

# TREKking WITH TERESA

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## TREK REPORT – Gokyo, April 2018

**Participants:** Teresa Williams (Group Leader), Kerri Southern, Veita Henshaw

**Support:** Lahar Pun (Guide), Chapal (Kancha) Tamang, Karma Pun

This trek was originally named Gokyo Over Renjo La. Read on to find out what happened...

I had a rather roundabout flight to Kathmandu – four hours in Frankfurt and then 4 hours in Delhi so just crashed in a heap at 7 pm on Wednesday 28th March, after a valiant attempt by Muna to feed me. I fell asleep after a few mouthfuls of daal bhat and slept till dawn.

My 'recovery day' was a treat, although a mild attack of Meniere's (problem with ears leading to lack of balance) left me with little choice of activities. A bit weird arriving in Kathmandu when nobody else is here. No Isabel, Sue, Lizzie, not even Netra. (His dad died really suddenly last week so he is up at his home village of Kangel.)

By Friday 30 March it was all systems go. Taxi into Thamel – travel agent, check out some new clothing designs for the market in Germany and buying some newer, larger trekking pants. Quitting smoking has taken its toll on my figure. Well, that and a winter in Germany with lots of cosy indulgences. At 4.15 this afternoon I even got a cancellation at the dentist.



*Icicles at Dole*

The last day of March was just as busy with trekking permits and flights to sort but I did find time for a pleasant lunch with my friend Julie who lives here.

### ***Sunday 1 April***

Back into Thamel to collect Kerri from the Hotel Amarylis; she had arrived late last night. We had a strong coffee at the nearby Java before heading out to Kapan. The taxi driver took a rather circuitous route but we popped up out of a steep lane not five hundred metres from home. Only time for a hurried cup of tea before heading out to the airport for Veita. I got stuck in some pretty woeful traffic at Pasang Lama Chowk – the deterioration of the road there defies description. Suffice to say it was worse than ever. I got to the airport at 2.15 for a 1.30 arrival – I need not have worried. The flight did not land till 2.15. An hour later our nice new taxi driver, Arjun, appeared out of the blue and we were soon home at Muna Cottage sipping tea. The evening stayed warm as we walked over to Bouda for dinner at the Garden Kitchen. The stupa was still open so we did a circuit of the upper terrace in the twilight. Lots of youngsters taking selfies, posed in front of the famous Buddha eyes.

### ***Monday 2 April***

Back into Thamel, but not before a super Muna's breakfast (French toast and fried tomatoes) and then a good look at Kerri and Veita's trekking gear.

In Thamel we checked out some clothing stores; quite nice not to have any guys to consider today. We bought a few items of gear at our favourite little trekking shop – overpants, sun-hats, fleece sleeping-bag liner, buffs. We ate at The Roadhouse with Jules again. Still good; food and company.

Yet another Magical Mystery Tour by taxi to get home. The heavens opened late this afternoon, hail even! During a brief pause in the downpour we dashed up to the Shambala for delicious veg pakoras. Australian red the perfect accompaniment of course. The pre-trek briefing was more of a re-familiarisation.

Packing, shower, ready. Phew!

### ***Tuesday 3 April***

Up very early. Thanks for the tea Muna. Lahar rounded up two taxis and, after a light breakfast, we were soon hanging off the counter of brand new

Summit Airlines. We need not have rushed. I can not recall a worse-organised check-in desk. Trekkers who could not fly in yesterday's poor weather jostled for position with this morning's scheduled passengers. Bags were weighed then left in front of the desk – almost as if they knew the bags were not actually destined to go anywhere. We remained optimistic as our departure time was put back by one hour. Once in the actual departure hall with a surprisingly good, if ludicrously expensive, coffee we looked on with increasing frustration as passengers left to go all over Nepal – all except Lukla passengers. 9.30, 10.00, 10.30, 11.00, 11.30, 12.30. These were our ever later EDT's. As the sky filled with huge thunderheads we began to hope our flight would NOT be called. At about 2 pm, with bad weather threatening and more forecast for tomorrow, I pulled the pin. I think Summit were happy to get five customers off their waiting list. I have heard a few light aircraft fly over Kapan this afternoon, blundering around in the clouds, but I am perfectly happy that we are not in any of them. Let's see about an alternative.

Lahar has found a good jeep and Kancha got a chopper flight down from Lukla to Phaphlu. We now plan to meet him there late tomorrow. Now I have to seriously re-jig our itinerary. It is quite a long hard walk from Phaphlu to Lukla. Let's see how we can do it and still get to Gokyo.

### ***Wednesday 4 April***

OMG! 5 am start. Empty streets at first and not much traffic to Dulikhel. Sadly it was cloudy so no views at all. At Khabre, Lahar made us a proper coffee, though the omelette and toast were not memorable. It was warm in the valley but we got a very decent daal bhat at a new clean place and, once we crossed the river and started to climb, it soon cooled down. Up, up and then up some more. Red rhododendrons, then pale pink ones as we gained altitude. Potatoes planted under little hummocks of soil. Endless switchbacks with alternating wet and dry micro-climates in ridges and gullies. A very welcome tea break at Khade Bazaar, where I was handed an adorable 5-month-old girl to cuddle while tea was made. A nice Nepali family stopped there too and we were to encounter them again at Phaphlu in the same lodge (well, it is the only really decent place in town). We whizzed past Pattale and I thought of Khoki and Ba (Dorje's parents) and all the folks we know there. Another 45 minutes saw us whizz through Salleri, thank goodness, and we

were soon parked out front of the Everest Lodge in Phaphlu, just a few minutes up the road. I even got my old room (with an attached loo. Shush.)

### **Thursday 5 April**

Our day started with yet another jeep ride, this time just two hours. I understood we would be dropped at the ancient stupa BEFORE Taksundo La so I expected the ride to be just half an hour. However, the jeep 'cowboy' took 5,000 NRS (\$65 AUD) but drove us all the way to Taksundo village, down the hill from the pass. I saw a beautiful old, abandoned house at Ringmu which I would like to investigate further. Also a gompa which I had never seen before as we trek through the newer part of the village.

A top notch breakfast was enjoyed and then we set off downhill. Down, down and down some more. I could not help but recall how I went A over T on this track, in the rain, at this time last year. Today we were in Nuntala by 1 pm but it is often good, when possible, to have an easier first day. Nice company this evening. A couple, Sandro (Italian) and Sabine (German) and a younger gal from Australia, Nicole.

Nicole's first day out of Kathmandu involved an overturned bus crash in which a man was killed. The three had all trekked from Junbesi today, which impressed the hell out of me, having previously only trekked from Junbesi to where they all had their lunch, and not found it particularly easy.

### **Friday 6 April – Nuntala to Kharikhola**

Sore legs this morning but all well and happy. Masses of donkeys today. At first it was a little muddy but soon became hot and dusty as we descended endlessly to the big donkey station at the bottom of the valley. We became adept at hearing the bells and finding good spots to stand aside, well, mostly. At one point I recall Kerri and I lurching desperately out of the way as a gaggle of crazed nags came charging downhill towards us. Not from behind where we expected them at all, despite Kancha yelling out 'Gora Ayo' at the top of his lungs.

Crossing the Dudh Khosi on a steel suspension bridge, it was something of a relief to start trekking uphill; at first. We were soon very hot and sweaty. After about twenty minutes we found a great spot for



*Early morning start in the jeep to Phaphlu*

lunch and enjoyed one of our best ever veg noodle soups.

After lunch was hideous. Endlessly uphill, hot, dusty and masses of donkeys. Halfway up the huge hill, with a monastery on top which never appeared to get any closer, we stopped at a bhatti. Rain was spitting so we bought sheets of plastic which the guy fashioned into covers in a practice involving a huge knife and a cigarette lighter. Of course the rain stopped as soon as the rain covers were ready. Meanwhile, Lahar made us a strong coffee. We really needed it.

The last slog up the hill was a real pig (this one was for you Alison) but Kancha led the way at a really slow steady pace which was good to follow. Far better than my usual rush and puff. It was a huge relief to reach the top. I had fancied a nice lodge near the gompa at the top but half an hour further on was the lodge where we had stayed last year. It is a really big day tomorrow and an extra half an hour might be useful.

The Tashi Dele Lodge offered us a cabin each with thick mattresses, soft pillows and, best of all, hot showers. I am writing this in the unheated (not necessary) dining room. A rum and Coke to hand. We are CLEAN!

### ***Saturday 7 April – Kharikhola to Poyan***

Hell's bells it was hard. My hardest day's trekking ever, and I have had some tough ones. From an 8 am getaway we trekked until 5.30 – that is 9½ hours!! The uphill out of Kharikhola was a little longer than expected and muddy after recent rain. However, when we hit the big descent the word muddy was totally inadequate. It was a quagmire of slippery clay mud mixed with copious quantities of donkey shit. Here and there, where donkeys frequently halted, were pools of fetid black urine with a sickening ammonia stench. This mud I am describing was over and around sharp jagged rocks so that even a dry foothold was precarious.

We followed some very young local porters, one of whom kept slipping out of his flip-flops. We stopped



*Orchids along the trail*

and bought him some really strong shoes. He was almost too shy to say thank you. After several hours of almost falling over, all the time, we had really had enough – but there was still an hour to go with Poyan appearing and disappearing in the mist.

The rhododendrons were beautiful, the magnolias superb but we were very happy to reach our lodge. It was quite difficult to rouse ourselves for the evening meal. I almost yelled 'I've had a biscuit and I'm sleeping' but thought better of it. Supposed to be the guide after all. I did try to read after dinner, it was only 7.30, but two pages were enough. The much-vaunted Volker Kutscher's *Babylon Berlin* just not grabbing me. We all slept like logs.

### **Sunday 8 April – Poyan to Chaurikharka**

We were warned that today would be just as hard as yesterday. It was not. The climb out of Poyan was reasonable if a little muddy, again. It had rained hard during the night. The descent was hideously muddy, but the mud was a little sandy which afforded some grip and it was not such a long way to morning tea.

The rest of the descent to lunch was horrid but not as endless as yesterday. When we did stop for lunch at Surke we all agreed we could not have done any more downhill. Knees, hips, glutes and feet. Enough already!

The lunch was rather horrid. Veg fried noodles were served as an overcooked sticky mush totally overpowered by garlic. Yuk! Anyway, it was fuel and we were soon pounding the wide sandy track uphill to Chaurikharka. A beautifully-made trail though we did have to stop for large donkey trains. A chance to rest? The trail clings to the side of a fantastically deep valley; within an hour after lunch the sun was clouded over and it soon began to rain – jackets on. The village of Chaurikharka begins quite low down so we climbed up through a long steep village of farmhouses and lodges, past an old stupa and several mani walls. The centre of the village has two beautiful white stupas and many new buildings which were rebuilt since the earthquake. We made a beeline for the lodge where Kancha and I had our lunch last year. Small traditional plywood rooms,



*Setting off from Kharikhola*

clean loo and a cosy dining room with great cooking. The didi here sings Sherpa songs to herself while she works.

We met Ina from Belgium, a fiercely independent type. A young couple passed us today both wearing headphones which is a bit hazardous when you have to listen out for donkeys. We saw a lone electric light bulb on in a clearing in the forest. It is to ward off tiger because donkeys are sometimes kept there overnight.

### **Monday 9 April – Chaurikharka to Jorsale**

Since we normally walk from Lukla to Phakding in one day, and then Jorsale the next day, this was a rather LARGE day of trekking. Our starting point was well below Lukla so it was uphill to the main trail at first. What a shock! We saw more trekkers in the first ten minutes than we had encountered in the past five days. Traffic! Oncoming trekkers, overtaking trekkers, slower trekkers. OMG!

Lunch at Phakding, at our regular lodge, was cheese omelettes with beautifully-made chappatis. A winner. Highlight of the day was running into Dorje and the Melbourne guys. I spotted Ram first but then Tom, David, Mike, Ramesh. We met on a rock ledge just before Benkar so just time for quick hugs all round.

We met some odd characters today; such a change from the past few days. A Russian man, travelling with a Pakistani boy who spoke a little Russian (think Imran Khan aged 20). In Monjo we met a strange Polish girl, determined to make it to Namche today (she flew up this morning). I did try to warn her of the health considerations (1400m – 3400m in one day!) and the sheer stupidity of walking at night, alone. Sadly, my advice fell on deaf ears. She said ‘I am OK, I have a torch’.

Luckily, we got rooms at the lovely Nirvana Gardens in Jorsale. As I write this we have all had our second shower of the trek. The stove in the dining room is almost too hot. Downside – the dining room is full of rather loud Americans celebrating the end of their trek.

### **Tuesday 10 April – Jorsale to Namche**

We must have gained some fitness along the way because we made Namche in 3 hours and 40 minutes. On fire. Green Tara, our favourite lodge, had rooms,

though it was packed to the rafters. Since we got in so early, midday, we had our first ‘relax’ of our eight days on trek. We wandered around in the cold foggy atmosphere. We had coffee and cake somewhere nice and shopped for a few essentials. Prices here are shocking. \$8 for a small packet of cheap Chinese panty liners. \$2 for a Mars. The porters who carry this stuff up here take a very meagre share of these inflated prices. Needless to say, we didn’t buy much. We played cards in the enormous dining room tonight. Really starting to enjoy our games of Thirteen.

Internet and phone working. Contacted home. Good sleep. Great lodge.

### **Wednesday 11 April – Namche to Phortse Tenga**

We awoke to a brilliant blue sunshiny day. Freshly-dusted snow peaks sparkled and bedroom windows were open for photos by 6.30 this morning. A beautiful ‘reveal’.

Namche to Phortse Tenga is a longish walk by Slowtrekking standards as we would usually start from Kangzuma, a couple of hours out of Namche. We are now trying to gain acclimatisation time. The weather was perfect but there were so many people on the trail it was a bit of a circus. If a large percentage had not been rather vociferous Yanks it might have been better. I heard a guy telling his porter all about his responsibilities as an exec. at Coca Cola – loudly enough for everyone to hear. Lots of people could use a quiet little nudge to just ‘be here’.

After a nice coffee at Thamserku Lodge in Kangzuma we left the main track to the Everest Base Camp and about 90% of the trail traffic disappeared. Heaven!

The trail up to Gokyo rises very steeply out of the valley at Kangzuma but it soon levels out, a little anyway, as a lovely narrow path cuts across a hillside of unparalleled views. Yaks grazing, bells clanging, quite close to the trail, is the sound-track of our morning. Mong La for lunch at 3900 metres. One of those distant villages that looks just as far away every time you deign to look up.

As we arrived so did the clouds and it was cold and foggy while we ate. It is a rather bone-jarring descent to Phortse Tenga; such a pity to lose so much of that hard-won altitude. I did remind Veita and Kerri that we have to come back this way.

We are at the 'other' lodge in Phortse Tenga and so far it seems OK. I left my water bottle at the View Point at lunch. Hopefully someone might bring it down with them as we met some nice people there who are heading this way. (Met them on the way to Luza next day, thank you.) My knees really hurt.

#### **Thursday 12 April – Phortse Tenga to Luza**

We awoke to the original Winter Wonderland. We had slept at 3700 metres and down there the snow was no more than a light dusting which looked exquisite on the pines and rhododendrons that surrounded our lodge. As we set off in bright sunshine the trail was clear, the snowmelt dripping like rain in places with the gorgeous smell of toasting pine needles filling the air. A perfect morning. The going was a bit harder than I recalled but isn't it always. We stopped often for photos, the scenery behind us becoming more and more spectacular as we climbed higher. Lunch at Dole was a welcome break. We are covering a bit more ground than usual since we lost a few days trekking in from Phaphlu and still want to make it to Gokyo, with an appropriate amount of acclimatisation.

As we reached Labama the clouds closed in a little and fine dry snow swirled around us. Hot chocolate seemed appropriate. When we were ready to set off for Luza the snow got heavier. Tempted to stay

put but time is not on our side at the moment. We arrived at Luza in almost blizzard conditions with two centimetres of snow on our heads, shoulders and packs. Our guys still had the big plastics we had bought in Kharikhola against the rain. It was freezing. Actually, I suspect it was well below as we hurriedly changed into warm dry clothes. We all jumped into our sleeping bags to warm up till the fire was lit in the dining room. It didn't take long and wet gear was soon festooned from a well-placed series of wires across the ceiling. No, they were not the electricity. The stove was a beauty, fuelled on yak dung. We were soon shedding pullovers as we played Thirteen. Still snowing when we turned in.

#### **Friday 13 April – Luza to Machhermo**

Hard to find words to describe the beauty which surrounded us this morning. The ground was deep in snow and the sky an impossible blue. The windows were frosted. Outside the only sound was the jangling of big yak bells 'gung-gadung gung-gadung' and a few choughs calling out to each other to come out and play.

I had had a really rough night. A killer altitude headache and the beginnings of a horrid cold. My head beat a low thumping rhythm as my sinuses pounded an off beat. Ugh! Decision was quickly taken for me to stay put, with Karma who had been



*Great views of Mt Everest (left) on the way to Kangzuma*

suffering with a cold for days too. You just cannot ignore altitude problems. They don't go away if you ignore them. They kill you!

So, after breakfast it was a rather teary farewell (altitude again). Kerri and Veita are in the extremely capable hands of Kancha and Lahar. As I wrote this I'd had no news, but we had very little signal today. I spent a miserable day huddled in bed. It would have helped if I had descended to Dole but I just couldn't get it together to move. By evening I was actually a lot better. My body had realised that 4250 was no big deal and all I had was a stinking cold.

### **Kerri and Veita...**

We set off on a brilliant sunny day. It was only one hour up to Machhermo as it is 'kind of' acclimatisation. Snow was six inches deep. We arrived there at 10.30 after crossing the Luza Pass. Staying at the Lamgyal Lodge where we had garlic soup and ginger tea at lunchtime – both said to help with the altitude. This afternoon Lahar took us up on the ridge behind the village. It was very, very cold so despite Lahar's urging we didn't go right to the

top of the ridge. Discretion being the better part, etc. Visited the HRA clinic around 3 pm. Blood oxygen uptake good. All passed. Snoozed till the fire was lit at 5.30. No cards! Left behind in Didi's bag!

### ***Saturday 14 April – Machhermo***

Feeling much better but not good enough to ascend, I packed after breakfast and we headed downhill on yet another brilliant morning. Had a little anxious moment when I glanced out of the window and saw a huge yak staring back at me not a metre away. A little bit windy so buffs and hats to the ready.

We stopped for tea at Labama again and I was surprised to get a signal on my phone. As I opened WhatsApp the messages came pouring in. I was so pleased until I started to read. My darling Ekki was at death's door as he had written the night before. It seemed unlikely he would live. I howled like a banshee all the way from there to Dole. Bizarre to feel so grief-stricken in such magnificent surroundings.

I got a lovely cosy attic room at the Dole Resort – highly recommended – and proceeded to chase up



*Lahar near Machhermo*



*Climbing the 'death stairs' on the way to Gokyo*



*We made it!*



*The stupendous view from Gokyo Ri*





*The view from Gokyo Ri over the Ngozumpa Glacier, looking towards Cho Oyu (World's No. 6 at 8,188m)*

information with a rather unreliable wi-fi signal. Before too long I made contact with Ekki. He was alive at least, if in really poor health. So great to talk to him though his condition presents another set of problems.

Dining room was really warm. Harry, an older Swedish guy, is holed up here too, waiting for his chest infection to improve. Decided to start on azithromycin tonight. Good call.

#### **More from Kerri and Veita...**

8.15 start was a bit of a slog back up the ridge then less steep on peat tundra to Fanga View Point lodge for a cuppa. A bit of a dive at 4448. The so-called 'death stairs' (thank you Denise) presented no problems and we were soon at the first lake with hundreds of cairns. We saw the golden ducks on the lake. Breathing heavily over a fairly level track we came upon the second lake and our first look

at Gokyo Ri. 'No way Hosé!' was our first reaction. At the third lake is the village of Gokyo where we checked into the Gokyo Resort. It was packed. Pizza for lunch took a very long time coming. We had a rather strangely-wallpapered room but it did have an attached bathroom (of sorts). We snoozed afterwards then Lahar took us on a walk up to the glacier. Well worth the effort. The sound was particularly astounding as the ice cracks and rocks trickle into the visible crevasses. Slept again for a while before dinner.

#### **Sunday 15 April**

Yet another fabulous morning as I await the arrival of Kerri and Veita. Since it is their Gokyo Ri day I don't expect them much before 4 pm.

#### **Veita and Kerri...**

#### **Gokyo and then all the way down!**

We had a 5 am, yes, 5 am!!, start. Lahar woke us with

tea then up Gokyo Ri. It was SO HARD, straight up, hardly any zig-zags. We kept asking 'are we half way yet?' but the answer was always 'no, not yet.'

We had a little ceremony for Aunty Gael quite near the top. We found a quiet place just off the trail with a view of the glacier. We strung up the prayer flags which Kancha had taken to the monastery in Namche to be blessed by the Lama. Kerri read a eulogy and made a short video. A portion of Gael's ashes were scattered here on the 'top of the world'. Vale Aunty Gael. We loved you.

We scurried down, down, down. The lake was an exquisite turquoise in the bowl of the Gokyo Valley. Knees screaming. Breakfast.

At 9.45 we set off for Dole. It was sunny. We could spot the flags we had set up from down here. The wind was bitterly cold so we set off in down jackets, hats and gloves. Almost ran down the Death Stairs. The weather closed in and we trekked in the mist. Had hot chocolate at Fanga. We lunched in Machhermo and then trekked ALL AFTERNOON

to Dole at 4 pm. Absolutely knackered but thrilled to bits to have done it all.

### *Monday 16 April - Dole to Kangzuma*

We set off on a lovely day which was a bit of a surprise after a complete white-out at 6 am. It grew warmer as we descended through the rhododendron woods to Phortse Tenga for morning tea. So much easier downhill. The climb up to Mong La was horrible. Hot, steep and extremely tiring. A bit disappointing not to feel fitter and stronger after almost two weeks on trek. Just a little bit worn out I guess. Veita and Kerri didn't find it any easier. A real pig. Just another one for you Alison!

We waited ages for our lunch at Mong La but when it came we all agreed 'Best chips ever in Nepal, bar none'. No qualms at all about eating a huge plate of chips for lunch when you trek this hard. The ensuing cruise gently downhill to Kangzuma was wonderful. Yaks grazing contentedly above and below the trail. Thamserku Lodge gave us three front rooms with stunning views. It stayed partially clear all day until a gorgeous pink light on Ama Dablam at the end. We



walked up the track to see if Everest was showing in the same light but it was playing hide-and-seek. A few minutes later everything was gone. Fog.

Back at 3500 metres felt so good. Hot shower in the little cabin across the road from the house. Rum and Coke and some Thirteen. Nice middle aged German couple from Stuttgart. A couple of really unlikely girls. Already unwell from their 'huge trek' today (Namche to Kangzuma). The pretty one nearly cried when I pointed out the trail for Dole they must take tomorrow. OK, I know, it was slightly unkind.

### ***Tuesday 17 April – Kangzuma to Phakding***

A very easy walk back to Namche Bazaar for coffee and cake in the sun, with two lovely dogs, one laying on my feet. The number of trekkers on the trail this morning, heading up, was phenomenal. Bordering on ghastly. We fairly whizzed downhill to the scary bridge. Kerri was great. Fearless with heights. Ate at a new place in Jorsale. Excellent veg food. A cup of tea at Benkar went down well. We were hammering along but our legs were kaput as we reached Phakding, just as it started to rain, so

we hurried through the village rather than stop for jackets. Another 'great night in' with cards and rum and coke. Met two brothers, Poms, who were great for a laugh in English. Slept really well at 2650 m.

### ***Wednesday 18 April – Phakding to Lukla***

A slow breakfast and a late start. It was very easy at first. A nice stop at Ghat Gompa for morning tea and we hailed the Pommie boys to come and have a dekko inside. Well worth the short stop. We took lunch at Tiplyang where we collected our 'left luggage' (lightweight clothes used lower down). Very tired indeed as we climbed the steep trail up to Lukla after a lunch of excellent fried rice. A big cheer and applause from a group of young porters we had been shadowing all afternoon. 'Baju Power!' (Grandma Power).

The North Face Resort (name a bit ambitious) has gone downhill a bit. It was damp and mildewy and the bathrooms smelled terrible. I am writing this diary sitting near the big new wood stove in the dining room with a glass of Jacobs Creek Semillon Chardonnay to hand. Kerri is on the Sprite with a bit



of a cold. Hopeful for clear skies tomorrow. Flight confirmed for 0830. (Ha ha ha!!)

#### ***Thursday 19 April – Fly back to Kathmandu***

Since our flight was not till 0830 this morning we didn't have to be at the airport at the crack of dawn, for a change. Still, there was nobody on the desk at Summit Airlines when we tried to check in. Did not bode well. We waited. And then we waited some more. Not much was happening though a few random Sita Airline flights did come and go. At least we had the landings and departures for entertainment. Some time during a rather long and dreary afternoon we were advised that there would be NO FLIGHTS for us today. We schlepped back into Lukla, five minutes, and found a better lodge, a much better lodge. Kerri's international flight is the day after tomorrow so getting slightly nervous about flight to Kathmandu. Fingers crossed. We have let Kancha go home.

#### ***Friday 20 April – Fly back to Kathmandu (Take 2)***

We were at the airport bright and early but it was a circus. Now there are loads of people who have

had their flights cancelled and we naturally have no precedence over people who booked for today's flights. Anyway, it seems a Malaysian airliner has parked in a rather unorthodox position on the runway in Kathmandu so, for now, nobody is going anywhere.

Choppers were flying in and out of Lukla at an astounding rate. It is just a week or two before the climbing season on Everest and gear is being shipped in fast. Rather funny to see the gear being offloaded from high-tech choppers onto donkeys. Rumours abound about flights and prices. I learned later, to our cost, that it is best to get a seat on a returning chopper in the morning as they are all going back to Kathmandu for more gear and they charge more as the day wears on and the trekkers get more desperate.

We hooked up with a couple of Kiwi guys, father and son, whose guide was sure he could get us a ride... if only we would pay enough. From about \$250 per person in the morning, which I balked at, to \$500 nearer 5 pm. In the end we just bit the



*A beautifully painted chopper at Lukla*

bullet and paid (credit cards in Kathmandu). We are all now trying to claim something back from our travel insurance people. However, I have to admit it was worth the money. It was absolutely fantastic. Terrifyingly beautiful. It rained, then sun shone into the windows as we neared sunset, the wind charged up each ridge to blast us as we crossed it, with metres to spare! Amazing! I nearly kissed the ground, Pope style, when we landed in Kathmandu. It was probably a pretty normal flight but it was the thrill of a lifetime for me.

I was so blown away by the experience I didn't make any more notes in my diary so the rest is from memory. We drank a lot of wine and ate crunchy veg pakoras over at Shambala. Isabel was in town and staying at Netra's just around the corner (upper storey of house now finished and very nice indeed). Kerri got away in time for her flight next day. Phew! I think I dragged Veita around to all my market suppliers by way of entertainment but she seemed to enjoy it. We ate pizza with Julie at the Roadhouse (a bit of a tradition these days). This year's monsoon is beginning to make itself felt with the loudest thunder I have ever heard. Veita got away OK. Dorje and Bir came to visit. Lahar and Karma made it down from Lukla; a flight at last. Karma left immediately for home by bus but Lahar stuck around for a day or so, catching up with Netra and Niru after their dad's sudden accidental death. A tractor overturned. Sad.

I had only a couple of days myself before flying to Germany for the summer. I needed to shop for the market so spent the next two days in and out of clothing stores buying, paying and organising transport for 120 kilos of gear. I had hoped for time for a crown on my tooth at the dentist but our changed itinerary had scotched that idea. I did find time for a clean. Extremely thorough! Ouch!

At the end of April Kathmandu is not a great place to hang out. The weather is oppressively hot, the monsoon is still weeks away and pollution levels are hideous. I was quietly pleased to be on my way on a warm night as we taxied one last time over the dreadful roads to the airport. Still, I will miss everyone.

Of course I had hoped for a few more customers for this trek but with just Kerri and Veita it was a much more personal experience for all of us. It was much harder to walk in from Phaphlu than flying

into Lukla. It was a bit of a challenge to accept the changed itinerary – no Renjo La! We had to push a bit hard here and there to get into Gokyo with sufficient acclimatisation to do Gokyo Ri. As you have read, I didn't make it. But Kerri and Veita did, with bells on. Way to go ladies. I am so proud of your effort. It was bloody hard and you didn't whinge or even question why we had to do this much on this day. You just got on with it. Your reward was Gokyo, with you and the mountains in peak condition. Fan-bloody-tastic effort. Thank you. And thanks to Kancha, Lahar and Karma for getting us up there. I think they know we could not do it without them. Thank you all. You were awesome.

I am sitting at my computer on a very warm May day (30 degrees) planning next season. Nothing as ambitious as Gokyo I am afraid. Easier Mustang, Solu District and Pike Peak and then the laid back Cultural Safari are all described in great detail on the website at [www.slowtrekking.com](http://www.slowtrekking.com). Have a look. I could be writing about you next season. YOU CAN DO THIS!

Cheers,  
**Teresa didi**

*Thanks to Frank Jones, Desktop Dynamics, Geelong  
for editing & layout.*





Lukla airport

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We made it!