

HIMALAYAN COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROJECT

The Exodus Travels Foundation is pleased to share the 12th edition of our Himalayan Community Support Project newsletter.

Find out more at:
www.exodus.co.uk/foundation

A WORD FROM VALERIE

After a couple of difficult years, tourism is steadily increasing again in Nepal and Ladakh, India. In the last year we have continued to support and empower our local staff and people in remote communities and helped to regenerate nature.

Since 2022, I have been back to Nepal and Ladakh several times, leading treks and co-ordinating the [Himalayan Community Support Project](#) initiatives, which mean so much to the people we help. These projects cannot exist without travellers who care, and we are always grateful for the support we receive.

Tourism is one of the largest industries on the planet, and we have a huge opportunity to create positive change in our destination communities. Most of our projects in the Himalaya are small scale and use the connections and long-standing relationships Exodus has built and maintained over the last 49 years. At the heart of everything we do is a focus on community empowerment and nature regeneration.

I hope you enjoy reading our good news stories.



LOOKING AFTER OUR PEOPLE, PLACES AND PLANET

Exodus puts nature and biodiversity gain through conservation and regeneration at the heart of our decision-making, trip design and work in our destination communities.

Our [People, Places and Planet plan](#) outlines how we seek to improve life for the people and places we visit and look after the

planet we explore. In your Trip Notes, you can read about how the trip improves life for local communities, helps to protect and conserve nature, and how Exodus is striving to reduce the carbon footprint of each trip.

VALERIE'S TIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

There are many ways to travel sustainably, below is a list of Valerie's tips and things to consider whilst on your adventure. Your Trip Notes include many more local suggestions.

LEAVE NO TRACE

- Carry your rubbish back with you (including used batteries) and dispose of it appropriately.
- Leave all packaging behind to be recycled in the UK such as the plastic and cardboard packs for batteries.

REDUCE SINGLE-USE PLASTIC

- Avoid single use plastics such as plastic water bottles. Carry your own water bottle and water purification system.
- Decant larger toiletries into small reusable bottles before you travel. You will not use a large tube of toothpaste or whole bottle of shower gel or shampoo in 13 days. One bar of biodegradable soap that you can use for hair and body is sufficient.

PACK LIGHTLY

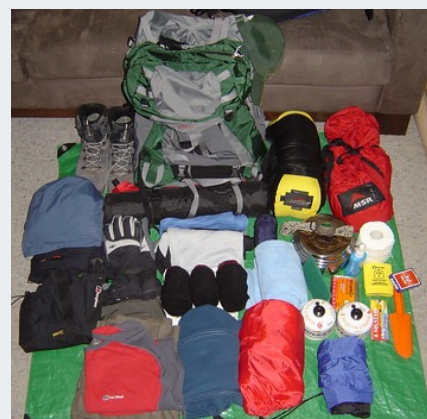
- When packing for a trek, please consider the quantities of the items you bring. On treks with porters, one porter will carry 2 kitbags plus a small bag of their own. Please respectfully limit your kitbag to 10kg per person. Three pairs of socks and underwear and three t-shirts are usually enough, along with one sunhat, one woolly hat, one buff, one thick and one thin pair of gloves. A lightweight quick drying trekking towel is sufficient.

- Make informed clothing choices such as purchasing clothes that are made of natural materials like merino wool.
- Limit the number of chargers and leads to just one which will work for all your electronics.
- Store your documents digitally where possible and leave any extra paperwork as left luggage in the hotel before the trek.

SUPPORT AND RESPECT THE LOCALS

- Buy locally made handicrafts – ask your leader (or look up online) where the women's sustainable handicrafts shops are in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Leh.
- Dress conservatively in India and Nepal. Don't wear tight leggings, very short shorts or vest tops. Read up before you go about respectful cultural behaviour in the country you are travelling in.

Read more tips [here](#) on how you can put nature first on your travels.





FREEDOM KIT BAGS

Remote villages in Nepal

Exodus has been working with Freedom Kit Bags since 2016 and we have donated over £72,000 (and over 3,500 Freedom kit bags) to improve the lives of women in Nepal.

Freedom Kit Bags are eco-friendly, sustainable, hygienic sanitary wear, essentially a 'kit' in a bag. They release women and girls from the cultural and physical constraints of menstruation and enhance their health. The bags give liberty of movement, allowing uninterrupted education.

When Nepalese women have their period, they are called 'chhaupadi', which translates to 'untouchable being'. Alongside this, Nepalese women must deal with the stigma that is still associated with menstruation. There are many problems that come from being without proper sanitary protection, for example women are more vulnerable to chronic vaginal infections that can lead to pelvic inflammation and infertility. Due to 'chhaupadi' women and girls also suffer from low self-esteem and lack of dignity. Poor sanitary management of menstruation holds women and girls back from opportunities and the ability to play a fuller role in their world. If you improve the life of a woman, you help the family, and therefore improve the life of the community.

A Freedom Kit Bag includes washable pads for daily and night-time use, pad-holders, panties, a pretty carrying purse, a waterproof bag for used pads, soap and its bag, a washing line and pegs, and a colourful holder. Everything is attractive to help empower the women. With care they can last up to 3 years. The kits are distributed together with classes for both men and women on period health management, sexual health and 'taking care of the kit'. Nirmala and Sumi are two inspirational Nepali women who are Freedom Kit Bag ambassadors in Nepal.

During the pandemic, we sponsored the training of a few Exodus leaders and local staff to carry out a Freedom Kit Bag distribution. Following the training course, they all did distributions in their home villages together with Nirmala and Sumi. Following the success of this, the leaders and

staff requested more distributions in their home districts. In 2022, the Exodus Travels Foundation sponsored the distribution of 200 more Freedom Kit Bags in remote villages, led by Subita Tamang, Tenzi Sherpa and Bikash Lama.

We are immensely proud of the ambassadors and the male leaders who have played a huge part in empowering the young women in these communities. Tenzi, one of our male leaders has done an incredible job of raising awareness and delivering the sessions. Having men at the forefront of the sexual health classes and distributions helps to break the stigma around menstruation and encourages other men to start talking about it and advocate for the wellbeing of their female peers.

In June 2023, Tenzi and Ajay (two of our Nepali leaders), took part in the largest Freedom Kit Bag distribution to date of 1000 bags. 500 of these bags were sponsored by the Exodus Travels Foundation. They were delivered to the two remote villages of Gumda and Larpak in the Gorkha district. The task was not easy and involved a 12-hour jeep drive from Kathmandu, followed by an 8 hour walk uphill with porters carrying the 20 loads of bags to the first village of Gumda. This was followed by another 4 hours of walking to Larpak. The whole operation took about 2.5 weeks to complete.

We have also sponsored the setting up of two Sewing Rooms, one in Kodari village and one in Kathmandu. This not only provides an additional source of income for the ladies but means they can produce their own Kit Bags in future. Since March 2021, the Kathmandu and Kodari Village Sewing Rooms have produced around 2,350 Kit Bags. Kodari village itself has suffered many problems since we set up the Sewing Room. Crops have been lost to locusts, bananas stolen by hordes of monkeys and flooding has forced people out of their homes. The community leader Kanchi had her kitchen and other rooms swept away and she suffered a broken leg- but still she is making around 10 Freedom Kit Bags a month on top of her farm work. This earns her much needed money to restore her home.

WOMEN'S ECO CAFÉS AND FELTED HANDICRAFTS

Ladakh, Northern India

In 2022 all three of the Women's Eco Cafés re-opened again after the pandemic. Hankar Café ran successfully in summer 2022 and was visited by many trekkers. The women in Kaya and Pensi were relatively new to running an Eco Café so Angela, an Exodus client, volunteered to go to Ladakh to provide some training. The Cafés are only open in July and August, the main trekking season in Ladakh, and sell organic south Indian coffee plus local drinks and food.

The women's groups also make felted handicrafts to sell. We fund the training in both flat and needle felting and supply the needles for needle felting. Needle felted animals, especially snow leopards, are a popular souvenir especially on the winter ['In Search of the Snow Leopard'](#) trip.

In summer 2022 Valerie and Khenrab Phutsog ran 2 training courses in flat and needle felting in Shang Sumdo and provided felting needles for the local women's group.



FRUIT TREE PLANTING

Ladakh, Northern India

Since 2019 the Exodus Foundation has been working with Sankalp Taru on Project Green Leh, Ladakh (Trees for Livelihood). The aim is to plant mostly fruit trees and increase green cover in the high-altitude desert of Ladakh. Planting trees sequesters carbon, helps regulate water flow and recharges the ground water. Trees help prevent landslides and the fruit can be sold as a sustainable source of income. In both 2022 and 2023 we funded the planting of 500 saplings. The saplings are taken to Ladakh in November and put in bunkers over the harsh winter. In April or May of the following year they are planted out. The trees are now being given to our Ladakhi trekking staff (guides and pony men) so they will eventually have an extra source of income.





SAGARMATHA NEXT

Everest region, Nepal

If you are trekking in the Everest region, the day you walk from Namche to the Everest View Hotel, we would recommend a stop at [Sagarmatha Next](#). A visit to the centre is now included as an optional activity on a select few of our [Nepal trips](#) in this region.

This new experience centre is for trekkers, climbers, mountain lovers and locals to learn about waste in the Himalaya. The SPCC (Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee) has partnered with Sagarmatha Next to find better waste management and to promote sustainable tourism in the Khumbu region.

There is a Museum and Sustainable Park, a Visitor and Learning Centre (where you can try a pair of virtual reality glasses that will take you to the summit of Everest in 3 minutes), a Waste Lab shop, a Café and the Denali Schmidt Art Gallery.

We encourage all our trekkers to participate in the 'Carry Me Back' initiative. Just below Namche at the check point you can pick up a 1kg bag of rubbish and carry it down to Lukla. Deposit the bag at the check point before you enter Lukla, and it will be taken to Kathmandu by Tara Air and recycled by BW2V.

SENIOR'S CARE HOME SUPPORT

Kyanjin Gompa and Chautara, Nepal

The care home in the upper part of the Langtang Valley is home to 6 elderly Nepalis who lost their family in the 2015 earthquake. The locals in Kyanjin Gompa make sure they are all OK. Through the Himalayan Community Support Project, we fund food, clothing, blankets, and other necessities. The Exodus Foundation has also funded a water filter for the Dorje Bakery in Kyanjin Gompa, a popular place for lunch for trekkers in the area. The bakery can now offer safe drinking water instead of importing water in plastic bottles. Chautara is a small town northeast of Kathmandu where there is a home for 12 senior people without families. There is a home for seniors which looks after 12 older people who have no family. One lady looks after them which is very hard work as they have complex needs – we will be supporting them this winter to buy food and other essential items.



HIGH ALTITUDE WORKERS WELFARE ASSOCIATION

Nepal

Set up by a group of climbing sherpas, this small NGO helps the children and families of Nepalis (climbing sherpas and other trekking

staff), who lost their lives climbing or trekking. We support five children with their education.

ANGELS' CHILDREN'S HOME

Patan, Nepal

Angel's children's home in Patan, Nepal, is home to 15 young adults. Dr. Rosa and Dr. Ian Matheson founded Friends of Angel's in 2009. Working with many friends and supporters in the UK (including Brian Mildenhall, a regular Exodus client and now a trustee of the Friends), they raise money to pay for the food, house rent and education of the children. We give £400 twice a year which buys clothes, shoes and schoolbooks. The children are all now teenagers and heading to college or into apprenticeships. One of the boys, Bijay, now has an apprenticeship as a chef in the Royal Singi Hotel.

Three of the girls are training to be nurses and one of them, Sarita, received a scholarship from the Exodus Travels Foundation. Sarita is studying nursing at the Nightingale Nursing College Lalitpur and is now in her second year. She is in the midst of her exams and has been doing practical training in a hospital in Kathmandu. She loves the course, after a nervous start in the hospital she is now really enjoying the practical work. We will be sponsoring Sarita through her third year of training.



THULOPATEL SPRAY PUMPS

Thulopatel, Nepal

In 2022 many areas of Nepal lost crops due to a disease that affected potatoes and corn. Thulopatel, a village of 1500 people, where many of our trekking staff live was affected badly by the loss of crops. The crops were supposed to bring an additional source of income alongside trekking, as many workers can't make enough money solely from tourism. We have funded 50 spray pumps which will be filled with organic repellent spray to protect the local people's potatoes. The 2023 spring potato harvest was very good with no disease and they have a good amount to eat and sell - they can plant again this monsoon and get a second batch in a year.



A BIG THANK YOU

To all Exodus customers and friends, who have donated so generously to the Himalayan Community Support Project, we are very grateful to everyone who supports us.

Thanks to our local partners who help coordinate much of our work on the ground. We especially want to thank the following:

KHENRAB PHUNTSOG

Who coordinates our felting training courses in Ladakh

CHOSPEL AND JIGMET

Who help with the tree planting in Ladakh

SUKMAN TAMANG

Who coordinates many of our Himalayan Community Support Projects and we are very proud that Sukman won the Exodus Leader of the Year Award for 2022

TENZI SHERPA

Trained as a Freedom Kit Bag trainer during the pandemic, and he has worked with Nirmala and Sumi on several distributions in the Manaslu area. Ajay (Jaite) Tamang has also been helping with Kit Bag distributions in 2023

AWARDS

Constantly pushing the boundaries when it comes to creating incredible adventures, run responsibly, we're proud that our inspirational leaders, impeccable customer service, innovative sustainability projects and itineraries are recognised by the British Travel Awards, National Geographic Traveller Which? and more.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Your kind contributions go such a long way in helping those remote communities in Nepal and Ladakh and we really appreciate your support. Here's a few ways you can donate:

1 Scan the QR code below to make a donation



2 You can send a donation by cheque to the below address, with a note referencing 'Himalayan Community Support Project':

Exodus Travels Foundation
Exodus Travels
DST House
St Mark's Hill
Surbiton
Surrey KT6 4BH

3 There is a donation box in the Royal Singi Hotel in Kathmandu by the main door – if you have any spare rupees at the end of your trip you can pop them in the box

If you have any queries about any of our projects, you can contact Valerie Parkinson at: valeriepark59@hotmail.com

Please note that Valerie is often out leading treks in the Himalaya and may not always be able to respond to your email enquiries immediately. Alternatively, you can email Charlotte Cheesman, Sustainability Executive at Exodus Travels, at charlotte.cheesman@exodus.co.uk



Find out more at:
www.exodus.co.uk/foundation

