

# Nepal calling

The mystique of towering mountains, some snow-capped, some verdant, interspersed with lush valleys, singing brooks, and rivers rushing between mountains, is what Nepal is to me. With a wanderer's soul and the pockets of a journalist, Nepal is perhaps among the easiest to access places for us Bangladeshis, and if the Bangla language skills of the shopkeepers are any hint, this is no secret.

Nepal has always held a fascination for me, as a place of people fabled for their bravery and hardiness, from stories of holding out against oppressive colonisers and the elements as well. No matter how romanticised the views that adulthood have tempered with, the country and its people have not lost their charm, for me, at all.

Perhaps it is from the rose coloured perspective of the tourist that I was; but both my visits, once with family and another with friends, felt like idyllic forays into a rustic and rugged charm of an old world country, often making me want to belong there, and not be the outsider peeking in for a few short days.

This year's trip started with Chitwan, a visit to the National Park. Chitwan is a seemingly endless expanse of elephant grass and flat forested plains with a tropical monsoon climate — a far cry from the snowy peaks that Nepal is known for. It is also a World Heritage site, well known for housing the five mega fauna of Asia, namely the Asian Elephant, Royal Bengal Tiger, Gharial, and the Sloth Bear, although the tiger and bear are notoriously difficult to catch a sight of. You can take either the safari on elephant back, or on a jeep. We opted for the jeep, as it was the more humane option to avail, having recently learnt that elephant rides can be quite cruel on

the gentle giants. We saw quite a few deer herds, some magnificent birds like peacock, greater adjutant, and the osprey, as well as wild elephants, and of course, the grumpy giants—rhinos—who often looked at us with supreme annoyance, as if threatening to ram the car, although reports of that happening in real life are rare.

The day rolled on to the evening, we were treated to a dazzling display of various dances by the Tharu people, an indigenous tribe of Sauraha, right outside the reserve, after a walk through their village earlier. The various dances presented by the tribe members were all mesmerising, but especially interesting



was the peacock dance performed by a dancer inside a huge peacock costume. The ladies also dazzled with their traditional simple clothes and gorgeous pieces of intricate jewellery. Back at the lodge, after a simple dinner, we stood by the gentle stream nearby and chatted into the wee hours of the night, on particularly nothing.

The next day, we set off for Pokhara, a quaint picturesque town over the Phewa



lake, 1400m above sea level. A very tourist oriented town, it offers almost everything Nepal offers in a nutshell. The nearby spot of Sarankot offers breathtaking views of the sun rising from behind the snow-capped tops of the highest peaks in the world like Dhaulagiri, Annapurna, Manaslu and the famous fish-tailed Machhapuchhre —the forbidden peak for being the earthly abode of the Hindu God Shiva.

Pokhara's natural scenic beauty is unquestionable, and the usual tourist attractions include various caves and gorges created by the Seti river. Of these, Gupteshwar Mahadev Cave temple complex, a significant climb into a cavernous underground gorge, Devi's Falls across the road from the temple, and the Bat Cave, are fun places to explore. Do temper your behaviour according to the religious significance of the places.

My personal favourite element of Pokhara is its versatility. It has the tourist lane of book shops, cafes, souvenir shops and a vibrant night life. It also has the peaceful quiet that calls to the heart of a bookworm, a.k.a., yours truly. But best of all is the plethora of adventure sports it offers. You can choose any of the options, from paragliding, ultra light flight, zip-lining, bungee and rafting. There are plenty of service providers, but

we went paragliding more than 2000m above sea level, over the Phewa Lake with Nepal Flying and Paragliding School, with our wonderful and capable guides Rakesh, Dil Kumar and Veeru. It was so much fun that we went two days in a row!

Trekking is a must, for the more fit among us. Rafting on the Trishuli river is



one exhilarating experience not to be missed. It is better to take all the services from affiliated firms or the same one, to allow for better time coordination.

Once our time in Pokhara was over, we bid adieu to one of our favourite cities, and headed back to Kathmandu, to catch the flight to Dhaka the next afternoon.

Our entire tour was made immensely smooth and comfortable with the car rental services provided by Nepal Explore Summit Trek (NEST), with the hardworking Narayan Pokhrel's amazing skills behind the wheel and knowledge of the route.

The trip seemed to have ended too fast; with some good friends made and many lovely memory to look back to!

**By Sania Aiman**

**Photo Courtesy: Sania Aiman**

Contact NEST at [info@nestadventure.com](mailto:info@nestadventure.com) for any tour related service and queries!

