

Episode 49: Trekking in Nepal

Summary

Several years ago, Nick and Wendy did the Annapurna Circuit and Sanctuary trek in Nepal. In this conversation, they talk about their experience on the trek.

Transcript

Nick: Today, Wendy and I are talking about trekking in Nepal, which is one of the great trekking and mountain destinations in the world. But before we begin, I'd like to announce that we have a sponsor. How exciting!

Wendy: It is very exciting!

Nick: And our sponsor is italki, that's I-T-A-L-K-I. italki is an online platform where you can arrange language lessons with qualified teachers or just conversations with native speakers. It's a convenient, affordable¹ and effective way to reach fluency in a language. And there's a special offer for listeners of our podcast. So you can get 10 US dollars in italki credits with your first lesson purchase by going to: <http://go.italki.com/englishin10minutes>

Alright, so, Nepal. This is a country that we wanted to visit for a while and eventually we did. It was quite a long time ago now, about eight years ago. Umm, but it's a spectacular country for scenery.

Wendy: Absolutely it is, yes. Umm, I love mountain scenery and, you know, living in Switzerland for a few years I was really spoiled², uhh, to have the Alps right ... surrounding us. But before that was when we went to Nepal and I hadn't been in mountains that often at that time and so it made it even more special and even more spectacular.

Nick: And so one of the things that a lot of people do when they're in Nepal, to take advantage of³ this scenery and to really enjoy it, umm, to the maximum extent, is to go on a long hike, or in fact a long trek. And we decided to do that as well. And there are really two long treks that you can do in Nepal and typically you might choose one or the other. It would be pretty hard to do both, I think, in the

¹ affordable: not expensive

² spoiled: lucky to have something that not everyone does

³ take advantage of (verb phrase): make best use of, profit from

same trip, uhh, because it would take a long time, and it also takes a lot out of you⁴. And so one is to do the trek to Mount Everest base camp, and obviously the huge appeal of that is that you're at the base of Mount Everest...

Wendy: Right.

Nick: ...the highest mountain in the world. So there's a huge allure⁵ of seeing that mountain. And so that's one of the options. The other option is what's called the Annapurna Circuit, and that's actually the trek that we chose. And the reason that we chose it over the Everest trek is that it's generally considered to be the better all-around trek. It doesn't have that one famous mountain of Mount Everest, but what it does have, which the Everest trek lacks, is that there are villages, uhh, all scattered around all throughout the trek. So as you're walking on the path, you're passing these little villages, and that just gives an extra dimension to it, because you're looking at this amazing scenery, these amazing mountains as you're going but you're also seeing a little bit of daily life, rural life, and you're watching these people in their villages go about their daily activities and so that just adds an extra dimension to it. And so we'd read and we'd heard that overall it was considered to be the better trek and that was I guess the main reason, is that combination of a little bit of culture with the villages but also the scenery of the mountains. So that's what we chose to do.

Wendy: Yeah, and you're also staying in these small guesthouses in the villages, and they're run by the local villagers. And you eat in these guesthouses as well, they prepare meals for you. Uhh, so you do get a chance to interact with the locals and to, yeah, see a bit of their daily life and I remember also passing by some temples where some Buddhist monks were chanting⁶ and praying and, yeah, it was, uhh, really fascinating, so ... and that's a completely different aspect from just looking at beautiful mountains.

Nick: Right, and so these guesthouses are called teahouses. And they're quite basic, but that's fine, that's ... you get what you need, which is a warm bed and a nice ... and a warm meal, basically. Umm, and so, you know, as, and I think we'll talk about this more as we go, but especially at the beginning of the trek, there's no roads, or at least when we did this, umm, there were no roads, and so it's very hard to get materials, uhh, to build fancy places and so it's very much, these teahouses are very much just built in the local style and that was great. It was a great experience to be able to stay in those every day.

And so at the beginning, you know, it's quite a long trek, firstly. It took us seventeen days to do it, and then we actually added on seven more days at the end, uhh, to add the Annapurna Sanctuary, or, which is often sometimes called the ABC trek, for Annapurna Base Camp, so we did twenty-four days in total. And you

⁴ takes a lot out of you: makes you tired because of the effort required

⁵ allure: attraction. See also: Episode 18: Los Angeles.

⁶ chanting: a form of singing, often religious songs

go through a lot of different scenery. It took us, I think, four or five days till we actually first saw snow-capped mountains for the first time, because you sort of start quite near a highway, the main highway I think that goes from Kathmandu to Pokhara, and so it takes you a while, because there aren't these roads, you have to walk it, to get to the mountains themselves.

Wendy: Right, I remember in the beginning, the early days, there was a lot of green, a lot of green trees and other greenery that we were walking through, a lot of woodlands. And then once we got higher then we got kind of above the tree line and you didn't have as much (many) trees, you had more sparse⁷ mountains. So the scenery did change quite a lot because our elevation was changing and we were going through these different types of, yeah, greenery and growth.

Nick: Yeah, and it really became spectacular, we saw these incredible mountains. Umm, and like you said, that combination with the culture. I remember, regarding the Buddhist monks, at one point we saw them on top of a roof playing trumpets.

Wendy: Yes.

Nick: And that was just at sundown, and so that was an incredibly atmospheric experience to see that and be a part of that.

Wendy: Yeah, you got a great photo of that too. I remember that photo really well.

Nick: And so I think those days from about day five to eleven, let's say, uhh, were my favourite days. Umm, and so you have that ... those ... some great villages around that time and some great scenery that had begun to reveal itself. And then what you have to do is you have to go over a pass, uhh, the Thorong La pass. And it's very high, it's over five thousand, four hundred metres, umm, which is extraordinary when you think about it from a European perspective, because that's taller than the peak of Mont Blanc, which is the highest mountain in Europe, and that's about four thousand, eight hundred and seven metres, depending on how you count it. And so this is six hundred metres higher than that, and it's the pass, which is the low part between, uhh, mountain peaks. And I actually had some problems with altitude, uhh, and so we actually had to make two attempts to go over the pass because the first time we tried it, I had huge trouble breathing, I just couldn't do it. Umm, and so we had to acclimatise⁸ for one more day and then try it again the next day. But that's something that I think is fairly common.

Wendy: Yeah, it is fairly common. I mean, when you're dealing with altitudes that high, then, yeah, our bodies - especially when we're coming from a very low altitude place, if you don't live at a high altitude - then your body definitely needs some time to adjust to that. And some people don't make it. There are people who just have to turn around and go back and aren't able to complete the hike because

⁷ sparse: Thinly distributed. In this case Wendy means that the mountains didn't have trees.

⁸ acclimatise: to adapt to a new climate (Note: American English is *acclimate*).

they physically can't get over the pass, uhh, just because of altitude sickness, which is really sad and I'm glad that that didn't happen to us.

Nick: Yeah, for sure. Uhh, although I do still think that the front part before the pass is the best part, or certainly for me, that was my favourite part. Uhh, and so then we went over the pass, we went down over the other side and continued on our way. And eventually as we said at the beginning, we connected with this Annapurna Base Camp, umm, trek and then this is a bit more like the Everest one. The villages aren't there anymore and it's just a kind of pure trek, but you arrive in this basin⁹ and you're just surrounded by mountains and it's truly incredible.

Wendy: Yeah, and I had never seen anything like that before. I mean, a few years later in Switzerland we did have some other experiences like that, but, yeah, to just turn around in a circle and everywhere you look on all sides you're completely surrounded by these snow-capped white mountains, it was just unbelievable.

Nick: And these were eight thousand metre mountains, so they're the highest that we've ever seen, even I think to this day. And so that was something really special. With the Annapurna Sanctuary trek, this second part that we added on, it's an up-and-back trek, so you spend a few days going there to see this incredible view, and then you have to walk back, umm, the way you came. So as we...

Wendy: Whereas the Annapurna Circuit is a circuit or a loop. So, uhh, you're not ... yeah, you don't ever walk past the same place twice, you're constantly going through new areas.

Nick: But I think the combination of the two was a really good idea. I'm really glad that we did that because I think with the circuit, you get, you know, this all-around trek with some great scenery, also the villages et cetera, and then with the sanctuary trek, you just get the phenomenal view of mountains.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: And so as we said it took twenty-four days, it was the first time we'd ever done anything like that, even anywhere near¹⁰ twenty-four days, umm, but it was amazing just to be in the rhythm of the walk. We would go bed incredibly early, about eight pm I think.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: And then we would wake up at five, five thirty and just start walking.

⁹ basin: large, open bowl, like a sink, or a dip in the earth's surface. In this case Nick is referring to something that feels like a basin because the mountains around it are so high. An image search shows the two uses of the word: <https://www.ecosia.org/images?q=basin>

¹⁰ anywhere near: at all near or close

Wendy: And yeah, we really got into a routine that way, and it just seemed very natural to get up and walk, and I really loved it. It was a little bit difficult to go back into civilisation afterwards, when we finished the trek.

Nick: Yeah, definitely. So it was one of the greatest things that we've ever done, and maybe one day - who knows? - we'll return and do the Everest trek as ... to complete the two great treks in Nepal.

Wendy: I definitely would like to do that one day, yes.

Nick: Alright, we'll see.

Comprehension Questions

1. According to Nick, why is the Annapurna Circuit considered a better trek than the Everest Base Camp trek?
2. Why did Nick and Wendy have to make two attempts to cross the Thorong La pass?
3. What type of accommodation did they stay in on the trek?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. That family is very rich and so the kids are extremely _____. They have all the latest toys and electronics.
2. It's a beautiful day outside. Let's _____ of the weather and go to the beach.
3. Not many people live in that part of the country. The population is very _____ there.
4. If you move to the tropics, you have to _____ to the humidity and the monsoon rains.
5. His performance isn't _____ the standard that our team needs. He has played very poorly recently.
6. Nepal is a very _____ country. Food and accommodation are much cheaper there than in Europe or North America.
7. Being a parent of a new-born child _____. You don't sleep very well and you have to take care of the baby virtually 24 hours a day.
8. The Amazon _____, including the river and rainforest, is one of the many extraordinary geographical features of South America.
9. The _____ of the mountains is what brings a lot of travellers to countries like Nepal.
10. _____ is a common form of singing in many religious traditions, including Buddhism and Christianity.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Would you like to do the Annapurna Circuit and/or Sanctuary trek? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever done a multi-day hike or trek? If so, where was it and what was it like?
3. What is the highest point you've ever been to? Did you notice any problems with breathing or altitude sickness?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. It's considered better because it contains villages as well as mountain scenery.
2. Nick had problems with the altitude at 5400m, so they needed an extra day to acclimatise.
3. They stayed in basic accommodation provided for trekkers in the villages called teahouses.

Exercises

1. spoiled
2. take advantage of
3. sparse
4. acclimatise
5. anywhere near
6. affordable
7. takes a lot out of you
8. Basin
9. allure
10. chanting