

Experience of Nepal by Askurina from Malaysia

If I were to describe my experience in Nepal in one word then I would have to say it was an "eye-opener"! Born and brought up in a country like Malaysia, I have had it "easy", I think. Continuing my degree education for almost 5 years already in Mangalore, India, and having gone to various places in India, I thought I have seen it all, but then again, how **WRONG** was I? Nepal is definitely in a league of its own! I remember wondering how "out-of-order" the town planning, were how dusty the Kathmandu city is and I was immediately scared to even begin to imagine how it would be in Bangladesh or Africa or worst Palestine?

The moment I step out of that Air India flight from Delhi -Kathmandu, I remembered my first impression of this country (Nepal) was "shubhanallah (Glory be to God)! What a beautiful country!" And yes, despite all that I have seen and heard along the way in the 22 days that I roamed the grounds in Nepal, my first impression, never changed. The ground-breaking and heart-breaking earthquake in late April afternoon may have destroyed many of Nepal's historical monuments, houses, schools temples and taken over 8000 lives, but it certainly have not destroyed the beautiful landscape this country have been blessed with.

I have volunteered initially as an Opportunity Village Nepal intern under the wings of an NGO/Good Shepherd Sisters Foundation with the collaboration of UNICEF but due to weather constraints and safety reasons, I have been assigned with the team to run the mobile health clinic in various villages spread in the few districts in Gorkha. At this point, many of my Indian friends might quickly dismiss what we are doing easily, because we as interns are doing the very same thing in India. So basically, my line of job is the same like our community medicine postings and our health camps conducted by our hospital in Mangalore. We tend to the same vague complaints the poor patients came with every other patient will have anxiety, high BP recordings, the headaches, the backaches, etc.

So, did I ever regret coming all the way to Nepal doing the same thing I have been doing for the past 5 months since my internship has started? The answer is **NEVER**. The very first day we went to the field, I had an "adventure" of a life time. From our hotel in Gorkha, it took our team 1.5 hours to reach the foot of the hill through the

long and winding highway road, adding to that, to reach the village, we had another 2 hours journey uphill across gravel road filled with potholes, sharp bends and no sort of safety bar that could keep our car from skidding down the valley! Following that, every other day, every journey is pretty much a different adventure altogether. Our teams have had to hike in the scorching hot sun because the jeep could not have gone up with our entire load in it. Other days our jeep got stucked in the mud, struggling to even keep the jeep in a straight line. Many a time, our driver twisted his shoulder trying steer back the car from being driven into the valley down under. Our team has had to carry the medicines on their back, walked barefooted through the paddy field, crossing an old wooden bridge.

A day came when there was not even a road to reach the village we were assigned to, thus we had to cross the hanging bridge over a river and hiked for 25 minutes uphill under the hot sun with easily 15 kgs or more of medicine on our back! I just want to take this opportunity to salute my team members for all of their continuous outstanding effort in building up and providing a better health care for the people in Nepal! You know who you are, so, keep up the good work guys!

I have always been a firm believer that a doctor treats a patient, **NOT** a disease. In Nepal, I am reassured of this fact. A lot may think that the health clinic conducted doesn't really cure or solve any of the problems the villagers might have, and yes, it may be just a temporary solution to the many symptoms they presented with, **BUT** if you just sit back and ponder how hard it is for these villagers to come to where we set up for clinics (i.e sometimes in a classroom with a roof over our head and mere ground as its floor but sometimes just directly underneath a big tree overlooking a scenic beauty of more mountains etc), you might then understand how much even this little service that we provide meant to them.

The biggest problem I faced, being a Malaysian was probably the language. In the first week especially how much it pained me not being able to relay to these villagers seeking medical attention how to better care for themselves, giving them lifestyle advice and all that. That was when I realized how crucial the participation of the volunteer doctors and nurses to be from people within the community itself! I have met here some doctors, nurses and even social workers who have gone the extra miles to listen to the villagers, empathies and educate them about personal and even their emotional well-being. It is indeed fitting with what the organizers had in mind

by conducting this project. They want to finally rebuilt the primary healthcare in the district and provide a holistic approach to patient care. The biggest thank you to all my team members and every single person I met through this journey for showing me and teaching me about life, and humanity. We have put our differences behind us and focused on a single aim and I wished with all my heart that we would continue this honorable effort indefinitely, anywhere we are.

From the aftershock that rocked me in my slumber at 4.15 am on August 10th to the jammed-pack night bus ride back to Sokedhara after visiting of what remained to be seen in Basantapur, many other of my experiences, emotions, hurdles that I have gone through here in Nepal are mixed with an endless bundle of pure happiness and gratitude of which is too extensive to be shared or expressed by words in this memoir but will forever be etched deep in my heart. A lot of things in this country has always amazed me from the very beginning I stepped on its ground and I will look forward to Nepal to rise one day at par with many other developed countries.

Admittedly, I do get homesick in the middle of this journey, but then, I promise myself, insyaAllah (with God's will) this is only going to be the first of many volunteering work that I would do as a medical personnel. See you again Nepal. See you again Nepalis.