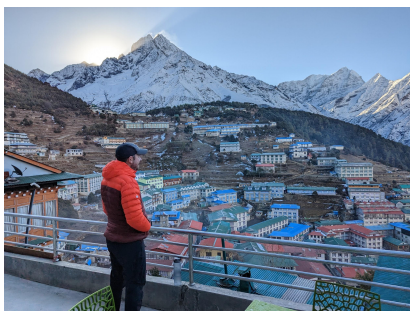




**Nepal 2023.** It's hard to put it into perspective, we have been back for a week and my conversations with friends and family are still focussed on the utterly fulfilling experience I have shared with our students. The fortitude that stands out time and again, from the challenges and experiences they faced and humility, care and respect that they all undertook each day with. Hopefully these few pictures and words can convey some of the time shared in Nepal.

Our first big experience was to undertake a breathtaking trek into the heart of the Himalaya, we trekked towards Ama Dablam, a stone's throw from Everest. A new trek for Birkdale and it proved to be a fantastic route, flying into Lukla airport to start the journey we then hiked along an 8 day route, only passable on foot. Crossing suspension bridges over rivers flowing from far off lands, such as Tibet, took us deeper into the Himalaya, where we had to catch our breath and acclimatise at places like Namche Bazar. A trekkers paradise, Namche Bazar is a town at about 3,600m and is the gateway to the big mountains. It offers creature comforts like bakeries and



markets alongside the first breathtaking views of Ama Dablam and Everest, we loved our time here. Setting off towards Ama Dablam from Namche Bazar was a big step, exciting but also intrepid, our team was learning on the hoof; how to live with each other in such close quarters, how to give space to each other, how to hike at altitude and much more. We had a wonderfully peaceful moment in Tengboche Monastery, at the end of our 4th day we were invited into the monastery by our guides, who gave thanks and said a prayer for us whilst we sat in silence

together. It was noticeable that not every guide and trekking group did this, very few in fact, and I think this bonded us to our guides even more, we were fortunate to have such caring people leading us along the trek. Tengboche felt quite pivotal, it had broken the half way marker and at 3,900m, it felt like a point of proof, we can do this and we are



thriving with the challenge! The return journey didn't ease, it was hard hiking but we had learnt the most important Nepalese trekking phrase, 'bistari', which means slowly. Whilst 'bistari' was the daily mantra this did not mean our students were lacking in energy and our stop at Phortse village, 3,700m, proved this to be true. We happened to be staying next to the highest indoor bouldering wall in the world, the Khumbu Climbing Centre and after a day's hard trekking there was no stopping our team having a climb before the evening meal.

After Phortse it took two days to reach Lukla and there was no better way to depart the Himalayan landscape than on a steep, exciting and breathtaking flight, what a way to travel!



From the breathtaking serenity and clean air of the highest mountains on the planet to the crowded, polluted, busy, noisy, packed, hot and sweaty streets of Kathmandu. Monday the 10th of April was a shock to the system, we arrived back on the Sunday afternoon, attempted to rest, showered off the days of encrusted dirt and attempted to prepare the resources for teaching. More time would have been a huge benefit but we had something better than that, we had Birkdale students. Without a single grumble, I think, we arrived at the Peace Garden School on Monday and it was as if our students had arrived fresh from the UK. The energy and enthusiasm was there in abundance, every lesson had wonderful resources and there wasn't a moment's hesitation about getting involved.

Their focus was entirely on the Nepalese students and from a teaching perspective we couldn't have hoped for more.

The daily routine became one similar to a school holiday camp, we would arrive for morning assembly, which involved a full dance routine that everyone got involved in; our hopes were that the dance routine would be taken up at Birkdale assemblies! After the assembly it was 'game on', lessons took different formats and our students were brilliant at sharing space, resources and working together with their partners but also as an overall team. Examples of lessons include, pen-pal letters; body part identification, dental hygiene, makaton sign language, mask making, science experiments such as a pop bottle rocket, economics and plenty of games. It was clear on day one that the Peace Garden School does an exceptional job and their teachers work to such a high standard, it was difficult to know what benefit our lessons would have. However, we realised that the most important part for the Nepalese students was to be able to engage, listen and converse with English speakers.



Less tangibly proved but potentially more significant was the connection between the two schools, the relationship grown and nurtured over many years had not been lost but strengthened.



In the time in between teaching we visited several of the UNESCO world heritage sites in Kathmandu and were introduced to many of the partners and projects associated with RNV Nepal. Several students at this point began to feel less than perfect, three weeks at full speed in Nepal can do that to a person. However, testament to their grit and character, even when tired out and ill they still wanted to go out and visit the sites, determined to experience as much of Nepal as possible.



Particular moments that stood out for the students were visiting two very impressive Buddhist temples, Boudhanatha Stupa and Swayambounhatha (monkey temple), these places offered a



cultural insight that can only be appreciated by being present in a place. Visiting the Patan Durbar Square was a beautiful experience, the craft and skill of the ancient royal courtyards was simply impressive. As much of it is still under reconstruction since the 2015 earthquake it was a good reminder of how long the recovery has been for Nepal and how much is still needed to be completed.

The charity project we visited alongside RNV Nepal that had the most resounding impact was the Annandit Charity Centre. Much of the focus of this charity is directed to helping girls and women that need protection, support and training to be able to lead independent lives, where such opportunities are less common. I think we all felt quite moved by the work of the Annandit Charity Centre and were very pleased to have been invited to their base in Kathmandu.

There is no easy way to finish this very brief summary of our trip. I have missed out so many details, names, places and much more. I can say that it has been an utterly wonderful trip and that the memories of all those details will certainly last a lifetime.

A great thanks to

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