

Amidst the mighty Himalayas

A wonderful, life-changing journey

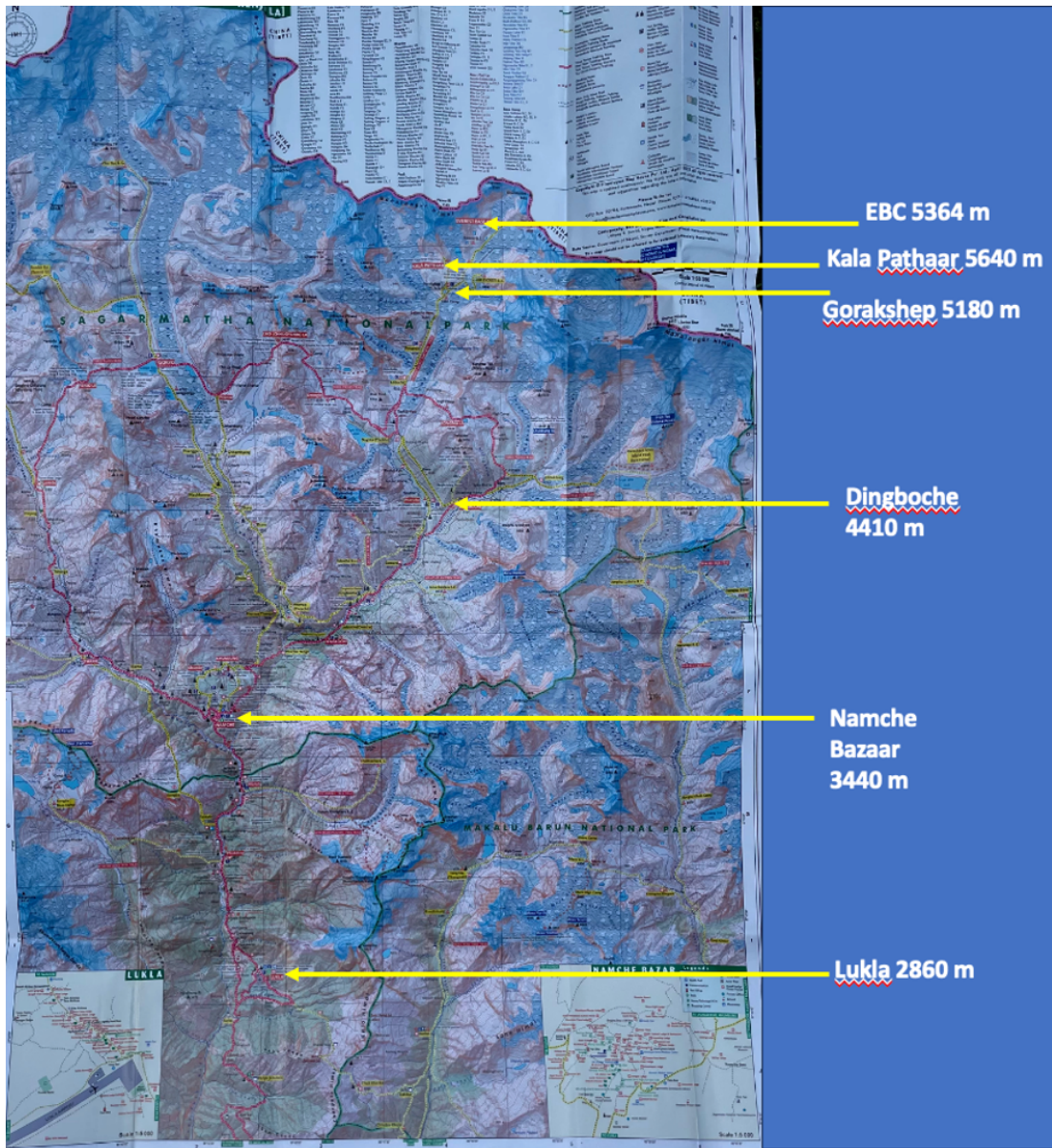


The Himalayan Roadies: From left - Nishanth (aka Nish), Bekay (that's me), Vijay, Lester, Dinyar (aka Diny), Lata and Ashok

Introduction

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step

Lao Tsu



The route map from Lukla to EBC and Kaala Pathar, 70 kilometers by foot

Mind body blowing

It was a trip of a lifetime. Our trek or shall I say expedition to Everest Base Camp and Kala Pathar. With closest of friends and family too. We went from 2800 mtrs to 5640 mtrs in 9 days and 72 km of rough and tough terrain. My heart rate at times going to nearly 200 beats. But the 7000-8000+ feet snow clad mountains that surrounded us at all times kept us going.

Over the days we experienced one-of-a-kind trekking from forest trails to steel rope bridges across rivers, glacier crossings, mountainous tough rocky, moraine terrain, steep gradients both up and down, -17 deg C temperatures, snow falls (ok just a mild flurry), yak farms, sunsets, horse back at moonlight, a helicopter ride zig zagging through a mountainous valley and more. Not to forget the superhuman Sherpa guides and porters who ensured that we made it.

We also enjoyed the tremendous hospitality of the local people right from Kathmandu all the way to Gorakshep. What you see is what you get. A simple yet proud culture, highly service oriented. Their attitude of **Attiti devo bhava**¹ comes to mind more times than it does back home where the phrase has originated.

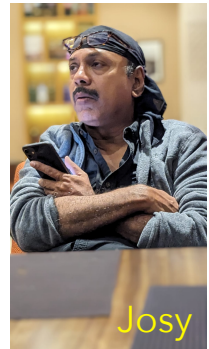
It is some story to tell. While this is written mostly in first person and are my thoughts and feelings, I'm am certain it reflects that of my dear friends and fellow trekkers on this marvelous journey that we took together.

In the end it's not going to matter how many breaths you took, but how many moments took your breath away (attributed to Shing Xiong)

¹a guest is like God

Prelude

before the beginning. karma strikes.



Nishanth (aka Nish) and I fly out early Monday 13th Nov from Bangalore to Mumbai to meet with the rest of our group and take the connecting flight to Kathmandu. Nish is a strapping young lad, super excited to be doing the trip and also keep a watch on me. He is also my son.

We have just heard of the last-minute set back with dear Josy, a central figure to all of us, having to drop out due to unforeseen circumstances. This bothers me quite a bit as I'm sure it does the others too but then life is unpredictable. I think of how he must be feeling it much more than us, on missing out at the very last minute. Karma or just bad timing.

At Mumbai, not having a single PNR, though we are connecting on the same airline, Nish and I have to re-checkin. This results in a negotiation with the airline desk on a few kilos of excess baggage. The girl at the counter is helpful though and we minimize the payout by moving some stuff into Nish's haversack, little realizing what we had done.

There are no real queues and I clear immigration and security quickly and find myself waiting for Nish for quite some time. I wonder what has happened when he finally emerges. The stuff that we had moved into his backpack included a (much loved) hunting knife that I

had got along for the trek. That apparently threw the security folks into a tizzy. Luckily for him they just took it away and finally let him go.

We find the others sitting in Starbucks. Vijay an advertising guru and life coach. Dinyar (aka Diny) a recently retired Quality expert and the researcher of our group along with his wonderful partner Lata who was taking this break from her investment advisory business. Lester the cool one, having flown down all the way from the US. My cousin Ashok a UAE based marketing whiz is already at Kathmandu (KTM) having flown in directly from Dubai.

We collectively mourn the absence of Josy the creative genius who was missing the trip and then go on to promise that we would give it back to him someday 😊

As we wait for our flight Nish and I regale everyone with our recent mis-adventure. The mood is one of anticipation of the days ahead. Everyone is on a quiet high.



Chilling out at
Mumbai
International Airport

The KTM flight in itself is uneventful until the last 30 minutes or so when the horizon (seen from the left windows of the plane) suddenly transforms into an unending line of snow clad Himalayan



From my window a section
of the never ending chain
of peaks on my horizon

peaks, some higher than the now descending aircraft. It's a *Shock and Awe* performance. I am spellbound.

Soon after, we land at KTM. The airport arrivals area is chaotic. The terminal takes me back to the average Indian airport of 20 years ago. We go through strange lines and stranger security checks, finally get our bags, which are strewn all over the floor by then, and come out looking for our vehicle. We have to wait, taking in the surroundings,



Outside KTM airport waiting for our cab, the tourist look

while we trace the driver and cab but find them after a couple of calls. All is well.

After a short drive, we are at our hotel and we meet the person who has been putting together this trek over the last 3 months. An unassuming young man, Nitesh. One who would prove his mettle time and again over the next two weeks and always with a calm smile.

His first briefing is sobering. Laying out the magnitude of what we are about to embark upon. The group peppers him with a lot of questions and he answers candidly. We are reminded that this is not a picnic. It is an expedition and a challenging one at that. Our guide Tenzing is introduced to us. I had asked WeRamblers² for their most experienced guide and they did provide Tenzing. He was a young, quiet sherpa and we would get to know him better over the days. There is an air of excitement, a lot of discussion around what else needs to be carried, whether we had enough energy bars, and lots of chai gulped down with it.

The evening is spent walking through Thamel which is one of the most active of districts with a mixture of shops, restaurants and bars and lots more.

We find a real gem for drinks and dinner. Electric Pagoda, recessed in a quiet corner, opening up into a large garden and bar. The first, of what would surprisingly be a clutch of amazing restaurants that we would discover.

The food and ambience are just great. We have a lovely time, with the famous local beer Gorkha, along with some terrific momos and peanut masala to start the evening. Everything we order is excellent. This was certainly a good start for the trip.

² We Ramblers is the tour agency that organized the trip. Highly recommended.



At Electric Pagoda and a sumptuous meal, Walking back after dinner a rare quiet street in Thamel, it is more like the pic on the left. Page 8

the long and winding road

Nov 14th. I am woken up by Nish with a Happy Birthday Pops greeting. This is the day that we start, even though it's a car ride. Not trekking but getting closer to the place where we will. It's also my birthday. Auspicious. All we get time for is a long breakfast and a hot bath. Its 1130 am and Nitesh arrives with our sleeping bags. Friend Ramesh (a local business tycoon) drops in to wish us luck. The morning has got over real quick. We load up into the vehicle, a Toyota HiAce and we are off. Due to congestion at KTM airport, we have to take a flight out from the small town of Ramechaap some 130 km SE of Kathmandu.

There is a lot of traffic leaving Kathmandu. As we head towards the hills the road gets narrow and winding. Tenzing realizes that we will not reach our designated lunch place on time, So we end up in an impromptu stop for lunch at a sleepy restaurant called Roshi Village.



It gives us the first taste of local hospitality with some freshly prepared food. The owner and his family are having their lunch but they stop to take our orders and serve us.



At the lovely restaurant called "Roshi Village"

The food is simple but very tasty and we are pretty hungry. The décor is bright and colorful. I like the long format table that we are sitting on.

Tenzing reminds us that we need to move on and we climb on to the HiAce for the rest of the ride.

A 5+ hour long, sometimes bumpy ride through a winding mountain road with ups and downs as we drive by valleys and rivers. Our driver, clearly very skilled, seems to love what he is doing.



Clockwise from Top Left, Through the mountains, Mirrors for good luck, Winding Roads, River hills and sky all in one, Nish taking a break

Finally, we arrive in Ramechaap. It is just one long main street with a few side ones, at the end of which is the airstrip.

The driver searches for our hotel and finally finds it. Our destination is where the best hotel is a small inn spread across a few low-slung buildings within the busy, single street. Diwali is still being celebrated in the alleyways with young girls and boys dancing to local folk music.

They are so natural and unaffected as they sway to the music some in a kind of trance. It feels like a garba in slowmo and without the dandiya.



Screen grab of local celebrations as we drive past

The hotel and the room are decent and functional and the food is freshly prepared and wholesome.



Our first experience of Daal Bhaath Tarkari or DBT as we name it, something that would become staple in the days to come.

Tenzing briefs us on the next day's plan and what to expect. At least we don't have to walk to the airport as originally planned, as he has arranged a van. Tomorrow, it will finally begin.

We hang out for a bit after that in the open courtyard of sorts but its (already) cold. We head to the rooms.

The first night that we are dealing with our luggage packs. We have to be up at 5 am.

I think of how its been a unique birthday gift to myself.

Sleep comes quickly. As soon as my head hits the pillow.



Nish and I after dinner