

Himalayan COMMUNITY PROJECTS

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A WORD FROM *Valerie*

Welcome to the fourteenth edition of our newsletter with updates on The Exodus Adventure Travels Foundation's Himalayan Community Support Projects.

Our support for small communities in the Himalaya began over 30 years ago with a small tree planting project in Braga, a village in the high Annapurna region. Over the years, with generous donations from clients, we have been able to support many small and remote communities in both Nepal and Ladakh. Our emphasis was (and still is), on small scale help. Over the years, we have been able to accomplish so much. Our achievements range from rebuilding schools and homes after natural disasters to putting water pipe into remote villages, to providing smokeless stoves and solar water cookers. We have helped women's groups in both Ladakh and Nepal by giving them the confidence to study or work. None of these projects can happen without you, travellers who care, and we are always grateful for the help we receive.

I hope you will find inspiration in the good news stories and updates from 2025 that you will read in this newsletter.

From Valerie

THE EXODUS ADVENTURE TRAVELS FOUNDATION

The Exodus Adventure Travels Foundation was established in 2019 to build upon decades of Exodus Adventure Travels' contributions to destination communities. We believe in travel that supports nature and people to thrive in harmony, and are empowering our local partners and destination communities to protect and regenerate nature.

Our key areas of focus

Our Vision – we want to create a world where all travel and tourism supports nature and communities to thrive in harmony.

Our mission – to invest in innovative, sustainable, tourism – related projects which support our destination communities to protect and regenerate nature, and harness nature to empower communities.

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



FREEDOM KIT BAGS, NEPAL

Freedom Kit Bags are eco-friendly, sustainable, hygienic sanitary wear and 'kit' in a bag, that release women and girls from the cultural and physical constraints of menstruation and enhances their health.

Exodus have been working with Freedom Kit Bags since 2016, and since then we have donated over £85,235 which converts into 4,260 kit bags, to help women and girls in Nepal have a better life. In 2025 Exodus has donated - £6,900 – this will change the life of 345 women/girls and also means hundreds of men and women have been educated in health and reproduction.

When Nepalese women have their period, they are called 'chhaupadi', which translates to 'untouchable being'. Nepalese women must deal with the shame and stigma that is still associated with menstruation plus there are many problems that come from being without proper sanitary protection. Not only are women vulnerable to chronic vaginal infections that can lead to pelvic inflammation and infertility, which is a growing problem in Nepal, but because of 'chhaupadi' women and girls also suffer from low self-image and lack of dignity. Lack of 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.

There are many 'Freedom's' in a Freedom Kit Bag -

- **freedom** from chronic illness
- **freedom** from feeling 'dirty'
- **freedom** to leave the home with confidence because of your 'kit'
- **freedom** to stay in your home and sleep in your bed
- **freedom** to go to work - in the fields or earn a living
- **freedom** to have an 'uninterrupted' education
- **freedom** to travel - any distance
- **freedom** to be amongst your friends and community
- **freedom** of choice
- **freedom** to feel 'good' during your period

One special and beneficial 'preventative' programme that Exodus has supported Freedom Kit Bags with is one that aims at helping women who have just given birth. In their work Freedom Kit Bags found that when new mothers leave hospital they are often faced with unhygienic situations, in some areas they even go back to chaupadi, and often go back to using old cloths to contain their bleeding. This creates many health problems such as vaginal and wound infections and rashes. Giving new mothers a Freedom Kit Bag, along with the Education and 'Care of the Kit Instructions' before they leave the hospital has shown at their follow-up hospital appointments, that the number of infections dropped considerably, so that now around 80% return without any problems.



A Freedom Kit Bag includes washable pads for daily and night-time use, extra inserts for those 'heavy' days/nights, pad-holders, panties, a pretty carrying purse for replacement pads, a waterproof bag for used pads, soap and its bag, a washing line and pegs, and a colourful holder-bag to keep it all safely in. Everything is attractive to help empower the women. With care the kit can last up to 3 years. The women are also taught how to make replacement pads and pad-holders which will extend its use and life considerably longer.

Nirmala Shrestha is Freedom Kit Bags' long-time, inspirational Ambassador who is assisted by other local inspirational Nepali women and men to deliver the period health management and sexual and reproductive health education, and the 'care of the kit' training, at the distribution sessions. The kits are made by FKB trained women in sewing rooms across Nepal, further empowering Nepalese women by giving them paid employment. Exodus are proud to have supported the setting up of very first Sewing Room in Kodari village, Sindupalchowk. Amongst the first of those trained was Kanchi. With her earnings from making Kit Bags, Kanchi was able to send her son to school and higher education. It is a matter of much pride for Kanchi to feel part of giving back to a community that has helped her family.

On a visit to the boarding school where her son now teaches, she found a girl having her period and trying to get some sanitary wear. In theory the Government provides a free sanitary pad service, but it is never enough and is really poor quality. Also, these girls must go and ask for each pad from teachers or school nurse, who are not always available. Lack of education or the old traditions system also makes them shy to ask. In the end the girl went to the school 's canteen and a woman gave her a piece of cloth to use. Kanchi was upset to see the difficulty of the girl and after that she requested Freedom Kit Bags to distribute at the school. Nirmala and Kanchi, helped by her son, made a distribution of 96 Freedom Kit Bags to schoolgirls from classes 9 and 10 along with 64 to mothers and some staff. A total of 160 kit bags were given - 120 were sponsored by Exodus Foundation via a generous gift from one of our clients. The other 225 kit bags and training sessions we donated in 2025 went to the women and girls in the remote Chokadee village. Exodus will be continueing its support of this project and we also to help support the sewing rooms, where the Freedom Kit Bags are made.



ANGELS CHILDREN'S HOME, : SUPPORT AND TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENCE

Angels Children's Home was established in 2009, initially providing care and support for 23 children. Over the years, we have been actively involved in supporting the children by supplying clothing, schoolbooks, and financial assistance for their education. Our scholarship programme enabled one of the girls, Sarita, to attend nursing college, and we are proud that Sarita, together with Nima and Dawa, are now employed as nurses in hospitals in Kathmandu.

As time has passed, the children have matured into young adults who are now forging their own paths in life. With this positive development, the need for the children's home has come to an end. While a few of the young adults are still pursuing higher education at college, others have begun renting accommodation and working towards financial independence.

The transition to adulthood is especially challenging in Nepal for young people without family support, as they lack the security of a family home and do not have access to inherited land or jobs. Recognising these challenges, we have continued to provide assistance to these young adults as they move towards self-sufficiency. Some still require help with expenses such as furniture and medical bills, while those still in education benefit from support with their college fees.

Despite the obstacles they have faced, all the former residents have adapted admirably and are now well-grounded young adults. We extend our best wishes to them as they continue their journeys into adulthood.



SENIOR'S HOME, CHAUTARA NEPAL

Chautara is a small-town Northeast of Kathmandu, where there is a home for older people who have no family to support them. Seniors have traditionally been looked after by their family, but due to various reasons younger people move out of the village to towns or abroad, so the elderly are left alone in villages. Others are left abandoned as issues like memory loss and diabetes are not well recognised in Nepal, and families do not understand how to look after someone with complex needs. Chautara Senior's Home was started by local people in Nepalese year 2063 (our 2009) with just four people. Since then, 75 residents have received care and kindness. Currently there are 15 seniors residing there.

We have supported the home for several years now, initially providing finance for additional foods that they would not routinely have such as milk, eggs, chicken and fresh fruit, as well as large bags of rice. One initiative we are proud to have helped with is a small health programme, whereby we provide funds for purchasing the necessary medical equipment to conduct regular diabetes checks. Diabetes is a big problem in Nepal and many of the residents suffer from it to greater or smaller degree and it is not generally understood or well managed in Nepal. Money from the Exodus Foundation has set up a programme which allows the residents' blood sugar levels to be tested regularly, recorded and monitored.

Foot care has been taught to the girl who works at the home and we have provided foot bowls and body creams for a weekly care treatment. This is beneficial for all the residents but especially for those who have diabetes which badly affects circulation. It is crucial to keep extremities in good condition to prevent infections and sepsis.

In 2025 we have paid for the addition of a handrail around the building. Many of the residents have trouble with mobility and balance, which makes them reluctant and fearful to move far. This handrail has brought so many benefits for the residents, giving not just greater security, safety and confidence to walk, but also enabling them to have a 'daily walking routine' of some useful distance to promote better circulation, mobility and mental health.

LOBUJE PORTER SHELTER NEPAL

Porters are the backbone of Nepal and anyone trekking in Nepal will pass countless porters carrying loads for locals or trekkers. In some villages there are plenty of local teahouses for them to stay and eat, but in some places there are only lodges for foreign trekkers. Larger porter shelters have been built over the years, mostly in the Everest region. The one in Lobuje, which is at an altitude of 4930m, was small and in a bad state of repair. The Nimsdai Foundation has raised the money to build a new shelter for the porters, which is being built in 2025. We have donated £500 towards kitchen or first aid once the building is finished.

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 CO2 and 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 2019 we funded 4,000 saplings for Western Ladakh and now we fund 500 saplings every year. 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 (or alternative) source of income. The first crops of apples are now appearing providing income for the families who can sell them locally.



SAGARMATHA NEXT

If you are trekking in the Everest region the day you walk from Namche to the Everest View Hotel (day 3 of the trek), stop on the way up at Sagarmatha Next. www.sagarmathanext.com This experience centre is for trekkers, climbers, mountain lovers and locals to learn and experience with waste from the Himalaya. The SPCC (Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee) has partnered with Sagarmatha Next to find better solutions for waste 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 in 3 minutes will take you to the summit of Everest!), 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. This crowd sourced waste removal system is a way you can do your bit for waste management. Just below Namche at the check post you can pick up a 1 kg bag of rubbish and carry it down to Lukla. Deposit the bag at the check post before you enter Lukla, and it will be taken to Kathmandu and recycled by BW2V.

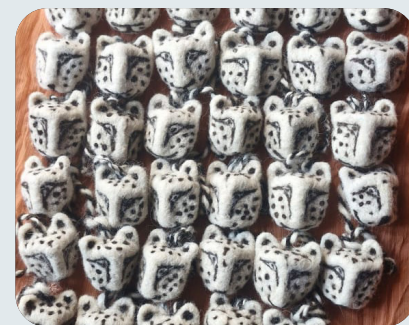
Find out more at:

www.exodus.co.uk/foundation

WOMEN'S ECO CAFES AND FELTED HANDICRAFTS, LADAKH, NORTHERN INDIA

Hankar is a small village located in the Markha Valley of Ladakh. About 10 years ago the local government constructed a building for the women's group, which was subsequently painted and decorated by the community using funding from Exodus. With additional support from Exodus, the Hankar Women's Eco Café was established to allow women to sell local beverages, food, and organic coffee from South India to trekkers during the summer season. Exodus provided training for the women and assisted in the creation of menus and information sheets. In 2025, the original building was demolished by the government to make way for new construction. Consequently, the café operated under a parachute tent for that year. It is anticipated that by 2026, the new facility will be completed, permitting the resumption of café operations in an improved setting.

Many of the Women's groups in Ladakh produce and sell felted handicrafts, supported by the Exodus Foundation through training in both flat and needle felting and the provision of necessary supplies. Needle felting remains popular in Ladakh; items such as needle-felted animals and key rings are especially marketable during the winter months, coinciding with snow leopard tourism. As felting needles are not available locally in India, the Exodus Foundation sources them in the UK and we donate them to the various women's groups.



MY TIPS FOR RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

The Exodus Foundation firmly believes that it is our responsibility as travellers to be as responsible as we can in all we do. There are many ways to travel sustainably. Here are just some of our suggestions. At the end of your Trip Notes there are many more local suggestions.

Minimalism - pack only what you need and avoid overpacking. This reduces the weight of your luggage, which in turn can reduce fuel consumption on flights and other forms of transportation.

Multi-purpose items - choose items that serve multiple purposes. For instance, a sarong can be used as a towel, blanket, or cover-up. Bring one charger that fits all your appliances.

Leave no trace - carry your rubbish back with you (including used batteries) and dispose of it appropriately. Leave any packaging back home.

Plastic waste reduction - try not to use single use plastics. Carry your own water bottle and water purification.

Search out locally made handicrafts - ask your leader (or look up online) where the women's sustainable handicrafts shops are in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Leh.

Cultural respect - dress modestly to be polite and avoid stares. Don't wear tight leggings, very short shorts or vest tops. Read up before you go about respectful cultural behaviour in the country



A FEW TIPS FOR TRAVELLING IN INDIA AND NEPAL ARE:

1. Sometimes local people may object to being photographed so please ask first.
2. It's polite to use only your right hand when eating something without cutlery and when handing money and small objects to someone else.
3. Dress modestly to be polite and avoid stares. Do not wear tight or sheer clothing and it is preferable to have shoulders covered and skirts or shorts below the knee.
4. When visiting a sacred site, sleeveless tops and shorts are not acceptable for women or men and you need to remove your shoes. You are permitted to wear socks in most places of worship. Take your hat off before entering temples.
5. Religious etiquette also includes not touching anyone on the head or directing the soles of your feet at a person, religious shrine or deity. You should also not touch a carving of a deity.
6. It is common practice to remove one's shoes before entering someone's home and you should tuck feet under if sitting on the floor.
7. Making the effort to fit in is invariably appreciated so being aware of these aspects of cultural respect will assist you during your travels in the Himalaya.

SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE PACKING

When packing for a trek, please consider the quantities/volume of the items you bring. On treks with porters, one porter will carry 2 kitbags plus a small bag of his own. We ask you to please to respectfully limit your kitbag to 10kg per person.

A few suggestions are:

Decant larger toiletries into small reusable bottles - you will not use a large tube of toothpaste or whole bottle of shower gel or shampoo on one trek. One bar of biodegradable soap that you can use for hair and body is sufficient.

A lightweight quick drying trekking towel is sufficient.

Leave all packaging behind to be recycled in the UK such as the plastic and cardboard packs for batteries.

Use clothes that are made of natural materials such as merino wool. Three pairs of socks/underwear/t-shirts are usually enough. One each of sunhat, woolly hat and buff. Gloves you need a pair of thin and thicker ones.

Try and limit the number of chargers and leads to just one which will work for all your electronics.

Leave any unnecessary paperwork in the bag you leave as left luggage in the hotel.

A BIG THANK YOU

To all Exodus clients and friends, who have donated so generously this year. We are very grateful to everyone who supports us.

LOCAL PARTNERS

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

IN NEPAL - 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 and in 2023 he entered the Exodus Hall of Fame.

TENZI SHERPA trained as a Freedom Kitbag trainer during the pandemic, and he has worked with Nirmala on several Freedom Kit Bag distributions in the Manaslu area.

IN LADAKH - Khenrab Phuntsog, who coordinates our felting training. Chospel and Jigmet who help with the tree planting in Ladakh.

WE ARE PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THAT IN 2025 WE WON THE FOLLOWING AWARDS:



it's more
extraordinary
with

exodus
ADVENTURE TRAVELS

EXODUS ADVENTURE TRAVELS
FOUNDATION