

TRAVEL SUPPLEMENT

Kathmandu: it's just a beginning

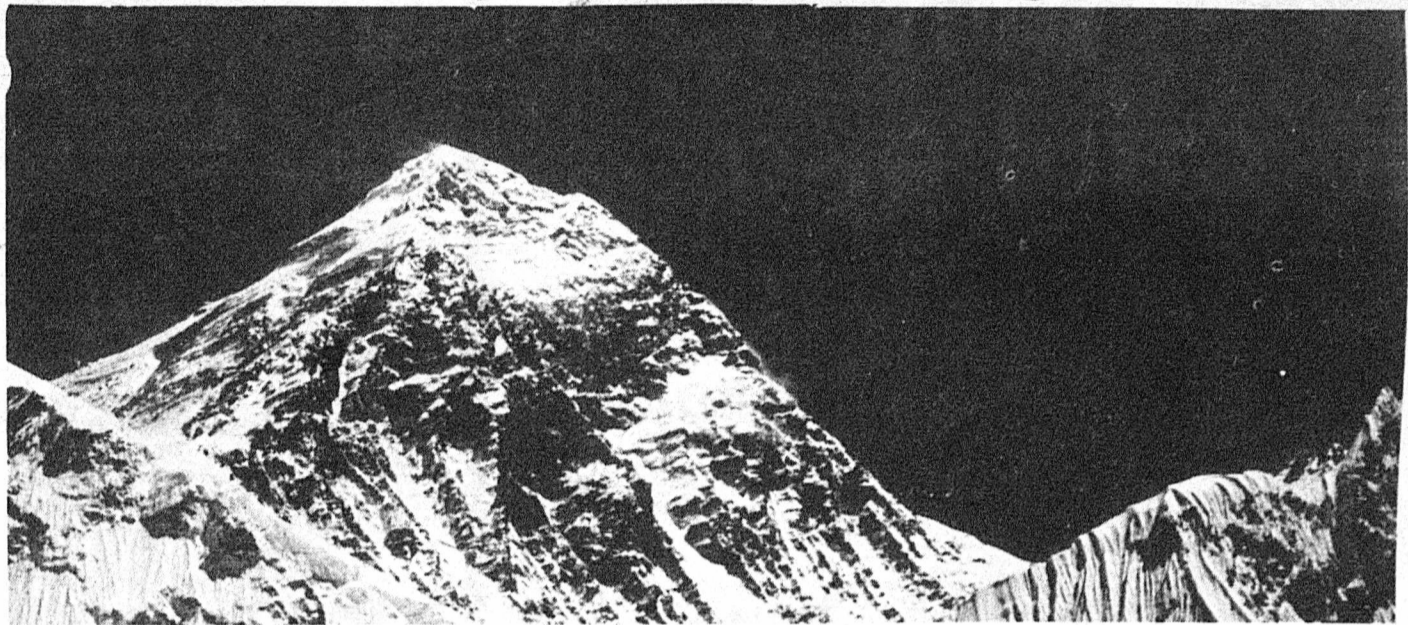
by Allen Ronneseth,
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Nepal — The start of something big. If you were to ask any Overlander which countries on the Asia overland trip he would like to revisit and spend more time in, Nepal would head the list in nine cases out of ten. Even though the traveller's experience may be limited to a brief stay in Kathmandu and a journey down the tortuous Rajpath, few remain unaffected by the unique atmosphere of this fascinating Himalayan kingdom.

For many overlanders Kathmandu represents the end of the road; a farewell party and then on to Australia or back to Europe before dwindling funds are exhausted, or their absence at the Christmas festivities is noticed. With a little forward planning - starting the trip a few weeks earlier, and conserving a little money - Nepal, instead of being the end of the road, can become the climax of your overland journey. If the overland trip is an Asian appetiser, you could do much



Trekking can take you anywhere



worse than make Nepal the main course.

On arriving in Kathmandu, one is immediately impressed by the contrast with India. Quite suddenly the people are different, architecture is different, even the air you breathe is different. Despite the noise and bustle of its bazaars, the encircling mountains create a sense of isolation, and the atmosphere of a rural market town rather than a capital city.

If you can sense this remoteness in Kathmandu, you can imagine the sensation one feels sitting at Everest base camp, or stalking game in the heart of the Chitwan Park, with the knowledge that the nearest road is a world away. You have to trek to explore Nepal, and after a 10,000 mile road journey, that in itself is a new experience. There is a lot to be said for travelling at four miles an hour, you can see, hear and even taste the country you are travelling through. There is time to stop and stare.

Nepal's most obvious attraction is its mountains - eight of the ten highest peaks in the world among them and all of them over 20,000 feet. Nowadays you can arrange a trek to one of five different areas of the Himalayas through your overland tour operator or agent. Everest

is perhaps the greatest attraction, and even though this trek takes you to 18,000 feet and the very roof of the world, it is well within the capabilities of any normally healthy individual. No climbing is involved, simply easy daily stages of five miles or so.

The Everest area is the home of the Sherpas, a fascinating race of people with a unique culture adapted to their environment. A trek in Nepal is not just a walk through a spectacular landscape; contact with the local people, who are extremely hospitable, is also very rewarding. One can also visit monasteries, like Thyangboche and Pangboche and observe the Tibetan culture as it must have flourished in Tibet before the Chinese takeover.

If you keep your eyes and ears open there are also many strange birds, animals and flowers to be seen, and perhaps you may even solve the mystery of the Yeti!

Whatever your specific interest, there is something to excite it on a Himalayan trek, and at the end of it all there is that sense of achievement that makes you feel as if you had climbed Everest itself.

A typical trekking day begins with the sun, and your Sherpa passing a mug of tea through the tent flap. There is no artificial light in the Himalayas, so, its a light breakfast and on to the trail early to enjoy the fresh morning air. There are wayside tea shops along the trail to stop at for a mid-morning break, and a two hour lunch stop is normally taken around eleven. We aim to camp by around three-thirty in the afternoon. After dark we sit around the fire and perhaps sample the local Chang (beer).

While on trek your baggage is carried by porters, and a team of Sherpas takes care of all the cooking, washing and campsite chores. It is easy to appreciate how the Sherpas earned their great reputation as mountain guides after trekking with them.

When the word Safari is mentioned one tends to think of East Africa rather than Nepal, but Nepal is the home of many rare species, not least among them the Royal Bengal Tiger. Only a short hop from Kathmandu, in the Terai (jungle) bordering India, is the Chitwan National Park, arguably one of the most interesting game parks in the world, and surprisingly neglected by visitors to Nepal.

Exploring this forest, on elephant back is an experience not to be missed. With over 150 different species of tropical birds to watch out for and with rhinos, crocodiles, deer, wild boar, and perhaps a leopard or the elusive tiger roaming free, there is plenty to keep wild life enthusiasts occupied. The setting on the banks of the Rapti river against a Himalayan background is idyllic.

It would take years to sample all that Nepal has to offer, and a book to describe it all. I have mentioned only two possibilities. However, I hope that when you plan your overland journey, you will not regard Kathmandu as the end of the road, but the start of new adventures. An excursion to the Chitwan park needs only three days. A week will allow you to visit the Helambu region, and two to three weeks will take you to Everest Base Camp, Annapurna Sanctuary, or the Langtang Valley - all three treks different and exciting in their own way.

You may still earmark Nepal for future visits, but will feel that you have more than scratched the surface of one of the countries on your overland journey. Before the tiger disappears forever, and before the foundations of the Everest Hilton are laid, don't miss the opportunity to explore this wonderful country.

There's no end to Hostel-tripping

by Sharon Rempel

To many people the words "Youth Hostel" conjure visions of unheated log cabins isolated in the mountain wilderness or cheap hotels - with paint flaking from the walls and ceilings - used by transients for evil and sinister purposes. This is unfortunately the typical North American's reaction; it comes as no surprise then, that there is nearly nothing to be had in low-cost travelling accommodations in North America.

Not so in Europe, where hostelling has been in full-force for two generations.

Hostel origins

The concept of hostelling began in Germany nearly 60 years ago. An elementary school teacher wanted to take some of his classes on trips into the countryside but was unable to do so because there was no place to house the children outside of the city. His solution? Build inexpensive dormitory shelters in the wilderness, equipped with only the essentials for survival. Stock the shelters with emergency rations for stranded wilderness travellers, lure hardy types to remain as "houseparents" for the shelter and attract all young people possible to the shelter, charging minimum rates so as not to limit accessibility to the shelter.

The answer was - the youth hostel. Government support for the project was quick because of the educational advantages the hostels afforded. Other countries quickly picked up the idea and hostels spread into urban areas. From Europe, the hostelling ideal spread to North America and all the other continents, until in our day 52 member countries compose the International Hostelling Federation. The idea has changed from wilderness shelters for school-children's outings, but the principle - of providing young people with

cheap accomodation on their travels - has not.

Cheap clean beds

If you're planning a trip through Europe this summer, you'll be relieved to know you can find a clean bed, washing and cooking facilities for about \$1-1.50 a night in most youth hostels. The hostel you choose to stay in might be in an old castle on the Rhine, in an ancient apartment complex in Venice or in an old sheep-herder's cottage in central England. Anywhere, in any manner of building.

There's generally a common room for rapping with fellow travellers and hostels usually have dormitory accommodations; they hold anywhere from eight to three hundred people. But hostels aren't cheap hotels; one usually has a small chore to do (sweeping the floor, etc.) before leaving in the A.M. In order to use hostels anywhere in the world, you must be a member of your home country's hostel association; this is done in Canada by paying \$10 a year in membership fees to the Canadian Youth Hostels Association.

Rules and regulations

Along with the \$1.50 a night paid for hostel accomodation, visitors must obey a few considerations which are strictly enforced. There is no smoking (anything) in sleeping rooms and no alcohol in the hostel. There is an early night closing time (10-11 PM); while this may seem unfair to those who have slept all day on the train, hikers and cyclists need it. Also, most hostels are shut from 9 AM - 4 PM (to enable the houseparents to get out and about).

It seems to a lot of travellers, however, that the good points of hostelling heavily outweigh the bad. The good points include the opportunity to cook your own meals, to meet some really fine people (maybe even some future travelling companions) and find out quickly what's going on in each place you visit. And there's even the chance to save money while travelling.

That's Europe; what about home?

European hostels are great and there's lots of them. Canada's hostels will eventually be great but we have to build a lot more, first. We have permanent hostels located in Calgary, Vancouver, Montreal and Ottawa (Ottawa's is in an old jail - the doors are open, in this case.)

The federal government sponsors many "summer only" hostels, generally located only along the trans-Canada highway, and that's about it, other than the primitive log-cabin hostels in the Rockies and around the Great Lakes. Edmonton is still only operating a seasonal hostel and it's unknown where this year's building will be - tents on the Legislative Grounds would be pretty.

There's a lot more to hostelling than just using Europe's network, advanced though it may be. The CYHA office beside the Mountain Shop (10932-88 Ave. 439-3089) has lots of information about what's required in Europe and ideas about what to do within our own borders. The ideas for Canadian activity include equipment rentals in tents, skis, packs, sleeping bags, crampons, ice axes, etc., information about climbing, canoeing and back-packing groups and a bulletin board for public information.

Check it out - the ideal has waited long enough.

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