

Note from *people and places*: this volunteer's placement was designed specifically for them – they went through our full matching process, as we've been doing with you. The placement report indicates their particular skills and experience – yours may be similar or completely different – your own placement will make best use of *your* experience and skills. Every volunteer is different – in what they give and what they gain. Reports from previous volunteers serve to give you as good a picture as possible about the project. If you have any questions about any of the detail in this report please do not hesitate to contact me at kate@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

Nicki Clive - Amar Jyoti School, Pokhara, NEPAL

18.10.11 – 19.12.11

pre departure preparation

The preparation details for this placement were excellent, with guidelines for all eventualities. All my dealings with People and Places - particularly the pre departure preparations - were efficient, warm and friendly, and instilled me with confidence about the project.

orientation and preparation at the start of the placement

Orientation at the start of the placement was very good. From the moment I was greeted at Kathmandu Airport I felt cosseted and enveloped by Tiger Mountain guides. I had asked for 2 more days in the city to meet with a friend. The guide looked after every detail and even offered to make phone calls for me.

The care and attention I received when I arrived at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge was phenomenal. Hari, the project co-ordinator, talked me through the placement on my first day, and accompanied me to the school the following morning.

what did we do well?

People and Places provided tremendous backup to my volunteer experience. I felt 100% secure at all times. From my first contact with Sallie and Kate I knew that I was in safe hands. People and Places is a very professional organisation which gives exceptional personal service. Kate builds up close relationships with the prospective volunteers, and she matches their skills and experience to the right project. She is ALWAYS there for support and advice.

what could we do better? – and PLEASE don't hold back: surely there's something we can improve on ...

This particular placement needs volunteers who are physically fit. Not only is the walk home from the school quite challenging but many of the lodges at Tiger Mountain are quite a few steps down from the main lodge. Personally I loved the walk to and from the school. Knowing that my fitness was improving was an added bonus for me, but it might be helpful if future volunteers knew what to expect.

Note from *people and places*: we've now added this information to our briefing docs so that all future volunteers are aware of the situation.

your experience and work – including what resources you may have left behind and with whom – please include any written resources you may have left behind as well as any other resources

My first week at Amar Jyoti was challenging. The Headmaster and 3 senior members of staff were away on a school trip with the top classes. On my first day, after being introduced to the teachers in the lower classes, I was taken to the secondary school, given a board marker and a class of 30 or so children and left to 'get on with it'! It was definitely a case of in at the deep end. When I returned to the lodge, I discussed the 'no teacher, no volunteer' policy with Hari, who then contacted the school. We agreed that for the next few days I would work with Years 1 and 2, getting to know Tara and the children and helping where I could.

Note from people and places: Hari is our volunteer co-ordinator at Tiger Mountain. The 'no teacher, no volunteer' rule may seem harsh, but volunteer placements are for skills-share, not for taking the place of local teachers – this is one of core values at *people and places*. Because Nicki raised the matter at the end of the day, Hari and the school were able to deal with the situation well. Such openness is vital for successful placements and local relationships.



Tara – multiplication with coloured markers – maths can be fun!

I stayed with the lower classes for the next two weeks. The temporary teacher in the Nursery was not well (she is now in hospital with severe diabetes) and did not have the energy to supervise the very young children. The Class 1 teacher was also away and Tara was looking after Class 1 and 2.

Note: there is no provision for substitute teachers – doubling up of classes is the only practical solution when there are staff absences.

I felt my need was greatest in these classes. Tara made me very welcome. There was no timetable and the lessons were very haphazard. The morning lesson was often one long session which was not suitable for such small children.

The need for a timetable has since been discussed with Mr. Samodar, the Headmaster, who has agreed that the younger classes need shorter lessons, with more breaks. After the national holiday, Saradha, the full time nursery teacher, returned to teach her class. She is motivated and enthusiastic but her English is not good. She is finding it difficult to shorten the lesson times as suggested, and to allow the children to have a break between lessons.

Previous volunteers, Nick and Jill had told of a cupboard in the science room in which they had put volunteers' materials. Unfortunately they were no longer there. After a couple of weeks and many requests from me, resources were eventually found in a stock room.

Note: experience shows that schools initially view new resources as precious treasures that must be kept safe (i.e. locked away). Gradually, the staff realise that such resources are for their use and become more confident in how they can be used, through the encouragement and skills-share offered by volunteers.

The Nursery Class had a cupboard which had obviously been home for rodents. It was full of shredded paper and droppings and the odd piece of chewed alphabet jigsaw. (Hari dealt with this) The children eat flaked rice and oranges in the classroom and the doors and shutters do not fit well. The main school dumps their rubbish about 10 feet away from this classroom so it is inevitable that rats find their way in each evening. We talked much about hygiene and the need for staff and children to take pride in their environment, particularly after the visit of the staff to the Fulbari Montessori School in Pokhara.



A visit to the Fulbari Montessori School for Amar Jyoti teachers

Years 1, 2 and 3 classes were also in need of cleaning, and there were oil drums full of rubbish in Years 1 and 2. (Lorna and I have now removed these!)

Co-volunteers, Lorna and Evelyn joined me five weeks after the start of my placement.

There is little discipline at the lower end of the school, and we all agreed with Nick, a previous volunteer's words, *'Teachers' and pupils' grasp of English is even lower than we were led to expect from previous volunteers..... 'Concerned about lack of a professional ethos in the lower part of the school'...*

The volunteers at Amar Jyoti before Nick and Jill spent much of their time in the secondary school, which does not appear to have the same problems of discipline and hygiene.

There is no sanction or reward system in place, but corporal punishment is used.

Note: gradually volunteers can encourage more of the 'carrot' and less of the 'stick' – this is already beginning to happen as teachers understand that children who are occupied and interested present less of a challenge to classroom discipline

It was difficult to encourage phonics teaching but with constant repetition from volunteers, small steps forward are being made. Lorna spent time forming a relationship with Saradha and we both began to introduce the sounds of letters, writing these sounds in lower case.

Lorna, Evelyn and I would like our donation to go towards furnishing this Nursery classroom in a more efficient way. The floor needs levelling with some sort of washable flooring on top and perhaps a rug and a suitable small table at the right height for the children. As long as the room is made rat proof, cushions would be suitable for the children to sit on. Hooks on the wall for bags would be beneficial.

Note: the 'project donation' shown in the project costs is a ring-fenced amount for use in the project as agreed between volunteers, project and project management team.



staff & volunteers start to brighten up the classrooms and the children appreciate the new posters

The need for firm foundations for the school was discussed with the Headmaster and other staff and all agreed that the Nursery and Years 1, 2 and 3 are most in need of help.

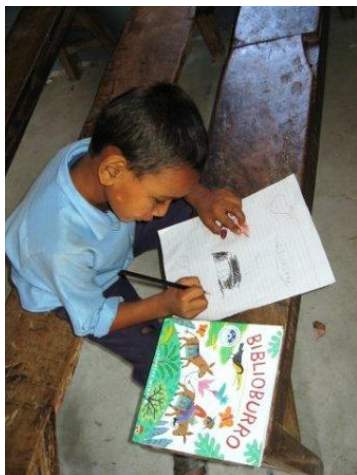
Resources left behind

In tin chest in the lower school 'staff room' (Hari and Tara have keys):

Small whiteboard and markers, Ladybird easy readers, various small books, cd player and speakers, crayons and felt tips, white A4 paper, resources from previous volunteers, big books, Papertiger books, Jolly phonics workbooks, poster paints and brushes, child friendly scissors (about 4 pairs) blutack, sellotape, double sided tape, stapler and staples, rulers and glue sticks

In volunteers cupboard:

Cleaning materials, pencils, rubbers and pencil sharpeners, sponge markers English resources and some English in Action books from previous volunteers. Posters, small whiteboard and markers.



Paper Tigers books



I love my binoculars!



Paper Tigers books



Learning through play: binoculars, paper hats, outdoor games

your recommendations for the input of future volunteers – a particular area of your work which could be continued by others and how would you suggest this could be done?

Amar Jyoti is very needy and volunteering here is a very worthwhile project. The school wants the help of volunteers but the teachers are not sure how to utilise them to the best advantage.

Note: this is where the role of our local partners is vital in their ongoing relationship and liaison with both the school and volunteers. Regular meetings, pre and post placement briefings and discussion – this ensures that individual placements and skills-share are part of a larger picture and a sustainable whole.

Mr. Damodar Sapkota, the Headmaster of the school put forward three main suggestions for future volunteers.

- At the start of a new project Mr. Damodar suggested that it would be helpful to have 2 volunteers in the same class, to demonstrate how they would work with the Nepali curriculum. The dialogue between these volunteers would be watched by the Nepali class teacher who would then take over from the second volunteer at an appropriate time.
- Mr. Damodar is aware that a more disciplined approach is needed in the Nursery and lower classes. He suggested that possibly future volunteers could help the staff to be more aware of punctuality.
- Mr. Damodar would like future volunteers help to change the environment in these lower school classes using the Secondary school library as an example. (We would like our contribution to go towards this as mentioned above) This would hopefully engender more respect for the environment from both staff and children.

Some more suggestions for future volunteers

Try to find one particular member of staff to liaise with Hari and volunteers (Besh Raj , the Year 5/4 teacher, who has a reasonable command of English, seems an obvious choice)

It would be helpful to have a volunteers' timetable from the start of the placement

Note: this has been discussed and agreed with our local partners – and will be part of their preparation with the school before each volunteer placement.

Try to look at the Nepali curriculum books on day one and ask the staff what they need the children to learn that month, then demonstrate how this could be done in an interesting and lively way.

Help deliver the curriculum by introducing creative and practical lessons to extend that weeks' learning ie. making clocks, or using colours. Outdoor creativity could be encouraged using twigs and small pebbles. Could marigolds be planted in pots?

The children need to learn to take pride in their school – collecting up sweet wrappings and rubbish from the playground each morning will engender this

Perhaps the outdoor environment could be made more stimulating for the children? I suggested old tyres cut in half and cemented in a circle and this has been discussed with Hari and Marcus. There is an example photo on the Tiger Mountain computer.

Year 2 could think about how to improve their playground. Could the Year 2/3 children paint a mural on the walls both inside and out? (There may be a way of fitting this into Nepali Curriculum)

Discourage eating rice flakes and oranges in the classrooms

Shorter lesson times for the younger children could be encouraged, and if possible get a timetable up on the wall in the junior staff room

Mr. Damodar has agreed that shorter sessions would be more suitable for the Nursery and Year 1 class. Often the whole morning until around 12 noon runs into one long session with no break. The teachers are finding this difficult to implement but understand that children's discipline will improve with more 'breaks'

Keep introducing phonic exercises, particularly in the nursery class. Encourage children to write simple words and sentences WITHOUT copying from board. (Explain to Saradha that you will be talking about sounds in simple words d....o...g..... rather than DOG spells dog.)

One aim for Years 2 and 3 could be to write a simple sentence WITHOUT copying from board.

Introduce some sort of sanction/ reward system (not stickers....they don't work in Nepal, and only cause disruption) Encourage the children to answer questions by putting up hands and asking permission to leave the classroom

If hooks could be put up for the bags the children would find writing easier. At present the children put their bags on a bench and then write in their exercise book, on top of the bag.

Encourage staff to take the children to the main school library on a weekly basis

DON'T GET DISHEARTENED AND THINK OF PROGRESSING IN VERY SMALL STEPS. The aim eventually is for staff to use resources and materials without volunteers, but this is going to take time. If volunteers continue to use resources other than the text book to teach the curriculum, eventually the teachers will gain more confidence and hopefully start using more varied methods of teaching.

Successes

Arranging for Mr. Damodar and some of the staff to visit the very efficient and well run Fulbari Montessori School in Pokhara, and hearing them comment on ideas they picked up there that they could use.

Introducing the PaperTigers Books to the school, and seeing the staff allowing the children to look at these books themselves

Introducing staff to ways of using natural and recycled resources. For example cut up the inside of loo rolls for binoculars, and for making a counting line (Any sort of circular cardboard could be used)

Making paper hats and seeing the pleasure the children got from decorating them.

Mr. Damodar agreeing to shorter lesson times for smaller children

Children collecting rubbish and trying to tidy their environment each morning

Showing Nursery Saradha how to introduce phonic learning (small steps!) to the children

Disappointments

Finding resources from previous volunteers in a pile.

Lack of enthusiasm for suggested ideas, which was sometimes disheartening.



Nicki's final day – formal farewells

what was the highlight of your volunteer experience?

The genuine friendship given freely by the Nepali people and the close relationships that I made with both children and adults whilst there

To experience such compassion and lack of envy in those who have very little material wealth.

Watching children being allowed to open books and turn over pages freely - seeing the joy this gave them

The feeling that you are doing something worthwhile takes some beating. ... So many highlights.....

would you recommend volunteering to other people? if so, please tell us why?

There is no greater reward in life than the feeling that you might have made a difference, however small, to the life of a deprived child. Volunteering gives you this opportunity.

how did you spend your leisure time?

I probably had more leisure time than most volunteers. The 10 weeks I was there included 2 scheduled holiday periods. I visited Chitwan for 3 days, and stayed at Tiger Tops. It was a wonderful trip, arranged for me by Marcus and Jhalak at Tiger Mountain. This included visits to 3 schools there, and provided an interesting comparison to Amar Jyoti.

Two free days were spent walking through the local villages.

When Evelyn and Lorna arrived we went to Pokhara each Saturday. We visited the Leprosy Hospital, The Gurka Museum, and the Tibetan Village (unfortunately the carpet factory there is closed on a Saturday).

how was your accommodation?

My Trip Advisor review below says it all. If it sounds unbelievable all I can say is that it is a genuine report of how I feel about Tiger Mountain and its staff.

"A Serene and Tranquil Paradise"

It was a joy and a privilege for me to have had the opportunity to stay at this truly special place in the Autumn of 2011 whilst volunteering at the local primary school which is supported by the Lodge.

Very seldom does everything come together to create near perfection, but the people who work and live at Tiger Mountain, combined with the spectacular environment, have created an idyllic mountain paradise.

Each carefully planned lodge has a balcony from which to watch the dawn breaking over the Annapurna range - no photograph can ever do this justice. This view together with the genuine, warm hearts of the wonderful staff who look after their guest's every whim make Tiger Mountain a truly magical place. The attention to detail is unparalleled and they must surely be amongst the most highly trained hospitality staff any where in the world.

Whilst there I noticed that every member of a group of 6 guests requested a different sort of bread for their breakfast toast the following morning and so, being Tiger Mountain, individual loaves were baked for each of them by Lalu the cook.

Many different types of tea, coffee, home made cakes and biscuits are constantly available. Delicious and inventive canapés are served before dinner, and the wonderful soups on offer are made with ingredients from the organic garden. Lalu's chocolate pudding is a chocoholic's delight.

Room Tip: *Do let the management know before your visit if you have mobility problems. Some lodges are a little less accessible than others.*

Please note – this report is supplied by a former volunteer and the contents are intended solely for your information and personal use.

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Please check with us if you would like to publish it beyond your own circle of friends and family.
Thank you.