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PORSCHIST



S O U L , E L E C T R I F I E D .

THE NEW TAYCAN

PORSCHE TAYCAN
PORSCHE IN NEPAL
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Namasté, NEPAL

According to insiders, NEPAL is an acronym for 'Never Ending Peace And Love'. That sounds pretty ethereal, but there is some truth in it. Nepal is a gentle country where 'haste' does not yet exist and the utopia of world peace is still nobly pursued by the worship of countless gods and the hanging of peace flags. The small border strip between India and China, situated at high altitude in the Himalayas, may be economically poor, but it is rich in traditions, cultural heritage and an impressive natural beauty.



It is very busy in the arrivals hall of the international airport of Kathmandu. Ten long rows of people are queuing up in front of four counters. All of them want the same thing: a visa for a stay in Nepal. After two hours of queuing, it's finally our turn. The officer scrutinizes us from above his heavy moustache and then places the required stamp in our travel passport with a firm thud.

The scene at the airport is just a small indication of what is awaiting us on the street. Kathmandu completely overwhelms us: an explosion of scents and colours, a constant stream of people, a cacophony of sounds. Noisy motor rickshaws, honking taxis and rickety school buses seem to be driving in all directions. How a person can negotiate this tangle of traffic is a mystery to us. Everywhere we see jumbles of electric wires, shops of all kinds where the dust lies in a thick layer on the displayed goods and houses that would be declared uninhabitable according to Western standards. But despite the prevailing chaos, nobody seems to worry about anything and everyone is just doing their thing. Kathmandu, the largest metropolis in Nepal, blessed with a population of two million people, is not just a city, but a phenomenon.

DWARIKA'S HOTEL: A TRIBUTE TO AGE-OLD CRAFTSMANSHIP

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Immediately after our long outward journey, the many impressions that overwhelm us are just a bit too much of a good thing. We are therefore relieved when the heavy wooden gate of **Dwarika's Hotel** closes behind us and the bustle of the city makes way for an oasis of peace. A girl with beautiful almond eyes places a vermilion red *bindi* on our foreheads – a symbol of the spiritual third eye that will protect us from potential dangers. According to Nepalese customs, a guest is a relative of God and should be treated with respect and courtesy. We are made to feel very welcome.

In the same way that Kathmandu is not just a city, Dwarika's is not just a hotel. It is a place with a long history, a story of perseverance and a love of historical cultural heritage. Because the founder, Dwarika Das Shrestha, was a man with a mission. In 1952 he saw, by chance, how some carpenters wanted to use a finely carved antique pillar as firewood. Indignant, he took the beautiful pillar away. What started as an impulsive act, grew into a true passion with the determination to preserve the rich Nepalese heritage. Over the years, Dwarika Das Shrestha gathered together an enormous collection of carved wood art, terracotta and bronze from the Newar era. He saved much of it from old houses that were destined for demolition. To provide a suitable location for his special treasures, he built a hotel in 1977. A large part of his art collection now forms part of the many areas and rooms of the complex. Half a dozen original Newar-style buildings surround different courtyards. Everywhere there are cosy corners from where you can admire the beautiful architecture. It is not surprising that, a few years ago, Unesco honoured Dwarika's Hotel with an award for preserving the Nepalese heritage.





Dwarika Das Shrestha died in 1992, but the Shrestha family continues his life's work. What is added or repaired today still happens in the style of yesteryear. In the carpenter's studio next to the hotel, craftsmen traditionally reuse old window frames and beams and copy the complex motifs. What is thrown away by other Nepalese people is recuperated by them. "Because old wood is better," they say. "It is stronger and is much nicer to work with." Today, the hotel has 83 unique rooms, all equipped with handmade furniture and age-old decorative pieces, rooms that effortlessly stand the comparison with the royal suites of the 14th-century Malla kings.

THE KATHMANDU VALLEY: NEPAL'S TREASURY

The Newar were the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu valley and surrounding areas. Their civilisation flourished during the rule of the Malla kings who ruled Nepal from the 12th to the 18th century. The Newar were artistically highly skilled artisans who passed down their many skills and talents from one generation to the next. They built richly decorated pagodas, temples with complex carvings and religious statues with refined carv-

ings. They were equally skilful in working with wood, stone and bronze. The rich historical heritage for which Kathmandu is now so famous, the region owes to the inexhaustible creativity of the Newar. And partly also to the competition between three brothers.

Because although Kathmandu now seems to be one big metropolis due to the enormous expansion of the city, in fact it isn't. During his reign, one of the Malla kings divided the Kathmandu Valley among his three sons. This led to the creation of the three so-called royal cities: **Patan, Bakthapur and Kathmandu**. When you explore the city you will still find these names. The spatial planning of the three cities is very similar: a central square - Durbar Square - with many pagodas and temples around it. All three brother of course wanted to have the most beautiful principality and had monuments erected that always surpassed each other in beauty and creativity. These displays of power and self-glorification resulted in sublime architecture. They have already led to less beautiful things in world history... A walk through the endless labyrinth of picturesque streets and alleys, past squares, palaces and temples, is a journey through time. Although the traces of the devastating earthquake of 2015 can still clearly be seen everywhere.



COUNTING MONKEYS

One of the most beautiful Buddhist temples in Kathmandu is the much visited **Swayambhunath**, also known as the Monkey Temple due to the presence of the many Rhesus monkeys. The enormous stupa can already be seen from afar. The yellow cone with the penetrating eyes of Lord Buddha is richly decorated with prayer flags and is surrounded by several *chortens* (smaller stupas). While we enjoy the spectacular view of the Kathmandu valley, souvenir sellers try to sell their wares: *khukuris* (traditional Nepalese knives), *thankas* (painted religious cloths), bags, jewellery and even tiger balm.



**Kathmandu is not just a city,
but a phenomenon.**



A MULTITUDE OF GODS

The gods play an important role in the life of the Nepalese. The main religion is Hinduism (80% of the population), but the country also has Buddhists (10%), some Muslims and a handful of Christians. Hindus and Buddhists live together peacefully side by side. Nepal is one of the few countries in the world that has never known a religious war. Nepalese are a traditional people and religion is really present everywhere. If it is not a statue of Shiva covered in red powder on the corner of a street, then it is a small altar at the back of a shop. The heavy scent of incense is everywhere.

So many gods, so many celebrations. No country in the world has as many celebrations and festivals as Nepal. There is always a reason to celebrate. Today, a group of musicians also parades through the narrow streets. They are nicely dressed in black and red and play traditional instruments: flutes, drums and cymbals.

WHAT ABOUT THE HIPPIES?

Kathmandu? Wasn't that also 'the place to be' for the hippies in their desire for adventure, endless love and inner development? In the sixties and seventies, the Nepalese capital was a favourite destination for many young people from all over the world who resisted anything that smelled of capitalism and materialism. In Kathmandu they found mysticism, spirituality and freely available cannabis. When the flower power movement died out in the late 1970s, the hippies also stayed away. Although even today, a few diehards and nostalgic souls still roam the streets of Kathmandu. They walk around in long, colourful robes and on worn slippers, with long beards, dreadlocks and flowers in their hair. In the tourist district of **Thamel**, where there are plenty of cheap hotels, shops and stalls, a striking quantity of harem pants and bandanas is still for sale.



The gods play an important role in the life of the Nepalese.

CREMATIONS: A TRIBUTE TO
THE PRIMORDIAL ENERGY

In the famous temple of **Pashupatinath**, the impermanence of life is central. The Hindus cremate their dead here, after which the ashes are entrusted to the Bagmati river. Because the Bagmati flows into the Ganges, a cremation in Pashupatinath is equally valuable to a Hindu as a cremation in Varanasi (India).

The temple is not accessible to non-Hindus, but we can follow the ritual cremations from the steps on the other side of the river. The atmosphere is surprisingly serene. Of course there is mourning, but Hindus believe in the duality of body and soul and the cycle of rebirths. The ultimate goal is the reunification with Brahm – the primal energy or primal force – and that can happen most quickly when the soul is released freely.

On the steps of the temple, the family says goodbye to the deceased, after which the body is placed on one of the *ghats* – large square trays on the lower steps of the temple. The eldest son lights the fire. Family and friends silently stare into the flames. Someone lays some wet straw on the stake to dampen the smoke. After just 2.5 hours it is over and the charred remains disappear in the river.

The latter provides another spectacle. On the right are the *ghats* for the poor, on the left, at the foot of the Golden Temple, the *ghats* for the rich. Here, men, their backs curved, are digging around in the water. The deceased are supplied with as much jewellery as possible on their last trip. The men try to fish a milligram of gold or silver from the river. Well, one men's loss ...

In the famous temple
of Pashupatinath,
the impermanence
of life is central.





STRANGE MEN, HOLY MEN

We look at them with a kind of discomfort combined with curiosity. Men in bizarre pink-red and saffron-coloured cloths with strangely painted faces and long unkempt hair. They clearly live on the fringes of society. We often see them near Hindu shrines. They are **sadhus**, loyal followers of Shiva. Some wear chains of pips, heavy copper rings and hold Shiva's trident in their hand. Others cover themselves with ashes from the sacred fire. Their way of life is hard for us, as western souls, to understand. They have renounced everything that is earthly and lead a complete ascetic existence. They have no property, no house and no family and deny themselves all longings and desires. Sadhus (the word *sadhu* literally means "good person") are fully committed to spiritual deliverance through meditation. They have virtually the status of saints within the Hindu community.

GONE WITH THE EARTHQUAKE

25 April 2015. An earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8 on the Richter scale affects large parts of Nepal. The shock can be felt up to the top of Mount Everest where an avalanche completely destroys the base camp. The epicentre of the earthquake is in Baktak, 80 km from Kathmandu. Houses and temples collapse like card houses. 9,000 dead, 22,000 injured and 2 million homeless: that is the sad balance of this black day.

Nepal is too poor a country to be able to recover from such destruction on its own. Large neighbouring countries, India and China, promise financial assistance. One would think that this is good news, but it turns out differently. The two superpowers are at odds with each other and refuse to collaborate. All or nothing, they tell Nepal. Which leads the country to a terrible stalemate, because small, poor Nepal cannot afford to offend either of these two neighbours. Fortunately, help from the rest of the world is coming in well. The international community collected 4 billion dollars. But here too things go wrong. Disagreement between the political parties within Nepal about the control of that money blocks the distribution of resources. A year after the earthquake, a million people are still living on the streets.

Meanwhile, now four years later, the recovery is slowly becoming noticeable, although the country still has a long way to go. The fact that Nepal is slowly recovering at all is mainly due to the mental resilience of the Nepalese people themselves, their many efforts and their intransigence.



THE EYE OF THE TIGER

Nepal has a lot of national parks. One of the largest parks, and also the most remote, is the **Bardia National Park**. This nature reserve in southwestern Nepal is unspoilt and has only been discovered by a few tourists. The park covers 968 square kilometres of jungle, grassland and savannah. It contains more than 400 different species of birds and many species of mammals. However, what really makes the park special is the large population of rhinos and Bengal tigers that live there. Two species that are threatened with extinction. We have especially set our sights on that tiger.

We stay in the **Tiger Tops Karnali Lodge** - a fantastic location in the middle of the jungle – at the same time as some Dutch scientists. They are there to study the behaviour of the tigers. "We wish you luck," they say. "We have been coming here for many years and know from experience that sightings of tigers are extremely rare." For two days we tour the park by jeep. We enjoy the beautiful landscapes and spot many animals: monkeys, deer, crocodiles, colourful birds and even a rhino. All great experiences, but there is no sign of the tiger anywhere. Will we not succeed after all?

There is only some twenty metres
between us and the Bengal tiger.

On our last day, Kumal, our ranger, wakes us early in the morning. He has discovered fresh tiger tracks. However, the place where he has seen them can only be reached on foot. We are unsure. Should we do that? On foot through the jungle? Our brain says no, but our eagerness decides yes. So, with clammy hands, we follow our guide through the tall bushes, a guide only armed with a sturdy stick. That is not very reassuring. After a long struggle through the jungle, we end up at the edge of a river. "Let's wait here for a moment," says Kumal. We squat and peer to the left and right, our hearts pounding. We feel extremely vulnerable, living prey in a world that is not ours. Half an hour later, we hear rustling on the other side. A tiger's head suddenly pops out of the tall grass. The animal strolls calmly down to the river to drink. What a colossal animal, is the first thing that comes into our minds. And the second: can a tiger swim? Because there is only some twenty metres between us and the super cat. We admire the gigantic muscle mass, the beautiful orange-brown fur with black stripes and white spots and the flexibility with which the animal moves. A Bengal tiger is the second largest tiger species. A shoulder height of one metre and a head-body length of up to three metres. That's bigger than a lion! Other tigers appear. Clearly younger ones. We watch breathlessly. They disappear again after 10 minutes. Still stiff from the adrenaline and not yet completely aware of what we have just seen, we start the return journey. Another name for the Bengal tiger is king tiger. We fully understand why that is so..



THE BIRTHPLACE OF A GOD

Now that we've been so lucky, it might not be a bad idea to give a word of thanks to God. Or Buddha. **Lumbini** is located in southern Nepal on the border with India. According to history, Siddhartha Gautama Buddha - the founder of Buddhism - was born here in 623 BC. A marker in the **Maya Devi temple** indicates the exact birthplace. Slightly further on is the Bodhi tree under which Buddha achieved "enlightenment" or "nirvana" - the state of overall and absolute peace. It goes without saying that Lumbini is a place of pilgrimage and one of the most important places for all Buddhists in the world. Although the place is crowded, the atmosphere is wonderfully quiet and devout. The pilgrims mainly come to meditate and apart from their murmuring, it is surprisingly quiet.

Around the sanctuary is a huge area where many countries have built a Buddhist temple or monastery. A kind of Minimundus, but not with scale models, but buildings of actual size. We rent a bicycle. That is the easiest way to explore the large area. We ride on narrow paths along beautifully landscaped gardens and clear lakes. All the monuments have a different architectural style. A Chinese temple stands brotherly side by side with a Tibetan one. The Burmese temple is a smaller version of the Schwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon. The Vietnamese house of prayer is too kitsch for our liking, but we find the Japanese Peace Pagoda very beautiful because of its simplicity. The entire region is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We spend the night at the **Tiger Palace Resort**. The name is a bit strange, because the resort has nothing to do with tigers, but it is surprisingly beautiful and modern. In addition, here we come across the *face of Nepal*. In one of the corridors, a girl in a traditional outfit arranges her ankle strap before she starts her performance. She looks up and gazes straight into the camera. Click! It produces a nice photo.

In Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautama Boeddha, many countries have built a Buddhist temple.







ANNAPURNA: SANSKRIT FOR 'THE GODDESS OF ABUNDANCE'

The Himalayas beckon. Of the ten highest mountains in the world, no fewer than eight are in Nepal, including the highest, Mount Everest (8,848 m). Annapurna (8,091 m), 'only' number ten on the list, is situated in the middle of Nepal, but is a mountain with a dark reputation. Always thought the K2 was the most dangerous mountain? Wrong. It is this giant mountain with its extremely treacherous southern wall of ice and stone. No other mountain has produced a higher average number of fatalities. No less than one in three climbers perishes during the climb.

From Pokhara, you can take a helicopter flight to the Annapurna base camp. This is an opportunity we don't want to miss. The flight is not cheap, but worth every euro. Slaloming between the valleys and gorges, the aircraft climbs upwards. First we fly over green forests and rhododendron forests, after that the landscape gets more and more sparse until we reach the snow line and only glaciers surround us. At the base camp, there is a small plateau on which the chopper can land. The aircraft simultaneously picks up other passengers for the return journey. The engine is not stopped. That is too risky at this height.

Of the ten highest mountains in the world, there are no fewer than eight in Nepal, including the highest, Mount Everest (8,848 m).

And there you stand, at an altitude of 4,130 metres, completely surrounded by impressive snow-capped mountain peaks. We look around in silence. It is quiet and grand there. At that moment we suddenly feel what every mountain climber experiences: the urge to go higher, to conquer that inaccessible summit. Because the Annapurna challenges, seduces, enchants. From here, the top doesn't even seem that far anymore. Although here even more than elsewhere, it would seem that appearances are deceptive. We do understand now why for some people, mountains are not dangerous places that you have to avoid, but challenges that you have to overcome.



POKHARA: IDYLICALLY BEAUTIFUL

Pokhara, a small mountain town beautifully situated in the middle of the Annapurna massif, is a very nice destination. It is a perfect base for sports enthusiasts who enjoy long hikes, rock climbing, bungee jumping or mountain biking. Paragliders can also find everything their hearts desire here. From our hotel room in **The Pavilions Himalayas** we see the many brightly coloured arches floating through the steel blue sky. Today we opt for a walk to the white **Peace Pagoda**. A steep climb of an hour and a half, but the phenomenal view at the top, over Pokhara city and Lake Phewa, is a fantastic reward. At the end of the day we settle on the shore of the lake where countless colourful wooden boats float, waiting for enthusiasts who'd like a rowing trip on the calm water.

A LAST BREATH OF MOUNTAIN AIR

Before we return to the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu, we want to enjoy the peace and quiet in the countryside a little longer. Nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, overlooking the fertile Nuwakot Valley, **The Famous Farm** is the ideal place for a final zen experience. A small-scale hotel housed in a 100-year-old Newar country house. The Famous Farm is a place where rustic charm and authenticity go hand in hand. Crops are grown on the surrounding green terraces that end up on our plates in the evening. A place far away from everything, a hidden gem, ideal for finding seclusion, slowing down and finding peace.



WHY NEPAL?

There are countless reasons why Nepal is a must for every traveller. The fantastic natural beauty of both the plains and the Himalayas, the many historical sites, the mix of cultures, the spiritual energy, the gentleness of the population ... the list is long. In addition, today more than ever, the Nepalese need tourists to be able to repair the damage caused by the 2015 earthquake. So: what are you waiting for?



GENERAL INFO NEPAL

- Area:** 147.181 km²
Population: 29.384.297 inhabitants
Capital: Kathmandu
Government: Federale parlimentary republic
Official language: Nepali
Travel documents: international passport and visum required
- With special thanks to:**
- Mr. Niraj Shrestha (Director at Rural Heritage Journeys & Snow Cat Travel) (www.rural-heritage.com) (www.snowcattravel.com)
 - The Dwarika's Hotel, Kathmandu, Mr. Rene Vijay Shrestha Einhaus (Director of Business Development & Finance) (www.dwarikas.com)
 - Tiger Tops Karnali Lodge, Bardia National Park (www.tigertops.com)
 - Tiger Palace Resort, Lumbini, Mr. Brett Model (CEO) (www.tigerpalace.com)
 - The Pavilions Himalayas, Pokhara (www.pavilionshotels.com)
 - The Famous Farm, Nuwakot (www.thefamousfarm.com)
 - Jurassic Resort & Villas, Pokhara (www.jurassicresort.com)

Shakti Kumar Begani: successful in everything he does.



Our Nepalese Porsche man is a businessman through and through. A stylish man too, as he comes towards us with quick steps in black trousers, cream-colored blazer with pocket square and shiny Italian shoes. He immediately knows the perfect place for the photo shoot: at the famous Nyatapola temple on Taumadhi square. During lunch an hour later, we ask the charming Nepalese a few questions.

In a nutshell, who is Shakti Kumar Begani?

My first name is Shakti, which means strength and my last name is Begani. Kumar is an insert. I am married and have two children: a son and a daughter. My son is studying in Los Angeles. My daughter is still in high school. I come from a family of entrepreneurs and I am a businessman myself.

You are a very active man: Managing Director of the Begani Group and Chairman of Shree Ganapati Jewellers.

The Begani Group was established in 1980. The organisation is active in a number of sectors. I am mainly concerned with the carpet industry. We supply handmade carpets of the very best quality. There are three types of quality in Nepal. The quality is expressed in knots: 60, 80 or 100 knots with 100 knots being the top quality. We only focus on the latter category. My company is specialised in modern designs, not so much in traditional motifs. That is why I export a lot to Europe and the US. For the last six years, I have also been active in the jewellery industry. Until now mainly focused on the local market, but I am working on developing export projects. Through my activities in the carpet industry I have global contacts. My wife is responsible for the diamond design department.

Why Porsche?

For the export of our carpets, I used to travel a lot to Europe, often staying in Germany for a long time. And of course you can't miss seeing Porsche there. I was particularly fascinated by the sports models, but unfortunately the roads in Nepal are not suitable. A sports car was therefore not an option for me. But an SUV was. A Porsche is not only a luxury brand, it is a lifestyle brand.



Do you have any idea how many Porsches are driving around in Nepal?
Yes, there are only two. I have one and my younger brother does too.

Where did you buy the Cayenne?
I imported it directly from Germany. To choose the colour, I travelled to New Delhi. There is not a single Porsche dealer in Nepal. However, there were only two colours in the showroom in New Delhi: white and grey beige. I had, however, set my sights on olive green. I knew that colour existed. In New Delhi they told me that there was only one Porsche driver in the whole of India who owned the Cayenne in that colour. He lived a long way away, in southern India. So I booked a flight and visited the owner at his home.

Did you travel there solely for the colour?
Yes. I wanted to be sure. The colour was exactly what I expected and I immediately ordered my Cayenne in exactly the same shade. And I'm still happy about that every day. Sometimes the car looks black, but it isn't. It is dark olive green. In the right light, the car gets a beautiful glow.



Where can you go for the maintenance of your Porsche?
Nowhere in Nepal. I have to take refuge in India. For minor maintenance, I have a technician come over from India. For major maintenance, the car goes to New Delhi in a container.

The condition of the Nepalese roads leaves something to be desired. Does that also cause problems for your Porsche?
No. A Cayenne is an excellent car in both city traffic and off-road.

We see that you have a driver. Do you never drive yourself?
I do. I let my driver drive in the busy city centre. The traffic is often congested, and that way you lose way too much time. For that reason I use a driver so that I can do other things in the meantime. But when I travel outside the city, I always get behind the wheel myself.

What do you like most about your Cayenne?
It is a combination of a lot of factors. The Cayenne is a robust, yet elegant car with a fantastic interior that is meticulously designed. You can see that. I love the design and the line of the car very much. In addition, there is a lot of horsepower under the hood, which is great for longer journeys.

And petrol?
Petrol is a very big problem. In Nepal, you can only get petrol with a maximum octane content of 70, but for a Cayenne you need at least 95 to 97. To get around that, I use additives.

We can still see the consequences of the 2015 earthquake. How did you experience it?
It was horrible. My family and I didn't dare to stay in our house for twenty days. We slept in the car or in an open place for fear of new earthquakes. All the people in Kathmandu did that, by the way. The earthquake occurred on a Saturday which was a small measure of luck because the schools and most businesses are closed on Saturdays. In addition to all human misery, it was also a very difficult economic period: the banks were closed, the companies were not operational, the airport was out of action ... After four years we are still busy rebuilding the country, but we'll get there. Little by little.

When you go on holiday, where do you go?
In Nepal itself I always go to Pokhara. That's a place I never get tired of. There are so many activities possible. You can take long walks, paraglide, bungee jump and so on. Outside of Nepal, the Maldives are my favourite destination. I have been there twice already and am eager to go back again. The Maldives offer absolute tranquillity with beautiful lagoons and fantastic resorts. But I probably don't have to tell you that. (laughs)