

Monthly Profile: This month we feature Marc & Stephanie Rapke's exciting travels to India and Nepal! Read more member profiles at: <https://templemanuellakeland.com/member-profiles/>

“Origins” - It was Friday night January 16, 1993 when I received a call from my wife to be. 9 months prior we were supposed to meet but the meeting was delayed. Tonight she insisted this would be the night. Over in my townhouse, I was in the process of planning my trip to Kathmandu, Nepal to board the flight that flies past Mt. Everest, the earth's highest mountain in the Himalaya mountain range.

Fast forward past love and marriage and the proverbial baby carriage and Stephanie and I are planning to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary. To get closure on my long forgotten visit to the highest spot on earth, we agreed on visiting India and Nepal.

“October, 2018”- Our flights and tours are set. We are to take a 24 hour journey to New Delhi and visit the Golden Triangle. Near the end of our two weeks is the early morning sightseeing flight on Buddha Airlines and circling past Sagarmatha, the Nepalese name for Mt. Everest. A British geologist, George Everest, who was in charge of measuring the mountain, was given the honor of the naming rights in 1865.

Our trip began in New Delhi in central India and proceeded to Jaipur, Agra and back to New Delhi: The three cities making up the Golden Triangle. Early in our packed New Delhi, India agenda is a visit to Gandhi Smriti, Mahatma Gandhi's last residence. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Gandhi was the Father of modern India and he led the India Independence movement against British colonial rule and inspired nonviolent civil disobedience movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. Along the covered walkway in Gandhi's home are framed posters with numerous facts and quotations. One quotes Albert Einstein stating “Taken on the whole, I would believe that Gandhi's views, were the most enlightened of all political men in our time.... We should strive to do things in his spirit.” That has timeless application.

“It's Certainly Hot Enough” - The Chand Baori is a fascinating example of man's inventiveness.



While travelling through the Indian desert region, we are taken to a stone construction built starting in the 8th century that serves as a well. 3500 steps down into the earth in all directions allow people access to potable water 13 stories below the surface. A defensive fortress is built into the well to guard against trespassers from stealing precious water reserves from local residents. A Temple dedicated to Hashat Mata, goddess of joy and happiness adjoins the Baori. Water is indispensable to human life.

“One of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World” - The most recognizable structure on our trip and perhaps the entire world is the astonishing Taj Mahal, built by Emperor Shah Jahan as a mausoleum for his beloved Queen near the city of Agra. From a distance, its construction of translucent marble makes it appear to actually float in air. We slip on our shoe covers and wait patiently to catch a brief glimpse of the sarcophaguses containing the Shah and his wife. Its elegant white marble, encrusted with semiprecious stones, was built over a 22 year time span and completed in 1643. The plaza surrounding the Taj is adjoined by a guest house and mosque that are impressive structures, but diminished by the grandeur of the Taj Mahal. Magnificent.



“And Now Nepal” - 3 years before when our trip was still a twinkle in my eye, I heard the news about the devastating earthquakes that demolished scores of centuries old temples and monuments, particularly in Nepal’s capital city. Our visit to Durbar Square, the central gathering point in Kathmandu, showed substantial evidence of the ravages of nature. Chain link fences surrounding many of the Hindu temples and pagodas bore signs, usually in Nepalese and English, detailing the nation or organization that was repairing and rebuilding the landmarks. My response to the people of Nepal was a contribution that I made to Chabad of Kathmandu online. The earthquake served only to stall our trip until the earth’s seismic fury abated.

Our Kathmandu City tour reveals how intricately the peoples’ religious and cultural lives are connected. Among the numerous ancient buildings are the sprawling Hanuman Dhoka, ancient palace of Nepalese Royalty and the Temple of Kumari, home to Nepal’s most important living goddess. Temples, Monuments and Palaces everywhere. So are the throngs of worshippers.



Next we journey to Swayambhunath, a 2,000 year old Buddhist Stupa (shrine) celebrated as the oldest Buddhist shrine in the world with its fluttering prayer flags and lofty copper spires. Overlooking the Kathmandu Valley, the stupa is painted on four sides with the compassionate eyes of the Buddha. This highly recognizable structure is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Our visit also takes us to the Monkey Temple, the Palace of Fifty-Five Windows and the Golden Temple.

“30 Seconds Over Everest”- Unlike the Allies aerial bombing response to Japan in WW2 by Capt. Jimmy Doolittle shortly after Pearl Harbor, our Buddha Air 6:20 A.M. flight was without any great risk. Our flight itinerary was a path parallel to the Himalaya Mountains as we flew through the Kathmandu Valley towards Destination Everest. Only the window seats on the plane were occupied and it was a clear day with great visibility. The flight attendants gave everyone a picture map showing the locations of the world’s highest mountain peaks (All of the ten highest above sea level are in the Himalayas). About 20 minutes into the flight, the attendants invited the passengers, one by one, to spend what seemed like 30 seconds looking through the window on the left side of the cockpit. This was our moment with high adventure. I fumbled with my phone to capture a picture knowing I was under tight time pressure. And there it was. The tiny triangular mountain peak that was topped by a wispy little cloud. See the attached picture. As we headed back to the airfield, the flight path changed and Everest and all the mountains appeared much, much larger. My guess is that passengers get a “Guaranteed” look first and then, weather permitting, get a closer view.



Our trip took us to another culture, indeed another world. We already have planned a trip to China and Tibet to gain yet one more perspective on humanity. About that 1 inch high picture I took of Sagarmatha, I need to contact Buddha Airlines customer service about enlarging my picture to at least 2 inches.

Editors Note: Thanks to Marc for sharing these highlights of their fascinating trip! If anyone else would like to offer a ‘profile’ for an upcoming issue, please contact irmacole26@gmail.com

Deadline for the next Menorah is November 30, 2019.

Please send info, articles, images, etc. to irmacole26@gmail.com