rooms to choose from, from the $2 a night backpackers dream to $60 a night Quazi luxury rooms. No matter what you choose, it is guaranteed to be value for money, as the rooms are clean and well kept. I checked into the funnily named garden facing room, which actually had no view of the garden except as one stepped out of the room. At $37 a night for a double room with attached bathroom, it was cheap, well kept and perfect for my sort of budget travel. The best part of the guest house are the people one will meet there, it offers one a snapshot of the melting pot of Thamel, and also helps people meet and form groups to either see the city or trek into the mountains. It quite simply puts forward a world of opportunities which one then has to make the best out of. It is also by no means the only place to spend a night in Thamel, there are literally hundreds of rest/guest houses and hotels in Thamel, some dodgier that the rest, but usually cheap and sometimes even reliable. It's all about how much you want to spend and just what are willing to put up with. A fellow traveller told me of 250 rupees a night accommodation at the Tibet Guest House, which offered nothing more than a bed and a common bathroom, but claimed the place offered more than value for its money.

The area of Thamel is something special, sure every other place is a sort of tourist trap, but the sheer number of hotels, shops, and cafes is mind boggling. Its narrow streets without sidewalks makes it difficult to walk around without getting run over by the hundreds of rickshaws, cars and maniacal motor cycle drivers, but that only adds to its charm. The real downside to the area is that everything (and I mean everything) has been geared towards the tourist. It is difficult if almost impossible to find any establishment that caters to Nepalis. The rates for calling home and internet vary widely, some places will charge 10 rupees a minute to call Bangladesh while others will not budge from 60 a minute. Some charge 30 rupees an hour for the internet while others charge 100. Initially it is easy to get fooled into paying a premium for everything, but as soon as one gets ones bearings in the area, it is just as easy to find out the right places and preices to pay. One will eventually get ripped off, the only question is when.

The answer usually is when it comes to changing money. When I first changed money there I got what I thought was a fair rate, within a few days it fell by over a Rupee to a Dollar. I walked through the entire place looking for a money exchange that would offer me a better price, but was amazed to see that they all had exactly the same rates. Eventually I thought they were all just law abiding citizens and were charging the government approved rate. That was until I went outside Thamel and changed my money at a Western Union for three rupees more to the dollar. Only then did it hit me, that there is an implicit price collusion amongst all the money changers in Thamel. Instead of driving each other out of business by offering better rates, they secured their futures by simply sharing the pie and conning helpless travellers out of their money. Here's a simple tip, do not exchange your money in Thamel. You will get a better rate anywhere else and I mean anywhere.



In Thamel anything goes.

To be continued next week.