



Offering a hand up not a hand out



A DHARMIK AUSTRALIA SPECIAL EVENT

In sight of Everest – for most, the trek of a lifetime

The second group to undertake the great trek to the highest monastery in the world - organised by Dharmik co-founder Mary-Louise as a fund-raiser and experience for supporters – sets out early in 2009.

Stephanie, one of nine women led by Mary-Louise on the first trek in April 2008, commented afterwards that the experience was marvellous “on many levels: physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually”.

All nine took advice and trained for many weeks before leaving Australia to follow the track up to Namche Bazaar, 4000m above sea level, and the Tengboche Monastery that clings to its mountain in a forest of snow-capped peaks topped by Everest.

A stunning plane trip took them to the start of the rocky track up. “The track was gorgeous, bursting with spring glory: red rhododendrons flowering white and pink, magnolias, ground cover flowers, mini iris, primroses and many more”, reported Sadhana, another of the group.

“Horned yaks and naks [??] with heavy loads passed us, their bells chiming, as we crossed high suspension bridges”, Sadhana said. “Sherpas carrying loads on their backs double their height and triple their weight passed us, smiling and bowing, calling “namaste” rising up at the end like a song. Then we would pass them as they rested their loads on their walking sticks chatting with friends, and there was namaste-ing again all round so it became like a mantra.”

Vistas of the mountains often grew out of the foreground of houses of stacked unmortared rock and wood, every one with tiny vegetable patches obviously loaded with cabbages, garlic and greens. Tiny eating houses fed the group.

The group’s porters (guides) carried their extra packs with sleeping bags etc, for which Stephanie said they grew more grateful the higher they went. Sadhana said her heart flew with the huge eagles and other birds, an inspiration as they became breathless and their hearts pumped hard from lack of oxygen approaching the 4000 metre mark.. “Resting gave me the opportunity to stop and feel the expanse of nature, to watch the birds such as the colourful Nepali pheasant and the long-horned mountain goats”, she said.

“And I had time to learn a song from my smiling porter who about the lali gouras (rhododendrons): ‘Lali Gouras is born in the forest, my love for you is born in my heart’”.

At the monastery they had a private audience with the Tibetan lama to arrange blessing of a baby, who had died, and its mother, one of Mary-Louise's yoga students. "We did a ceremony for the baby at night on a wild precipice with a young laughing monk – "Baby gone...no big thing...on to next life" – who gave us a rare invitation into the inner sanctum of the temple where he wound red thread around our necks for good luck. In the morning we went to the morning chant with its trumpets blaring and cymbals clashing", Sadhana said.

Visiting the children's homes

Stephanie especially looked forward to visiting her sponsored child, Kopila. "Just to meet her and to be giving her the opportunity of an education, and to follow her journey – she wants to be a nurse – is so rewarding", Stephanie said. "It was so obvious to all of us how much of a difference that Dharmik has already made to the children we met."

"In Kathmandu we visited stupas (temples), mingled with the locals and their cows, monkeys and goats, and absorbed the people's deep connection with their faith", Stephanie said. Then, of course, there was wonderful shopping and the yoga at dawn on their hotel rooftop.

Sadhana said the classical Hindu dance performances they saw were stunning, especially when she saw in dance "the power of opposites as the vicious Kali was transformed into compassionate Tara in front of me so clearly".

Both of our 'reporters' praised Mary-Louise for her caring, especially for those who became sick, her patience and love, and the ease and grace with which the visit to Nepal was made to be so enjoyable.

