

*THE OFFICIAL*

# ***NEWSLETTER***

*For Projects Abroad Nepal*



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# ISABELLE IN ACTION

A Note from Michael Goodwin, Projects Abroad Nepal Communications Officer

On a recent visit to Ghandruk, I met Isabelle, a passionate volunteer at our conservation project. As we enter the cold Nepali winter, I would like to share her story. Though she is but one of many volunteers in Nepal, her story reminds us of Nepal's generosity of spirit, its stunning landscapes, and its continued need for driven, talented volunteers.

After hearing about Projects Abroad from several classmates, Isabelle knew that a project in Nepal was a great way to spend her gap year. Growing up hiking in the Ramapo Mountains, she always had a love for the outdoors. However, it was not until a summer college course in environmental science that Isabelle realized she would pursue environmental studies.

As a conservation volunteer in Ghandruk, Isabelle spends her days between various wildlife survey projects, focusing on data collection for species protection. Between mammal surveys with camera traps, butterfly surveys, and reptile pitfall traps, she is learning a great deal about the inhabitants of the Himalayas. But it is not only the animals she is connecting with.

"Though the village is small, we have a wide exposure to Nepali culture," she stated. "Being here during festival season has been an incredible gift. We have been able to understand the local culture from the perspective of the family, and our host parents Die and Didi have been generous in sharing so much of themselves."



"I have always been interested in Asian cultures, particularly Eastern philosophy and religion. The combination of Buddhism and Hinduism in Nepal seemed so fascinating, and it is," Isabelle said of her choice of conservation in Nepal. "I also wanted a conservation project as far from my home as possible, to truly push me out of my comfort zone."

The conservation site in the Annapurna Conservation Area Project is a world away from Isabelle's home in the States, but that has not prevented her from finding similarities between her duties as a Projects Abroad volunteer and former volunteering. Having spent time in an environmental cleanup of a Native American reservation near her home, Isabelle was familiar with many of the principles of larger ecological conservation. She has also noticed a fair amount of similarity between Native American culture and the local Gurung ethnicity. "Both cultures have a striking connection to nature, and respect for the earth," Isabelle reflected. "Both peoples lead incredibly humble existences, while welcoming foreigners to understand their spirituality, their many gods, and their belief in the divinity of animals."

Outside of Ghandruk, Isabelle has had the chance to explore other areas of the Annapurna range of the Himalayas. She hiked to Jhinu with several other volunteers for a weekend at its hot springs, and has also spent free time in the lakeside city of Pokhara. At the completion of her project, she hopes to trek to Annapurna Base Camp. "I'm currently training," she said, "as we often hike as much as three hours a day to survey wildlife in Ghandruk."

As she plans to enter university this coming fall, Isabelle has been greatly impacted by her time as a Projects Abroad volunteer. She has learned that she already had many of the foundations needed to do successful environmental conservation. She has also delighted in meeting many likeminded, young internationals with passion for ecology, and has created a new network of colleagues and friends.

Yet her biggest takeaway is the splendor of her experience in Ghandruk. "Living in Ghandruk, you are confronted everyday with views of the snowy Himalayas, with a magnificent display of nature," she declared. "I have learned that there is so much life at such a high altitude. Not only is it surprisingly green at 2400 meters, but there is great life in the passion of Projects Abroad's volunteers, staff, and the locals who welcome us to their beautiful village."



**Michael Goodwin**  
Projects Abroad Nepal

# HEALTH CAMP

Samantha Genefaas, Physiotherapist, New Zealand

In the month of October the volunteer team in Chitwan participated in a health camp in the Koiralaphat village in the Lamjung District, in Nepal. We were joined by a team of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, dentists and members of Red Cross Nepal. We left Bharatpur early in the morning and started our six hour journey on a rickety old bus. We travelled along narrow dirt roads with deep valleys below, passing rice paddies and villagers at work. On our arrival the camp was held at a local school. We were welcomed by the children who placed beautiful Marigolds necklaces around our necks. We then had lunch, which was Daal Bhat, goat and buffalo milk.

After lunch it was time to get to work. We had 400 patients attending over two days. Some people had walked for several hours as there is no medical support nearby. First, the patients registered with the school children who allocated a doctor depending on their main problem. Then our volunteer team was responsible for taking blood pressure, oxygen saturation, pulse and weight. From there the patients visited their allocated specialist. As I am a physiotherapist, I was fortunate enough to work alongside an orthopaedic surgeon. He would diagnose the conditions, which were often low back pain and osteoarthritis due to overuse. I would teach exercises and educate on preventing further injury. From our station, the patients would visit the pharmacy to receive free medication.

That night we stayed with a local family. All six volunteers slept on mats on the floor in our comfortable room. We were fed rice pudding and tea until our stomachs were bursting. We met every cousin and neighbour in the district and they couldn't help but laugh as we tried to speak Nepalese with them. Overall I had an amazing experience. I learnt a lot professionally, as well as gaining insight into life in rural Nepal.





# DIRTY DAY

Clare Hobern, Projects Abroad Short Term Specials and Groups Assistant Manager

Early in November, a large group of fantastic volunteers from many different projects around Kathmandu gathered for a Dirty Day of painting. We set out for scenic Bhaktapur, an ancient city once the centre point for one of three kingdoms in the Kathmandu valley. Today, Bhaktapur is described as a 'cultural gem' and the central town is listed as a UNESCO world heritage site.

Our project for the day was to revamp some classrooms in one of Projects Abroad Nepal's regular placements, Himalayan Glory School. Located in the city's winding backstreets, the views from Himalayan Glory showcase some of the most beautiful landscapes of the Himalayan Valley. Looking out over the inspiring vista of rooftops and rolling hills made our volunteers even more determined to help revamp the bare concrete walls of the classrooms.

As a team, we worked hard to paint base coats and colour on four classrooms and a hallway, only pausing to enjoy a delicious meal of Dal Baht. The classrooms came alive with the good spirits of our volunteers, blasting the best of the 80's and all the positive energy we put into the school. By the end of the day, the classrooms were looking brighter and more inviting, giving new life to the learning environment for the local children.

Thank you again to all our amazing volunteers, who through their hard work and positive attitudes made the day such a success!





## ***Dal Bhat: It's what's for Dinner (and Breakfast, and Lunch...)***

Jessica Vance, Projects Abroad Nepal Operations Manager

For people with a love for food who loves to travel, one important question to consider is: what am I going to eat? While Nepal has several delicious dishes to offer, without fail the local favourite and staple cuisine in most households is Dal Bhat.

When translated into English, Dal Bhat essentially means lentils with boiled rice. The translation may lead one to assume that the dish is quite simple, but don't let the name mislead you! To add variety to the dish, Dal Bhat is usually served with a wide assortment of curried and pickled vegetables, aloo (potato), saag (spinach), papad (a crisp, thin flatbread) and some sort of spicy sauce. As an American, I tend to judge the quality of Dal Bhat based on the sauce offered, but the variety in dishes truly makes this a meal that anyone can enjoy. Be sure to end the meal with curd when available: many Nepali people believe that the curd helps to ease the effects of the spicy curries you have just eaten!

In Nepal, it is not uncommon for people to eat Dal Bhat every day, often for more than one meal a day. Rest assured, however, our host families provide a much greater variety of food for our volunteers. A close runner-up to Dal Bhat that one should look forward to eating is Momos. Momos are dumplings that can be filled either with meat – including chicken, goat, or buffalo – or local, seasonal vegetables. My personal favourite is Momo soup – it's perfect on a chilly day and is really tasty!

Regardless of what your personal tastes are back home, be sure to come to Nepal with an open mind and an open palate. You'll certainly leave with plenty of stories to tell your friends and family back home, and you just might leave with a new favourite food in mind as well!

