

Trekking with Teresa

TREK REPORT - MUKTINATH EXPEDITION , OCTOBER 2022



Teresa Williams – Group Leader	Guide	Lahar Pun
Billy Codlin	Porters:	Nigma Tamang (Dorje's nephew)
Keisha Codlin		Ram Kaffle
Col Codlin		Sagar Pun (Lahar's son)
Lyndall Codlin		Sancho Pun (Lahar's son)
		Ramchand (Ika's son)

September 28: I Arrived safely but tired and slept all afternoon. Lovely to be back at Benchen Monastery, our home for the next few days. Very simple but comfortable rooms with attached bathrooms, private balconies and a view of Kathmandu to die for. The Heavenly Tasty Café is not bad either.

September 29: Huge day, starting with a breakfast meeting with my agent Deepak, then over to Netra's house in Kapan to collect my trekking gear. After a lot of sorting, I met our minibus for the airport in TriDevi Marg. It was Electric! Spent half an hour charging in some god-forsaken little back alley! Met Dorje and Ram for dinner at 8.30 but our meeting place was closed. We called the electric bus back and got a ride to a nearby Indian restaurant at Peepalbot. The driver ate with us and the food was fantastic, and really cheap.

I was frankly not looking forward to the airport pickup. It is usually a rather dreary business. However, big changes at Tribhuvan Airport. I paid my 100 rupees, a dollar, to advance to the lovely new waiting hall. Bright lights, clean chairs, three functioning lifts, a café (branch of Himalayan Java) and super clean toilets. Oh what a feeling!

Of course, as soon as I ducked off for a quick pee, the Codlin family arrived. The security guard was onto them in a flash, as we had chatted beforehand. The electric van dropped us at Benchen. The chowkidar (night watchman) was not best-pleased to be opening up so late, but he had been warned earlier. I woke Chiring, by phone, and he very graciously came down to the gate two or three times for bags – luggage plus donated soccer gear. I gave him a really decent tip. As it was after midnight there was very little chat, just sleep after the long flight from Australia.

September 30: I was awoken at 9.30 by Lyndall's gentle knock. The family had already breakfasted. I had slept in. It was way past our 8 am breakfast date. Oh dear. Not very professional. I rose quickly, washed and coffeed-up, then started checking their trekking gear which they had laid out on their beds for inspection. They had most of what they needed. We were unsure if sleeping bags would be needed as it was so warm. I had not trekked quite this early in the season before, days were still 28 degrees in Kathmandu with very mild nights. Keisha needed sunglasses and all, except for Col, needed sun hats.

So, off to Thamel, in taxis. First stop, more coffee and a bite of lunch for the early breakfasters. The Smoking Yak, adjacent to Deepak's office, has replaced The Ricksha, which replaced The Weizen, has a rather meaty menu for my taste but it is nicely got up with super toilets, which is always a plus on these big shopping days. . The tropical garden vibe is rather conducive to mosquitos and there has been a bit of Dengue so we were well-spritzed. Makes a change from Covid, which is not much in evidence as I write.

We changed all the money we will need for the next few weeks. Deepak had permits, insurance and bus and flight bookings all in hand. We were free to browse some of our favourite shops. Amrita Craft took some time, and the bargain trekking shop next door. The divine Chime Jewellery store and then Pilgrims Bookshop. All well-patronised.

We found two taxis for a quick trip back up the hill to Swayambu. Up the many stairs to the sanctuary of cool rooms and showers. Did I mention it was hot?

We dined in, quite literally, as there were mozzies outside. I think the customers found my pre-trek briefing a bit tiresome after the big day out. It IS a bit tedious. What to do?

October 1: Ram and Ngima arrived early this morning and helped carry the bags to the minibus waiting for us down at the gate. The kitchen opened especially early for us and our pre-ordered breakfast was spot on. Man, they make great coffee at the HTC....Heavenly Tasty Café. Despite our reasonable start, 7.40, the traffic was appalling. Dashain approaching and it was Saturday. Double whammy, as another half a million people leave Kathmandu for their home villages. An estimated 1.4 million will leave town this week.

Coffee at '20 km' (great coffee, rather grubby toilets), tea at our favourite little hidden gem of a café, then lunch at Riverside Springs. The driver, his assistant, Ram and Ngima joined us for a posh lunch in the lovely pavilion.

The pace was better this afternoon but we did not arrive till 5.30 this afternoon. It was hot. 31 degrees in Pokhara today. Spot the Goats was easily our favourite game.

Traditional Thakali food for dinner....possibly not the favourite choice of the customers? We checked out the posh Temple Tree on our way back to the New Friendly Home. Kids crashed early, the grown-ups did drinks on the terrace where it was warm till late. Almost tropical.

October 2: Lahar and Ngima arrived early and we had a cup of tea and biscuits on the terrace. The morning was warm but clear and the Anapurnas were stunning. The lake was a mirror as we boarded boats to be paddled across. It was a very hot walk up to the Peace Stupa but everyone handled it and we made good time. After a nice breakfast on a shaded high terrace, we walked around the stupa. Gorgeous Buddha statues and stunning views. Lots of visitors, mainly Nepali, but rather hot in the sun.



We trekked back down through the jungle but, without a breeze it was rather uncomfortable. Billy was exhausted and Keisha had a sock full of blood from a leech – more shocking than dangerous. We took the local bus back. As I write this we were all enjoying a “siesta”. Did I mention it was hot?

Evening plan went well. Billy and Dad dined out at the nearby Café Concerto (Billy likes Carbonara). I went shopping with the ladies. Loaded up with rented sleeping bags, coffee, plastic shoes, sunglasses and Aquatabs, we flopped down in the Boomerang’s garden.

The waiter seemed baffled by the words Gin and Tonic but finally returned bearing a glass half full of gin (turned out to be 90ml, a triple, on my bill), very cold tonic and slices of fresh lime. Heaven. I could not drink it all, no, really! Lovely food and then a rather long hot trudge back to our hotel for a final pack for trekking.

October 3: Another early start. Lahar, Ngima, Ram, Sagar, Sanchok and Ramchandd (Ika’s son) were on time. Lahar found us takeaway coffee – a lifesaver – which we drank on board our jeeps. Lahar and Codlins in one jeep, me and the guys in the other. A broken-down truck on a terribly muddy stretch of road held us up for an hour. Col was right in amongst the 30 or 40 guys who eventually pushed it out. The road conditions did not

improve. The great café at Galeshwor, just after Beni, was re-opened but busy. Service was so slow we were ready to eat the legs off the chairs by the time the food arrived.



We told the customers it might take three more hours to drive to Tatopani, but of course it only takes just over an hour when all goes well. Customers, well-pleased, headed down to the hot springs which are not far from the Trekkers Lodge, an old favourite. Apparently, the water was VERY HOT today. Dinner was easy as the lodge has very few customers tonight.

October 4: The plan: Col, with Lahar, Sagar, Sanchok and Ramchand will trek out of Tatopani, over the steep ridge and cross back to the road near Rupse, and perhaps catch us up. The boys need to learn this section. A jeep will take me, Lyndall, Keisha, Billy, Ngima and Ram to just above Rupse Chahara with ALL THE BAGS. Hopefully, the A Team comes along, collects Ngima and the bags and possibly catches us up.

Today's plan worked a treat. The jeep trip was terrifying, but in a good way. At the waterfall, where the road lets go every year, we opted to get out and walk, while the jeep took Ngima, undaunted, and the bags another five minutes up the flimsily repaired road.



After just half an hour we reached the 'last chance' teashop so opted for a rather early lunch of omelette and chapatti. Then the serious trekking started. We were on a jeepable road but there was very little traffic as landslides made progress difficult for all but 4WD jeeps.



Ngima waited with the bags for the A Team. He had a cuppa and a few cigarettes. The lodge where he waited was making him daal bhat for lunch. Easy day. It took the A Team five hours to reach him but I believe they lunched on the way.

Meanwhile, our B Team made steady progress. The frightening drop to a raging river 50 metres or so below us, kept the trekking interesting. It was mostly cloudy, though warm, but with the predictable cool breeze at our backs after 11 am. We reached the lodge at 1 pm, but not before crossing the big suspension bridge over the Kali Gandaki, just for fun.

Rosti with Egg was a big hit for dinner. Played a new game, Up and Down the River. Rather complex scoring, ably handled by Billy. The kids won. An early night in persistent rain. Hoping for clearer skies tomorrow.

October 5: Such a strange, nothing kind of day. It poured all night and was still raining heavily this morning. The road south to Tatopani is blocked in several places. The rain has washed huge boulders out of the overhanging cliffs, making it quite dangerous to even walk on the road. We are heading North anyway. We have opted to stay another night here at the Eagle Nest where we have very comfortable rooms (attached bathrooms). The lodge filled up today with people travelling by bus, jeep and motorbikes as the road is closed. We passed the time well enough, reading, playing cards and chatting with our fellow travellers. Still raining this evening and forecast is bleak.



October 6: All set this morning to walk, in the rain, to Kalopani, after being woken at 5 am by a huge thunderstorm. The lightening was the most brilliant I have ever seen and the thunder ricocheted endlessly around the mountains. I heard it was snowing higher up and the Thorong La was closed.

We only got as far as a group photo at the gate before Lahar called me back. A last-minute phone call to confirm our lodge for tonight, revealed that Kalopani town is absolutely chock-a-block full and nobody is planning to leave today. What to do?

I write this now in the room I have just re-occupied, Lahar is on the phone, trying to find our next lodgings. All the tourists booked on flights out of Jomsom over the past few days, are stuck in various villages up and down the Kali Gandaki Valley. All vehicles are at a standstill. And it is still raining!!

Larjung would normally be a day and a half away, but fairly easy trekking, so possible in one day. However, it is already 10.30 so too late to start on such an ambitious day trek.

October 7: A very large day indeed! At 8 am in very light rain we set off North towards Kalopani and Larjung. Wearing rain jackets, over- pants and plastic ponchos, we were soon too hot. We trekked on the road as there was NO traffic. We took tea at Upper Ghasa and then trekked the winding road over the new traffic bridge (the old one had already fallen into the river) and then the long gradual uphill to Lette. It was getting colder and the rain was increasing. With heads down against the weather we listened carefully for falling stones, washed out of the loose cliffs by the relentless rain. There were quite a lot on the road already. We were pretty bloody miserable when we hit the grotty little teashop at Lette. I have made it sound awful. It was a bit uncomfortable and a breeze compared to the same trail in February. A hot drink gave us the boost we needed for the long schlepp through the village. It is pretty flat but about two kilometres long.

The See You Lodge at Kalopani – where we would normally have stayed – made us a decent lunch. Huge plates of fried rice, full of veg and chopped omelette, were very welcome. However, once again, the spaghetti did not meet with Billy's approval. I tried it. It was strangely sweet.

Despite the rain we opted to trek to Larjung this afternoon. (I am laughing as I type this, as we actually had NO choice in the matter). It rained most of the way there. The first hour to Kochethanthi was actually lovely. I have never seen the Kali (black) Gandaki so full, swift or full of silt and debris. It fairly thundered under the little suspension bridges outside Kalopani. At one point we needed to cross a swiftly-flowing creek. In the end there was nothing for it but to run across, allowing our boots and socks a complete soaking. I think Ram carried Keisha.



As I write this our wet things are draped around the dining room. Sox and boots are under the hot table – though not too close to the brazier. We normally cover this distance in one and a half days. Well done us!

October 8: Possibly our most exciting day. Not raining this morning and we were trekking off the road on a small local trail on the East side of the Kali Gandaki. The trail winds along above the river, through groves of Juniper, a few orchards and shady forests where cows wander through the shadows. In a couple of hours, we reached Chairo where Col and I were lucky enough to see inside the gumpa, just as it was closing. We even caught a glimpse into the tiny chapel housing the Guru Rimpoche statue. It is a real beauty.

While we drank tea in the Tibetan Refugee Camp at Chairo, Ram went ahead to find out what the problem was at Marpha. We had heard a few disturbing rumours. The fact was a landslide, loosened by the torrential rain, had blocked and then diverted a tributary to the Kali Gandaki. It was now flooding across the jeep road, scouring out a deep, impassable path for itself. We soon heard that it was now possible to trek to Marpha, a big relief as the alternative to Jomsom would have been long, difficult and possibly just as fraught.

The small suspension bridge to Marpha was damaged. About 50 locals formed a human chain to dump rocks near the foundations to divert the water. Instructed to cross one at a time we scooted, low and fast, without running (too bouncy) to the encouraging hoots from locals. Billy got a huge cheer. Small boy alone on a dodgy suspension bridge!

That was not the end of it. Through a mass of mud that almost sucked your boots off, we reached a detour through the apple orchards. We had to walk on a narrow earthen bund – no problem when dry but now it was like walking on a chocolate cake. The wall above us was pierced with leaks, gushing black, silt-laden water. It would not have taken much for the whole wall to let go. Huge relief to reach the edge of the field where we had to climb over a gabion wall. Col caught those of us who could get up, but not down. The gabion was a barrier to the normal path of the river, which was now a muddy river bed. Too much fun!

Reaching the main road at last we were able to see the extent of the damage. A huge backhoe was hard at work but it seemed highly unlikely the road would open any time soon.



Within half an hour we were ensconced in the lovely Tampopo Lodge in Marpha. New block is below the main house and flanked by a lovely garden, full of marigolds and roses. The stove in the dining room (sun room in the day time) was lit by 6 pm and we soon had our damp clothes draped over every chair and circled around the fire. The food was very good tonight and we played 13 till late. Keisha is definitely developing a killer instinct.

October 9: Weather mild, but cloudy with not even a glimpse of the fabulous mountains which I knew were looming, unseen, above us. We hit the road at 8.30. The terrain is flat now as we journey northwards in the Kali Gandaki's rocky valley. Over the entire day we will gain just 200 metres. We were soon traversing a moonscape of grey rocks. I had never, in 20 years of trekking up here, seen the area so wet. It is famous for being in the rain shadow of the Himalayas. Every precious drop of snow melt is channelled onto well-tended fields of apple, plum and walnut trees which, in turn, shade a bounty of spinach, cabbage, cauliflower and pumpkin.

Arriving in Jomsom just a couple of hours later, the place, which is normally a bit of a dump, looked totally trashed. It had rained for a week. The houses up here have flat roofs, open central courtyards and no storm drainage whatsoever.

We dropped in on the Mustang Taj, our usual overnight lodge here, while Lahar scouted for some replacement boots for Keisha. Not much available except cheap knock-off runners. Lahar put some more cable ties around her flapping soles and we pressed on. It felt as if it would rain again at any moment, but nothing came of it. I rather hoped we could pick up a ride at the jeep station on the edge of town. It was eerily quiet. No flights for a week and roads blocked by landslides meant jeeps were all busy ferrying people about, looking for accommodation. Trekking was good though our usual riverbed trails were under the raging river and we had to take the higher, jeep road. Kids fading a little, so we sent Lahar back into town to find some transport, and started off slowly. A local bus rattled up behind us so I tried to phone Lahar to let him know we would jump on board. As it drew up, we saw that it was Lahar hanging out of the door waving. He had commandeered a whole bus! 20 minutes later we were parking in Kagbeni. Time for lunch.

At 3.30 I set off with Lyndall and Col to explore the village. The little stream that usually gurgles through the village was a torrent of black sludge. We poked around, taking photos – mostly of dogs, found a coffee bar and met a few tourists doing the same as us. We wandered down to the wooden bridge and Hindu temple ghats. I was shocked to see that the old metal bridge, which I had crossed, on a dare from Kati in February, turned into a wreck of twisted metal by a rockslide on the far bank. This silt-laden water is undermining the riverbanks everywhere. Applebys Café looks as if it might fall into the river soon. It is closed of course.



October 10: The jeep ride up to Muktinath was fabulous and terrifying by turns. The outside edges of the road had been washed away in quite a few places. Luckily, we never had to pass another vehicle on the outside. The drivers earned their tips today.

We took tea with Shiva in his modest guesthouse in Ranipawa. We know him as the cook for many years at the Eagle Nest. We arranged to take our lunch there at 1 pm and then walked up, up, up to the temple complex of Muktinath, just a couple of kilometres away. We circled the Hindu temple first, taking a handful of holy water from each of the 108 taps. The little Buddhist temple at the Anni gumpa was open but the flame in the rock was quite hard to detect...not impossible, but it was a hands and knees job.

Muktinath was mysteriously beautiful. The cloud cover breaking up to reveal the peaks in surprising ways all afternoon as we walked down to Kagbeni. We took every short cut off the road, some a little ill-advised as it was very muddy and we had to brush aside some rather thorny rose bushes. Great views of peaks and the ancient village of Jharkot as we descended. Gently downhill, nice n easy. Cuppa at The Blue Sheep – old friends. Billy befriended a local dog, a little chap with a sad limp. About twenty minutes out of Kagbeni, and pretty tired, we boarded the local bus. The road is long and winding and the shortcuts we normally take were mostly washed out. They stung me for the fares but we were home in time for tea.



October 11: Jeeps back to Marpha booked for 9.30 so we had time for a bit more wandering around the crumbling medieval village that is Kagbeni. Lyndall wanted a traditional hand-woven apron, worn diagonally in these parts. A young lad offered to take us to a likely source but on the way, we met a delightful local lady, wearing one, so we could show the lad what we were after. No sooner had we pointed at it, the woman spoke up, quite forcefully. "10,000 Rupees!". Just the ticket. Lyndall gave her 12,000 NRS as the woman guessed, correctly, that perhaps we had said OK too easily. Both satisfied and only half the price our lodge-owner was asking for a similar one.

It was a pretty hairy jeep ride to Jomsom but the sun shone here and there which cheered us up no end. We stopped at the checkpoint in Jomsom, which, by chance, was near the Himalayan Java Coffee Shop. The place was half café, half gallery and the local artist was actually there. He was showing fabulous work in oils and pastels. I bought a print and some beautiful line and wash postcards of Kagbeni. And some much-needed ground Coffee of course.

Onwards then to Marpha. We did not score rooms in the new block this time, but rooms in the original house, which are still very comfortable – though the mattresses are that weird Nepali invention. They look really thick but seem to be actually made of wood!!

In the afternoon we meandered through the pretty protected lanes of Marpha, down to the site of the dreadful flood we had navigated, just, on the way up. Flood damage was serious but dozens of locals were shifting stones and shovelling mud. The road now appeared passable, and the suspension bridge is functioning normally. We shopped a little on the way home. A fluffy green and purple shawl for Keisha. A big yak bell for Lyndall. A silver (?) spoon for my coffee jar at home. Col got a bit bored and ducked back to the lodge to watch international rugby on wi fi.

October 12: We set off with high hopes this morning, having reconnoitred the repaired road yesterday. The repairs had seemed basic but adequate, and traffic was moving in both directions. A rather different story this morning. No road, just 15 metres of knee- deep fast-flowing muddy water which was quickly gouging a channel for itself across the road. A group of mountain bikers took their shoes and sox off and waded across. We spotted a big tractor coming up the road and it crossed the river fairly easily. I nodded to Lahar who pulled the guy over and asked for a lift back across. Getting in and out of the trailer was not as easy as the locals made it look. Excitement over, we trekked off down the road. We may have cast the mountain bikers the odd smug glance as they tried to put their sox back on their wet feet.

Within ten minutes we were over the bridge to Chairö and on our way downhill again. The sun shone as we followed the clear water channel through the Tibetan Camp. Built in the 1950's to house refugees fleeing the Chinese takeover of Tibet, they were initially supported,

fighters even trained, by the U.S. After all, they were fighting communists. Détente with China (Nixon/Mao '72?) ended the aid and America dropped the Tibetans like a hot potato.

This morning's trek was on the lovely trail on the East bank of the river. The mountains shone. Daulaghiri in front of us, Nilgiri behind. We reached Tukche a 12.30 lunch. Several of us had the fried rice – delicious, but so much. Kept the kids on side with Choco Pies. The afternoon was all on the road. Our usual short cuts across the wide river bed were still awash. The tiny sprinkle of rain as we reached Larjung was rather nice on hot, wind-blown faces. I managed an almost hot shower using the down tap, a bucket and a jug. Way better than a fine spray of lukewarm water all over the bathroom. OK, it was not hot enough to wash my hair. The day turned chilly at dusk so I am writing this at the hot table in the huge open dining area (formerly a courtyard but now roofed). Col, Lahar and Ngima are watching 20/20 cricket on tv. Time to break out the Khukri Rum and Sprite, our new favourite tipple.



October 13: This was our first truly cloudless blue-sky day. Daulaghiri, Tukche Peak and Nilgiri shone. Trekking in this weather is a joy and most of the floodwater has receded. We had no trouble crossing the smaller creeks and even walked on the riverbed for a spell. Crossing the Kali Gandaki on the steel suspension bridge we stopped for a cuppa at a very cosy teashop in Kochethanthi. The fine weather meant we were able to dawdle here and there, checking out cows, buffalos, chickens and especially dogs.

Warm enough to eat our lunch outside in the sun at Kalopani. After lunch we took the local trail through the fields, bashing aside huge swathes of marijuana, and then the cool pine

forest. We re-joined the main trail at Lette and could see how much damage the recent rains had done. Lots of landslides but a few jeeps and motorbikes were getting through.

I felt as if my knees and right hip were giving up on me as I staggered into Ghasa. Despite a lovely evening of cards, delicious food and a super hot-table, I was, in fact, correct. I hobbled upstairs to bed (why are our rooms always upstairs??) – thinking I would be heaps better in the morning.



OCTOBER 14: Woke up this morning in the same woeful condition. I had already suggested to Lahar that, while the east bank trek to Tatopani was marvellous, it was a lot of 'schlepping' of big packs. I thought a few of the guys and all the big packs could go down by jeep. Of course, I decided to go with them, and Billy decided to come with us.

The A Team, Lyndall, Col, Keisha, Lahar, Ram and Ramchand, set off early. I expected to wait hours for a jeep but just 10 minutes later I got the call 'Jeep ayo'. Unwashed and teeth uncleaned, I was staggering around the room trying to pack. Ngima came up and helped and, with two trekking poles, I managed to limp a couple of hundred metres to the jeep. We glimpsed the A Team just exiting the huge suspension bridge across the Kali Gandaki. It is very long and very high as the river is in a gorge at this stage. The road was very boggy in places and detours around the rockslides were nerve-wracking. Billy chose the seat furthest right. Good call. We wore the seatbelts and I hung on to the 'Jesus Bar' for dear life.

After a very hot (solar) shower and drying my hair in the hot sun, I phoned Lahar. The A Team was already eating lunch at the Hydro Power Station, not much more than an hour away. Amazing progress. Easier downhill perhaps. I have only ever done that trek uphill. Memories of trekking it in February with Kati came flooding back.

They arrived shortly after 3 pm. Amazing! They loved the trail, even though the photos clearly show some dodgy sections. Well done A Team.



The air is warm, moist and soft down here at 1100 metres. I can hear the Kali Gandaki raging below the lodge somewhere out of sight and a big waterfall is spraying out of the cliff on the far side, adding to the sound of rushing water.

Hot springs and then good food. Another top day. Hope we can find jeeps for tomorrow.

October 15: I was a bit sceptical when Lahar said he had located a jeep and a TAXI for Beni. Given the condition of the road on the way in, and the rain since, it seemed likely a taxi (car) would be inadequate to the task. Lahar was optimistic – isn't he always? I was relieved to be in the jeep. It was not a 4-wheel drive but traction was hardly the problem. The rain had taken quite large chunks out of the edges of the road – in places where it really mattered. There was quite a bit of 'lean into the hill' and "don't look". We reached Galeshwor for snacks and brand-new clean toilets in just over an hour despite a short delay for 'ongoing road repairs'.

At Beni Lahar negotiated for two jeeps. He is a bit of a softie so it was no bargain. Our two jeeps set off, not on the main road to Pokhara – the first 20 km of which is in dreadful

condition – but up a well-made winding road to Baglung which is a huge city these days. Skirting the city, we drove on another smooth road till we intersected with the main road not that far from Nyapul. Lunch at Nyapul was nothing to write home about but it was plain sailing to Pokhara after lunch and we were back at the New Friendly Home by 3 pm.

We gathered for dinner with all our support staff, minus Ramchand but plus Loyan (Lahar's wife) and a cute little tacker called Lagpa, Ramchand's son. (Making him Icka's grandson). We ate an astonishing amount of pizza and Lahar ordered 3 more to takeaway for the kids at home who missed out.

Wages and tips and some tears as we shared our thanks to all and our farewells to Ngima and Ram who are bussing back to Kathmandu early tomorrow. Walked home to our nearby hotel rather full and satisfied and just a little bit sad.



October 16: Late start for a change. Much appreciated. Pottered around all day, but walked down to the lake in the soft dusk. Hindu religious music floated up to meet us as we approached. Priests chanting. Heavenly. The lakeside path was crowded with evening strollers, mostly local. We washed up at The Boomerang on an elevated terrace. Two weeks of veg food and even I was gagging for some chicken. Some dishes were exquisite but the Chicken Tikha Butter Masala was just a bit too spicy for Col – how generously Lyndall swapped with him! Keisha persevered with hers but it was clearly a struggle. Well done girl!

October 17: Only a half an hour delay on our flight to Kathmandu today. Pretty good by Nepali standards. It was a clear day with super mountain views – we sat on the left, heading East, mountains to the North, but were mostly directly under the wing. Views down were pretty special. Transport connection went smoothly, though Col's bag nearly exited baggage collection with a new owner. Slack tag checking and almost identical black rucksacks.



Heavenly back at Benchen. A little cooler in Kathmandu at around 26 degrees. A big breakfast at Heavenly Tasty Café and then I hit the town with the ladies. The boys quite content to chill, or wander locally, as they liked. There may have been rugby on the internet? The shopping posse started at Sherpa Mall in Durbar Marg for Grace and then FabIndia. Crossed the road to Biba and then walked, very slowly, through Thamel. No stick and no tablets today. My hip is recovering, thank goodness – I have Everest trekking in a week's time. We found Trance Trip, Pilgrims and many others. That was the girl's shopping done.

October 18:

More shopping today, but after a nice slow breakfast. The kids had pretty definite ideas of what they wanted to buy for their friends. Amrita Craft had most of what they wanted. Billy found the perfect jacket at our regular gear shop, which had a big sale on. A big puffy down jacket, red/silver grey, a bit too big, under \$40. He negotiated a good price for an official army-issue Ghurkha knife for another mate.

We dined at The Roadhouse – another whole pizza each! Boy, can we eat. It is often like this after trekking. As if your body wants back EVERY calorie it burned on the trek. We sent the boys home in a taxi with all the bags. They had a plan to visit the local swimming pool. Keisha, Lyndall and I are made of stronger stuff and managed an extra couple of hours.

After a brief 'feet up' we gathered once more for a ride over the Bouda. It was crowded with the Buddhist faithful and quite a few tourists. It is the holiday season here in Nepal. We made a couple of laps of the ancient stupa, spun a few huge prayer wheels and ended up on a terrace with a stupa view for drinks and very delicious cakes. Our lift was waiting at the gate just as we came out. The trip home made jolly with thousands of lights, on cars, buildings, trees and gardens. Diwali, really is the Festival of Light.



October 19: The Codlins have gone. It is really quiet. Eating alone. I just cancelled my visits for today. I am washing clothes in a bucket in my bathroom and slowly catching up with myself. I might even have a nap?

Bye Lyndall, Col, Keisha and Billy. I really loved having you guys here. Thanks for the photos Lyndall. This report would have been rather dull without them. I miss you already. As I wrote this there was no sign of Malaysian Airlines on Flightradar24. Hope all is well. This flight is often delayed (it was). I am sitting on the dining terrace in a white kurta, in case you fly directly overhead, as many flights are today.

We had a few days of appalling rain. It was a bit hotter than I was ready for. I loved that we didn't need to even consider 'group dynamic'. We were a great fit. Mainly because you are a lovely family, but also, we do have the best support team ever.

Thanks for coming. Let's do it again some time.

Love

Teresa didi

PS If anyone reading this would like to go trekking in 2023, please look at www.slowtrekking.com and see what we have planned. Cheers, Teresadidi.

.....a few extra pictures I just could not leave out







