

## *Reflections from Nepal: Connecting with self, others and community through outdoor experiences*

### *Part 3: Connecting with Community*


This is the third in a three-part series of my reflections from this epic experience.

In December 2023, I embarked on an extraordinary journey through the Khumbu Region of Nepal, completing the Three Passes Trek—a 14-day adventure covering over 111 miles and ascending more than 45,500 feet in elevation. This outdoor experience not only presented epic trekking and landscapes; it offered experiential learnings connecting me with self, others and community. This is the third in a three-part series of my reflections from this epic experience.

**Intentional Design:** Engaging in outdoor experiences isn't just about the activities themselves; it's about the approach we take. It's about intentional design, leading with curiosity, and connecting and supporting the communities we encounter along the way. Listen, respect and learn.

*Led by Locals:* Being led by locals provides a unique perspective, enabling deeper interactions with those who call a place home. In Kathmandu, our journey began with immersive cultural experiences. Our American guide shared his deep passion for Nepal and his background in cross-cultural studies and adventure education. We visited Temples, the world's largest Buddhist stupa (a structure that contains relics and is used for meditation), a village school and even received a blessing from a monk at a Monastery. Our guide intentionally developed multiple, trusted relationships with local guides and sherpas who graciously welcomed us into the heart of Nepalese culture with a tremendous sense of pride. Immersing in the culture gave us a greater appreciation and understanding of the place, the people, the customs and the community we experienced.

*Shared Space:* Sharing the trails with locals going about their daily lives revealed a profound connection to the community. Locals carried goods stacked as high as 5 feet on their backs. Some carried glass doors or metal pipes and used a band across their heads to offset the weight. They do not have the latest hiking shoes from REI.



Many have standard tennis shoes or slides as they scramble the steep, rocky inclines to the next hilltop village. Witnessing their adaptability and resilience, we gained a newfound appreciation for the resourcefulness and resilience required to live at high altitudes.

We also shared the trails and suspension bridges with yaks sporting decorative headdresses and saddles with a bell that made a sweet sound. In the United States, we might only come across a yak in a childhood book learning the letter Y, but they are plentiful in the Khumbu region. The villages are built on the people's backs, but the yaks are workhorses that carry goods and provide milk and cheese. Dried yak dung is even burned to warm the tea houses. Resourcefulness is a theme carried throughout the community's daily life.


**Appreciation:** As we experience communities, we become hyper aware of our actions and their impact on the community. We are visitors in the community, and it is a privilege to be here.

*Environment.* It is important to have a minimum impact on the environments we enjoy. High in the hills of Nepal, you are conscious of not wasting the water that is brought to you from the local stream by your guides. We are mindful of only bringing what we need as the porters carry our duffels from tea house to house, enabling us to only carry a day pack. By using only what you need, simplicity is emphasized during an outdoor experience.

*Religion/Customs.* Growing up and a practicing Catholic, it was fascinating to see and learn about the Hindu and Buddhist religions first hand. I was particularly drawn to the prayer flags that were strung across suspension bridges, trails and at the high mountain peaks. Prayers and mantras blow in the wind to spread goodwill and compassion. Blue represents the sky, white for air/wind, red for fire, green for water and yellow for earth. Movement is integral in connecting with a higher power. Spinning prayer wheels, rubbing prayer beads and touching prayers inscribed on the large Mani stones while passing on the left are mindful practices along the journey. It is a reminder that movement and mindfulness are integral to connecting with something greater than ourselves.

**Support Local Communities - Food, Lodging, Shopping:** Sleeping in tea houses, dining on local food and immersing ourselves in the rhythm of village life, we experienced Nepal.

Our first two days were spent in Kathmandu. Walking along the narrow streets without stop signs or lights, we avoided the motorcycles zipping by – an adventure that rivaled the hike at times. Striking up conversations with artisans and shop owners provided insights into local products and customs and reinforced the



importance of supporting the local economy. These community connections inspired me to intentionally seek out products that promote workforce development initiatives with women and/or connected to social impact.

*Local Accommodations:* Unlike my past outdoor experiences, which involved sleeping in tents or under the stars, we slept in tea houses. They varied from house to house, but each reflected the cultural experience. Tea houses are not heated. However, the main eating/gathering areas had yak dung burning heaters and were quite toasty. Naturally, the fumes came along with this. We had double bedrooms with beds and a thick comforter. Squat toilets are common, and flushing requires you to pour a pitcher of water from a barrel. Bring your own toilet paper. It is never flushed but disposed of in another basket.

*Local Food:* The food was delicious. It was amazing to see what can be created with a few key ingredients. We ate sherpa's stew, fried noodles & veggies and pizza with yak cheese. But the most common meal was dal bhat which consists of curry vegetables, rice, lentil soup and spicy vegetables in vinegar. This was an "all you can eat" menu item and a clear crowd favorite. Hot beverages were a mid-day hiking and evening treat—lemon and ginger tea, masala tea and instant coffee. Local food not only gives you an authentic taste of the region's cuisine, but it also supports local chefs, farmers and food producers.

Ultimately, this journey through Nepal was not just about trekking through breathtaking landscapes; it was about forging connections — with oneself, with others, and with the communities we encountered along the way. Returning home, I carried with me not only memories of majestic mountains but also the lessons learned, the connections made and the profound sense of gratitude for the privilege of experiencing the world in such a meaningful way.

You don't have to travel to Nepal and trek the Himalayas to find your epic and connect with others. In founding All Forward, I am committed to designing outdoor micro experiences in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and surrounding areas. These experiences focus on leadership, team building and well-being. Activities include hiking, navigation, kayaking and more. Learn more at [www.allforward.us](http://www.allforward.us). More reflections [HERE](#) with Part 1: Connecting with Self and Part 2: Connecting with Others.

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