that came up to the table, again good thing we rehearsed our Namaste to greet the child! This took up most of the morning, but afterwards the cadets split into pairs and the children split into small groups, we then got out some traditional English games and each pair of cadets showed a group of children how to play that game for a while until the groups rotated round until all had played each game. My brother and I had 2 sets of garden bowls to use, I found this very iconic because I could remember playing this game as a child in my grandmothers back garden and now I was teaching the Nepali children how to play one of my childhood games. This was a very different kind of teaching, I was very used to teaching cadets different lessons back at home but here it was a harder challenge as they couldn't speak English, I couldn't (really) speak Nepalese, so it was a great deal of hand movements and luckily we had Sunil and 'Ronaldo' to tell us one or 2 Nepalese words to help us out. When we had these few word to use, I was shocked because I probably wasn't saying it exactly right yet the kids knew what I meant and picked up the game straight away. As fun as our game was, I think the most popular game was the giant skipping rope, and some kids were extremely good at it, even beating some of the cadets. Later on that day, when all the kids had gone home for the day we had some gifts remaining so we took a walk back to the village and gave the remaining gifts to some of the local residents. When all the gifts were gone we then got to visit Bikhram's house which, like all of the nepali houses had a short door frame, which we had to avoid hitting our head on, inside the house it was very basic, no rooms as such, mostly open plan but was divided into sections by furniture, there was a indented pit at one end of the room for a fire but there was no chimney and you could tell because all of the wood on the ceiling was black with soot and charred looking. The house was three stories high but the occupants only lived on the first floor, the second and third floors were used for storing the crops that would be harvested and later on sold in the local market.

After we visited Bikhram's house we started walking back to the school. We came across a volleyball court and we started playing eventually building into a massive game consisting of the locals old and young, eventually we left the locals to play and we headed back to the school where we relaxed (and played a few more card

games.) later that evening, the locals came to the school with some music (traditional and modern) and we had a bit of a party, Starting off with traditional music and moving onto more upbeat music. We were quite surprised that they had a stereo and the way in which they 'plugged' it in to the main electric cables overhead, unbeknown to our culture of health and safety conscious U.K where all electricity is not exposed and left swinging from the ceiling !!

Day 18

Today we left the village to return to Nayapul and get the bus ride home to Pokhara, it was the same routine as the previous morning, but then we packed up our kit ready to go. We were all thankful for the shelter that the school had provided but relieved that our next night sleep would be in a comfy bed. As we walked through the village there were only a few people out to say Good Bye. When we got to the Osborne trail (named after Major Osborne because of all the money he had raised to build it) we noticed a mass of people, it was all of the local villagers, they had come to wish us fair well! The children were there with more flowers and wreaths; even the local band was there to play us a final song before we left. As we descended down a great flight of stairs the music faded in the distance but the cheers and waving could still be seen and heard for a good length of the descent. From that point the walk was a lot downhill, very smooth paths to walk along and still plenty of steps, when we got back to Nayapul we got on the bus and headed back along apparently, one of the most dangerous roads in the world. I didn't notice I was either asleep or admiring the scenery, as I would most likely never get to see any of it again.

It was nice to wake up in a comfy bed and we had our usual breakfast in Pokhara. We were supposed to do all of our sight-seeing in one day but due to the weather being bad we wouldn't have had a very good view so we just went to the local museums, we firstly went to the Ghurkha museum; I enjoyed looking round the museum because I was quite interested in the history. We even had our own tour guide because the museum manager was one of Bikhram's man relatives! He even let us into the back office where he told us the plans for the future and what he was going to do to develop the museum more. One thing that I noticed was some Ghurkha weapons, it turned out that they were given to him by the Nepalese army for the museum, but was having trouble displaying them because of the political situation ... insurgents tried stealing them before, so he wanted to block of the barrel so it couldn't be used as a weapon, but as the army were only lending them to the museum and could ask for them back at any point he didn't want to modify the

weapons as they didn't officially belong to the museum. Next was the mountain museum and it was very interesting, it had a wide variety of exhibitions, from the local flowers and fauna to models and pictures of the mountain ranges, history of mountain climbing gear and who ascending what mountain, it even had history of the different clans (Magar, Gurung, Rai etc.) and what their native dress was. Outside there was a small replica of fishtail mountain which you could climb on and all the cadets had fun clambering over it. Before we set out to have another exploration of the local neighbourhood we had some washing to do. Three of us teamed up and washed our clothes in two baths, one had the washing liquid in; the other had just water in so we could rinse the soap suds out, we had a little assembly line going, one wash, one rinse, one hang, and this was nothing like mechanised washing machines back in the U.K. That evening we found out that this day was a religious day (Tihar) and all the shop owners displayed patterns outside their shops. This was really nice to see because it was completely different from what we were used to in England. When we were in a shop talking to the owners and their family we learnt all about the religious festival. When we were outside we noticed a big crowd in the middle of the road next to an island, we saw that there were people break dancing in the road! It was remarkable, both the skill and the fact they were doing it in the middle of the road, with all the traffic beeping and honking, they were full of confidence; to perform in front of such a big audience was quite a feat

Day 19

the last day in Pokhara we went to a religious monument (we all called it the pea soupa because it sounded similar) this place was very hard to get to, very rocky roads and very tight corners, when we got there the car park wasn't on the same level so we had to do a bit of climbing to get there, when we got there we realised how big it was, it was completely white washed with a big golden statue facing towards us and smaller statues facing outwards on either side, there were steps up to different levels so you could walk all the way round, it was all built on top a hill so you could look out and see Pokhara disappearing into the smog, Pokhara looked very big, starting at the lake and just expanding out further than the eye could see, we must of spend a few hours there before heading home for food and free time where we could prepare our second presentation about our experiences of Nepal (the commandant wanted us all to do a second, individual presentation because everyone, except my brother and I were poorly prepared for the first) which we then presented in the evening downstairs in the hotels function room.

Day 20 - 21

We travelled to Kathmandu by coach, we then had some free time in Kathmandu so, me, my brother, Ollie and Sunil went out to have a look around the shops (Sunil needed to get some software for his computer), Sunil was taking quite a long time trying to find the right software for his computer and we only just made it back to the hotel in time for meal time, after that we had free time to get all of our kit packed up in our rucksacks and suitcases ready to take to the airport, unfortunately we needed to keep a spare change of clothes in our hand luggage because once our suitcases were checked into Kathmandu airport we wouldn't see it again until collection at London, Heathrow so we were extra cautious to make sure our bags had transfer flight tags on them.

When we arrived in India there was a bit of confusion, with how we were getting from the airport to our hotel. We were all split down into small groups and we each got a taxi to our hotel. We were the first group to set off and as luck turns out, we were the last ones to arrive at our designated hotel. This was because we were relying on local knowledge to get us to our hotel. The first hotel we pulled up to, we went inside, and waited around for a while then decided we would check into our rooms to wait for the others. At this point the receptionist said "this can't be your hotel, we haven't got a booking for you and there is only 2 single bedrooms left available" so we all hopped back into the taxi and were minutes away from pulling away when a cadet had to run back in as I had left my passport and flight ticket on the table in the lobby. However, after this fiasco we managed to get to the right hotel and have a relaxing sleep before our flight back to the U.K.