

After attending Mani Rimdu *"the sherpa festival"* held in November in the Tengboche Monastery located in Khumbu district, visiting the National Park of Chitwan and the holy city of Lumbini I felt restored and full of energy and particularly being eager to hike with Ambar anywhere in the Himalayas again.

After Christmas celebrations I could not bear anymore and I asked Ambar to prepare a trekking itinerary for next autumn, immediately he proposed me to hike in the restricted area of Naar Phu and the toughest part of Annapurna Circuit.

Definitely, he was not sure about me and told me *"I don't know if you could do it since it would be very cold temperatures and tough trekking"*. Without hesitation I answered him with any hesitation *"write the itinerary"* then I dawned on having accepted the challenge. Ambar has never cheated on me but I was so afraid after reading the trekking route, nobody knew it. I did not tell it to anybody.

Once time accepted the itinerary, I asked him to add some days in the relaxing and fascinating Pokhara, a visit to the beautiful city of Bandipur and historic and magnificent Newari cities of Patan and Bakthapur also the Hinduism temple of Changu Narayan, all three are UNESCO Heritage. As well Ambar offered me an excursion to Begnas Lake and a private sightseeing for less touristic temples and markets in Kathmandú.

Although I was already not beginner hiker as usual, I did not find many information about the area to cover by foot. It is normal, books are scarce with poor contents. Needless to tell I am in love with these cities, other sightseeing would be a surprise. In February, I have already had the flight tickets and immediately I bought some necessary items for my trekking.

What excitement! What fear of the cold temperatures and the high passes!

Time went by quickly and soon it was time to leave for Nepal.

I rested two days in Kathmandu before departing to the long-awaited expedition. Only three people were the whole team Man Pakhrin was the porter, Ambar Tamang the guide and me. The two first days the temperature was moderate even warm, hiked through forest with a rich and varied flora as well we could take a bath in a hot spring in Koto next to a rough and noisy river in the company of the young people of the town. As well the temperature water was scalding, I was sometimes burnt and it was necessary to mix with cold water.

It's fair to say the bath was luxurious for these latitudes, completely relaxing. Little by little, we were gaining height, landscapes changed drier and dramatic, always breathtaking, the mountains were higher and higher, I regarded the snow-capped mountains passionately.



Awesome.

As well, I had to pay more attention to sick altitude, hiking slowly and drinking water constantly. During the day, temperature was not cold even warm for this season and I hiked with my sleeves rolled up, once time in the lodge none shower.

Sweating with dusty clothes.

Truly, the feared cold I did not feel yet and it made me feel calm, enjoyed the landscapes and the local life, took pictures and chatted without stop. In every tea house we were warm welcomed. Unfortunately, the spartan dining room has not any heating system I felt so cold.



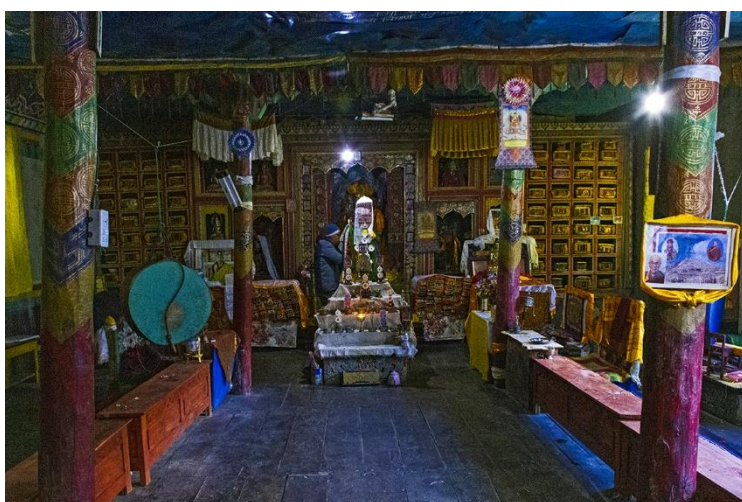
Finally, we entered in Phu Valley, recently opened to visitors just in 2003. A blue and pure sky saluted us, what a good impression made it on me, long *mani walls* well decorated, beautiful *stupas* even the ruins of a fortress and in the background the Tibet. It is so close. As well, fields were perfectly plowed, I noticed an excellent agriculture knowledge.



Phu is facing the foot of a mountain, every street is very stepped nothing is flat, in the shelters of the little square kids played, women spun wool or the grain is dried. Despite its isolation and high altitude, the village is still alive.

Next day, early morning we went to Tashi Lhakhang Gompa. What a cold it was, the jet of the tap of tea- house and street fountain had frozen and I could not even wash my face. Even streets and paths were completely icy I walked slowly-slowly, cowering with my hands in my pockets as well I had an atrocious fear of slipping. Ambar was aware of me at all time.

What a wonder!



It was surrounded by thousands of *prayers flags*, well decorated *mani-walls* and stupas. Undoubtedly, it's a holy place, the spiritual center of Naar Phu valley. When I took off my shoes in the temple, the cold immediately penetrated me to the bones. What a cold I felt it even more with my empty belly. It hurt me. Ambar was a bit annoyed with me because I did not have the patience to take the picture when the sun lit up the whole big *mani-wall*, it was only a matter of minutes but I shivered and I returned to the guest house for tea.

What a mistake!

Really, I left Phu a bit sad, I had liked it so much that I thought staying one day would allow me to explore the area more deeply. All in all, enjoy it. Although we walked more warmly, the temperatures were not very cold, but we didn't take off our jackets. The landscapes were completely dry, brown color, with all shades from the lightest to the darkest, from time to time some reddish thorny plants cheered the path but what made the hiking so beautiful was the blue color of the sky. In a resounding way I had never seen, nor ever imagined a blue so pure so excellent that with the contrast of the color of the mountains it stood out even more. Finally, we arrived to Naar valley after stopping to visiting a beautiful monastery located in Naar Phedi where I was cold again on my feet and ate a tasty noddles soup.



A hot soup helped me to get warm fast.



After having lunch, we started hiking again suddenly a long line of *stupas* announced that Naar was near. If Phu had surprised me, Naar would not be left behind. The entrances to the valley was triumphant, well-plowed fallows, *prayer flags* waving over the roofs of the houses, stunning *mani-walls* and beautiful stupas and in the background the snow-capped mountains. Until sunset village life was intensely alive...villagers of all ages. Kids playing, women on the looms, men turning horses into stables and others with white-painted faces attending a party in a terrace.

Sincerely, I was amazed by the popular architecture, the houses are made of stone and flat roofs. On the ground floor are the pack animals as horses, oxen, yak,... and on the first floor, the house that is accessed by a wooden ladder. In our tea house any hiker was accommodated, we spent time sitting around the fireplace, probably the warmest place in the house. How cold it was inside and outside the house. Temperatures dropped so dramatically.

Early we had dinner, the next day was the first big day in our expedition, we would cross the Kang La Pass 5.306 m, at 4 am it was already up. Practically, I had not slept nothing, I was very worried it was my first time over five thousand meters as well I was so afraid. At 5 am started hiking with the flashlights on, the cold was extreme, we walked slowly-slowly, everything was frozen. Soon I started to get tired, I could not breath well I was drowning even my chest hurt me.





Suffered.

How could it be otherwise I told to Ambar and he answered me back "If you can't climb, I'll take you on my back" and showed me how to hike "slowly and coordinating my pace and my breathing rhythm". I started hiking behind him, without hurry and everything started to work out better. With a lot of caution and a lot of fear, the path terribly climbed higher and higher even I felt my femoral vein was about to explode as well I could not wait to get the summit.

Impatient!

Finally, *prayers flags* announced the Kanga La Pass 5.130 m. Soon we got the highest point, then we started celebrating but I could not believe it, many emotions came to me, so I started crying while Ambar and Man hugged me.

What uncontrollably sobs!

The excitement overwhelmed me. After celebrations, we took many pictures and enjoyed 360° amazing landscapes then we started descending, the first meters I suffered from vertigo. How steep down was I was afraid of falling down Ambar helped me and he was patiently telling me where to put my feet. After a while, we descended very fast as the temperature gradually increased and in front of us the majestic Annapurna range. The path was long, so tiring and my knees burned time to time we rested and drank water.



On the way we stop to eat something after that Man stepped forward so fast to Ngawal and he booked me room. Fortunately, the tea house offered hot shower, finally after many days soaked in sweat one after the other, we took shower at 33°C.



Not too cold but not too warm. What a bad smell my body made!

After taking shower and changing clean clothes I sit in the living room I could connect by *whatsapp* with family and friends also we ate a tasty dinner. In this village there were more hikers and mountaineering expeditions, both international and national groups.

Early morning we headed up to Manang, the biggest town of the Annapurna Circuit, it was cold but the path was very easy, as I was walking overwhelmed by the presence of the

Annapurna range, the porters were ahead of us, rather than walking they ran, laughed and listened to music, they competed with each other. We stopped in Braka to visit the largest and oldest monastery on the Annapurna circuit, no hiker accompanies us, we tremendously enjoyed the frescoes, altars and statues.

What a beautiful place.

After sightseeing we walked to Manang where we would stay for two night and acclimatize to the altitude. The hostel was large and had a very well-conditioned and warm living room with a good stove. Here I got in touch with hikers from other countries, the atmosphere was quite fabulous, in addition the restaurant offered tasty meals, delicious pastries and sugary coffees with milk. Also, I took my dirty clothes to the laundry.

What a luxury the room was big as well I could take a shower every day.

During these days we visited a monastery where the monks were praying, some shops specializing in mountain clothes and we made an excursion to the Gangapurna glacier as well I rested well, took warm showers, read and meditated. Sincerely, I needed the break, it suited me, the next challenge of the expedition was Tilicho lake 4.995 m. Sincerely, I needed the break, it suited me, the next challenge of the expedition was Tilicho lake 4.995 m.





Just as the sun was shining, we headed up towards the Tilicho Base Camp, gratuitous to say temperature was quite cold but the landscapes were breathtaking. Although the trail was not too difficult, I noticed immediately the altitude increased very fast again. Man was walking faster and abandoned us from the first hour. He was hiking a head of us. For me it was a mystery that I could not understand it. Ambar and I stopped for having lunch, the meal was neither good nor the tea house knew how to serve customers.

What a mess!

Soon we started walking to Base Camp, once time we reached it, Man was there waiting us. He had booked a room with a toilet.

What a luxury!

That night I would share the room with a German girl I had met in the Manang hostel. Ambar had predicted the tea house would not have enough rooms for all the hikers and so he sent for Man to make the reservation. Ambar guessed and won, I felt so fortunate to have Ambar as a guide and Man as my porter.

A Dream Team.

I understood why Man was heading up of us. After changing my boots and wearing a warm jacket I went to the dining room, there were many hikers, guides and porters. The living room door was constantly opened, many exhausted hikers arrived and had to continue hiking to another lodges, there were no rooms for everyone. But I don't have any idea where my team will sleep this night.



We got up about 4 am, it was freezing cold, after dressing up directly I went to have breakfast at the dining-room and I remained speechless what I saw guides and porters slept on tables and benches. I felt so sad thinking about working conditions of our guides and porters. Fortunately, we left our backpacks at the lodge where we did have lunch after going to Tilicho Lake. With our headlights on, we slowly began the ascent, it was still dark, soon my left thumb started to hurt, it had a wound and the cold froze the bone.

What a pain I could not keep on hiking.



Thanks to Ambar's first aid knowledges, my finger soon warmed but I put my poles in my backpack and my hands in my pockets, I did not want to get cold anymore. After a while I had a faecal incontinence, I had to pull down my pants and to sit on the side of the track in front of everyone.

What a remedy!

If until now the path was steep, it became more and more vertical, harder. I followed Ambar coordinating my steps and breathing, I could not wait to get to the lake as well I did

not know the distance left to reach, so very often we would stop, indeed I was very suffocated not only my breaths came in pants, my quadriceps and calves made an intensive effort. We finally reached the top, we walked about fifteen minutes more and finally the lake, royal and brilliant blue, surrounded by majestic mountains and a pure blue sky without clouds.

What a beauty, even I did not feel cold.



Amazing was what I saw. Although I felt profound emotion I did not display it, only inside me I experienced such a big explosion of happiness. I could not believe this unreal beauty. Fortunately, we were among the first to arrive and to celebrate the success of the excursion and take many pictures. After enjoying of the views from the lake shore, we started going down but we took different pace and speed, if the ascent was brutal, during the descent my knees grinded badly. Like most of the way we did at night, I could now enjoy the scenery, deep valleys and very high mountains.

Stunning landscapes.

As Ambar had planned, we had lunch at the tea house. After that we took our backpacks and headed back to the trail.

What a walking long day.

My porter who carried the biggest backpack walked faster than us while Ambar and I walked more relaxed, stopping time to time to take pictures. Sincerely, photography is our addiction. After a long-distance and hard hiking day, Ambar and I arrived at the tea house I was speechless, Man could only book a shared room with six other people. Only Ambar saw my face ordered Man to go to the other guest house to see if they had a room. He returned quickly with a booked room with a toilet that I would share with an Austrian couple.

What a bad luck, we were at the same lodge we had eaten so badly the previous day.



The next day when I got up, I found out that my guide and porter had slept in a tent with other porters and guides. Morning was so cold. Unfortunately, I could not wash my face nor my hands everything was frozen. As we did every day we set out for our ultimate challenge, crossing Thorong La Pass 5.440 meters about sea level. While Man headed up so fast Ambar and I walked more slowly, chatting and taking pictures. Photography is our passion.

What awesome landscapes!



After many hours of ups and downs we finally arrived at a cosy and not crowded guest house, even I took a shower and washed some clothes. Unfortunately, a Californian boy who was going to cross the pass suffered from altitude sickness and he had to return to Manang. Unfortunately for him, the adventure was over.

The next day we hiked until Thorong Phedi 4.550 m, the track was neither too long nor tough, but it was necessary to get room and acclimatize to altitude. We arrived early immediately I occupied a room. I spent the

whole day sitting in the dining room I was terribly afraid about crossing the pass and silently nervous.



It was the big challenge of the expedition. After having dinner, I went to bed, it was still early evening.

What a bad stomachache I had!



At 3 am I was already packing as soon as we had breakfast we started climbing up. At that time, how many hikers were ascending simultaneously. It was so impressive the line of headlamps on.

Ambar as usual slowly began to walk, I followed him soon we were ahead of the hikers. Time to time we stopped breathless, drank water and ate chocolate. Needless to tell it was freezing cold. We did not talk, just looked into our eyes and kept on walking. When the sun rose brilliantly, the first prayers flags appeared solemnly to accompany us to the summit. At the top, there was a hut where we had a cup of hot chocolate.

What a luxury!



Warm and tasty I drank it gladly and it warmed me up. Before descending we shot many pictures to immortalize the feat. The descend was long and heavy, my knees roared, hurt me quite badly. Sooner than I expected, we arrived at our destination Mukthinah finally I enjoyed a hot shower and changed my dusted and sticky cloths for clean ones. Also, Ambar took a shower too. After many days we slept in a nice and warm hotel. Finally, the long-awaited bed. Fastly, we went to visit the Mukthinah temple, a place of pilgrimage for Hindus and sacred for Buddhists.



The next day was the last stage of the trekking, along the way we could enjoy the view of the Daulaghiri 8.167 m (the seventh highest of the world), we hiked through deep and dry gorges...we were in the Lower Mustang. We stopped for having lunch in Lopra a very cool village where the main religious belief is Bön a pre-buddhism religion. We visited the interesting and beautiful temple also I could enjoy the local life, after a long walked we reached Jomsom, the end of our three-weeks expedition where we drank a dreamed beer and toasted.



Ambar and I flew to Pokhara early morning, my favorite Nepali city where we would spend a few days resting however Man came back to Kathmandu by bus at noon. We will meet again for a farewell party. In Pokhara, we rode a bike along the lake shore, visiting the Tibetan refuges settlement and temples. Also, we tasted very good food, drink beers and wines and I took a massage.



After a few days of rest in Pokhara, we went to Begnas Lake, a very cool area well-known to young Israelis who come on holiday after military service, also we visited an organic coffee plantation and enjoyed the local life of the lake.



Once our excursion was over, we spent a night in Bandipur, a city of very fine and well-preserved Newari architecture with its facades adorned with colorful plants. Bandipur is a pure and refined gem. It's a must to be visited.

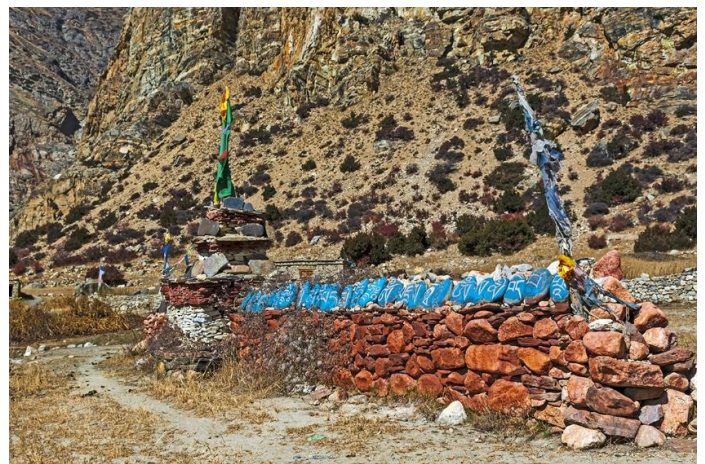
I was very surprised and really liked it.

Fortunately, the trip has not finished yet and we came back to Kathmandu and from there we visited Patan and Bakhtapur, two UNESCO heritage cities. Although I had already visited them, I wanted to visit them again and took some pictures. Also, we went to Nagarkot to say goodbye to Himalayas and saw some the highest Peaks of the Himalaya including Mt. Everest. On the way back to

Kathmandú we will stop at Changa Narayan, a Hindu temple that is a UNESCO World Heritage Site too. What a wonder, there were so many pilgrims and I was able to see some religious ceremonies.

After enjoying a challenging trekking through the hidden valley of Naar Phu and doing a part of the Annapurna circuit as well as visiting some of the most beautiful places in Nepal I returned back home happy and satisfied and I promised Ambar to write a text and accompany it with pictures, without realizing I wrote a book entitled “NEPAL. PROP DEL CEL. CAMINANT PELS ANNAPURNA”.

The book has not been published commercially, but I presented it successfully, now friends and neighbors know that: **“hiking into Himalayas is one of the most rewarding experiences in life”**.

















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