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OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF PROJECTS ABROAD NEPAL



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# Two Weeks in Nepal

*Emily Sun – Australia  
Medicine Two Week Special*



In December 2013, I journeyed to the land of the Himalayas, where I took part in a medical volunteer project. After spending fifteen hours up in the clouds, I finally arrived and was warmly greeted by the Projects Abroad staff. Although I was physically exhausted, my enthusiasm and excitement did not drop one bit as we were driven through the cramped streets of Kathmandu to get to Hotel Excelsior. I was surprised by how the Nepalese drivers could skillfully and calmly, maneuver their vehicles in such hectic traffic where there was also an absence of traffic lights, road lanes, and signs. In some instances, our van was barely inches apart from the vehicles on either side of us. The occasional sight of a buffalo, monkey or goat only added to the thrill of the ride. We spent our first night at Hotel Excelsior, getting to know all the other volunteers and we had a fun time eating dinner with our hands!

The next day, we drove six hours to Chitwan, where our medical placements awaited us.

Our first placement was at the Asha Bal Bikash Disabled Centre, which looks after children with disabilities during the day. While there, we played games, read English books, danced and joined in musical activities with them. The children were all very energetic and lively. It was such a joy to play with them. As some children had physical impairments, we helped perform their daily physiotherapy routine by following the staff member's directions. As well, I also assisted hanging the colourful pennants around the room for their Christmas celebration. At the end of the day, it was rewarding to see the children beam back at us and knowing that we made a difference.

We also visited the Community Hospital where we spent our morning and afternoon mainly observing consultations with Dr Shrestha, from who we have learnt heaps of medical knowledge. As well, we also witnessed an endoscopy, a circumcision and a transurethral resection of bladder tumour in the pathology lab. It was always interesting to compare the differences between healthcare in Nepal and Australia. An endoscopy that was scheduled at 7am did not take place until after 9am and this appeared to be normal to both the patient and doctor. Also, hygiene was not properly practiced in the operation theatre. What was even more startling was when the surgeon answered his phone midway through the operation. Nevertheless, we gradually adapted to the laidback and relaxed culture of Nepal and enjoyed every bit of it!

The other placements we visited included the Marie Stropes Family Planning Centre, the Bharatpur Eye Hospital, the Spinal Injury Unit, Chitwan Medical College Teaching Hospital (CMC) and the Bharatpur Cancer Hospital. Some further highlights include witnessing a gall bladder removal, plastic surgery and a nasal surgery at CMC. As my interests lie in oncology, I was very looking forward to visiting the cancer hospital. We observed several endoscopies and went to the histopathology laboratory. At the hospice and inpatient units, we were mostly guided by nurses who let us visit patients and view their patient notes, which showed their medical history.

One of the non-hospital placements included visiting a community school where we taught the young children how to brush their teeth. We showed them pictures of good and bad teeth and the causes of both. We also spoke to the children there and they all seemed to be very curious about me and my life in Australia. I also met students who are my age and seeing the differences in our education and

## Nepal Fact #10

In 1982, the first ever game of Elephant Polo was played in Chitwan National Park, in Nepal. Over 30 years later, the sport is played in numerous Asian countries and the World Championships are still played in Nepal!

conditions made me realize just how lucky I am in Australia. They were all very friendly as they helped me with my Nepali language. Just before we were about to depart, one of the supervisors gave me a folded piece of note from the Class 10 students, which carried the message in neat handwriting “We will miss u both of you”. I instantly ran back to the school grounds to wave final goodbye to the students, who were all upstairs also waving back to me. These will be the children that I will remember the most from Nepal. I was so touched deep down and knew immediately that I had to return to this beautiful country one day.

At the end of our first week, we stayed at Chitwan National Park for the weekend. We went on an elephant safari, where we had a fantastic ride through the jungle. In addition, we went to see a Tharu cultural dance performance and later, we

were all invited to join the dancers on stage. We followed along with the dance routine and it felt extremely fulfilling to be immersed in the Nepali culture. Elephant bathing was another highlight. At first, I was a little terrified by the majestic size of the elephant, but soon this fear turned into eagerness as I climbed onto its back. We were splashed with river water and later as the elephant lowered itself; we slid off and fell straight into the river. It was definitely a memorable experience!

Throughout our two weeks, we also had yoga classes, meditation classes and heaps of shopping opportunities. Shopping in the streets of Nepal definitely put both my haggling and Nepali language skills to the test.

By the end of the trip, my passion for medicine had solidified. I have made lasting friendships with likeminded people from all around the world. Additionally, I have fallen in love with the Nepalese culture – the adventure on the streets, the laidback mood, and the spicy yet ‘*mito-cha*’ dishes and the friendliness and hospitality of the people – these are the things that I will never forget and are also the reasons that I know for sure I’ll be returning to Nepal one day.

To future volunteers out there, I cannot recommend this project strongly enough. At first, the sound of volunteering in a developing country might overwhelm you, but don’t be afraid to take on this challenge because it will be a most incredible experience! When you are in Nepal, try to embrace the culture as much as you can and don’t be shy to talk to the doctors or nurses because they are all very friendly and kind.

Finally, I’d like to say a massive ‘*dhanyabaad*’ to Nepal and the supervisors who were always there for us, 24 hours during our trip!





## Mural Painting at Chitwan Medical Teaching Hospital!



Medical volunteers in Bharatpur summoned their best artistic talents for a great cause. During Clean & Green Week at Chitwan Medical Teaching Hospital, staff members and volunteers alike combined their efforts to keep the hospital sanitary and beautiful.

With the help of a local artist, volunteers spent three days designing a set of murals for the outside wall of the hospital, and even painted what you see above! While Chitwan Medical Teaching Hospital serves hundreds of patients daily, cleanliness can sometimes be lacking. Hopefully, with efforts like this progress can only be made.

**Thanks to all our volunteers who contributed!**

# Places We Love: Tansen, Palpa

Rebecca Goodall – Australia  
Chitwan Medical Teaching Hospital

The premise is simple: write about your experience at a Nepali location that you love, that stood out to you, that you'll travel back to while daydreaming at your school desk or office cubicle. The place can be your favorite cafe, your host family's home, or even a dusty road in the middle of Nepali nowhere.

The idea is to be able to see how your experiences in a place compared to someone else's, and to gain insight into the #PlacesWeLove you may have not yet explored. I hope many of you decide to share, and they can be emailed to me at [iansandler@projects-abroad.org](mailto:iansandler@projects-abroad.org).

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The journey to Tansen, Palpa, from Baraapur was guaranteed to be an interesting one seeing as the only available mode of transportation was via local bus. Sure enough, after reaching our local bus station and locating a bus heading to our first stop, we were physically barred from getting on by a man who insisted we travel with him instead. After 10 minutes of confusion and determination, we ended up on this man's bus anyway and were on our way! By the time we left the station we were surprised at how comfortable and spacious the local bus was and were wondering why Projects Abroad always strongly recommended we take a tourist bus. The answer arrived within half an hour by which time we accumulated an extra 30 or so people, doubling the number of passengers initially on the bus. By this time I felt I could strongly relate to a canned sardine. I had an elbow in my ribs, a bag between my legs and a baby on my lap and this was only the first bus of three! Like I said, an interesting journey, but

don't let that put you off!

When we arrived in Tansen, we were taken by its gorgeous cobblestone streets and thin snaking lane ways (although this did present a challenge when it came to navigating our home-stay). We zigzagged across the streets asking after certain landmarks and after a six hour journey were unimpressed with the steep incline of the way. Just when I was about to give up and hail a taxi, I heard my name being called and spotted a little old lady waving at me from the rooftop of a 3 Storey blue house. Thank God! Our accommodation was called horizon home-stay (HIGHLY recommended) and we were taken to the rooftop and offered dal bhat for dinner, which we gratefully accepted. We sat on the roof taking in the amazing views and sipping on the yummiest masala tea we had ever had. Tansen is built into the mountains and our home-stay looks down onto the rooftops and winding streets of the village with a big looming mountain landscape in the background - it makes all the houses look so tiny! You can even spot the Himalayan peaks if you take a short walk up the mountain. We were shown the way by a volunteer from the UK who'd been staying with the family for five months. Because the peaks are so large, the sun didn't actually rise till 7am (sleep in!) but from 6.30, we watched the peaks turn a pinkish hue from the reflected light before they reverted back to white.

## Nepal Fact #11

Nepal has over 5980 species of flowering plants, which covers 2.4% of the world's total.

There's not actually a whole lot to 'do' in Tansen to be honest, but it's a beautiful place to explore and although it seems like a strange thing to mention, the air is so fresh after coming from Kathmandu or Baraapur - it's worth taking a walk up the mountain which is less trying than walking the steep streets anyway! Tansen is also known for producing a particular type of woven fabric and brass wares - you can visit these production sites in Tansen or buy the finished product (NB: shops are closed Saturdays so you might have to plan around that).

## *Projects Abroad Nepal Photography Competition*

Congratulations Joan Rae Teves! Joan, 22, from New South Wales, Australia, volunteered at Clark Memorial School in Bungmati as part of her Care Project. As a care volunteer, Joan assisted in teaching English to Nepali children at the school, and offered new and creative ways to instruct different from the rote memorization traditional to Nepali education



Joan had a few words about her winning photo:

"This shot was taken of a student during my Care placement at Clark Memorial Himalayan Primary School. I found it interesting that it was regarded as normal for young children to come to school wearing makeup, especially thick layers of eyeliner!"

Congratulations again to Joan, and look for her shot in our special section of the monthly Nepal newsletter! Next month's submissions will be accepted until March 7th, so start shooting. And remember, the more creative, the better! Good luck!



# Life at Orthoplast Rehabilitation Hospital

*Allan Rasmussen – Australia  
Chitwan Medical Teaching Hospital*

I came to Nepal, knowing I was going to work at the physiotherapy clinic Orthoplast, but I had no experience with physiotherapy treatment. This made me terrified of walking into the clinic the first time. Luckily, the staff turned out to be the nicest people on earth, and I worked with another volunteer for the first three weeks. He was a physiotherapist student, and he eased my way into the whole thing.

For the first few weeks, I mainly observed him carry out the treatments, while he explained what he did, why he did it, and what muscles we were targeting. I had taken a few courses in anatomy and physiology



back home, which made the muscle terminology easy to understand. The third week we turned it around, so I would carry out the treatment, he would observe, and correct me if I did something wrong.

We primarily worked with CP (Cerebral Palsy) patients, people who had been involved in traffic accidents or people who had suffered from a stroke. What really interested me was that we would use the same exercises to treat all three types of injuries. Although it did depend on a lot of factors for how we would do the exercise. A CP patient would need passive exercises, as they were not able to do them on their own, and probably never would be able to. A person, who suffered from paralysis because they had had a stroke, would need passive exercises to begin with as well, but it was used to build the connections between the limbs and the brain.

Once they had been rebuilt, we would work on lost motor skills, joint movement, and range of motion. Lastly we would work on muscle strength.

For a person who had been involved in a traffic accident, it could either be a joint or muscle problem, depending on how long it had taken to heal correctly, so you had to gradually increase the level of difficulty in the exercise to deal with the patient correctly. We primarily worked with range of motion in these cases, as a lot of the patients had developed stiffness in the joints.

I have been working at Orthoplast for almost four weeks now, and I am working independently with patients, who I have been seeing in the clinic every day. My experience has been that the patients show a lot of trust in us, as long as they can see we are trying our best, we want the best for them, and we show interest in being there.

So far it has been an absolutely amazing experience working with the staff, volunteers, and patients at Orthoplast, and I recommend it to anyone who wants to either do physiotherapy, or are already a qualified physiotherapist. They let you get a lot of hands on experience if you want it, and are more than happy to answer all the questions you might have. As well, they love it when you show interest in a patient. The staff is always happy to show you which exercises the patient has been doing since they started, and are very open to suggestions in regards to new exercises that might improve not only the recovery speed of the patient, but also the future quality of the clinic.