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## VICS: A return to my second home – Nepal

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# A return to my second home – Nepal

VICS volunteer **Mary Martin**, who spent 9 years in Nepal (2000-2009), shares some experiences from her return visit in 2013.

It was great to be “home” once again, to awake to the sounds of the cuckoos, to walk to 6:30 Mass at St. Mary’s and be welcomed so enthusiastically by the St. Mary’s sisters, so many of whom had been praying for me as I journeyed through my cancer. They could not get enough of just looking at me, so healthy and full of life again. How they rejoiced! They showed me photos of myself which they had in their prayer books, as they prayed each morning for me. It was very humbling to know how much they cared.

Friends from Canada joined me through my journey. Three of them had never been to Nepal, and two had never been to a developing country, so it was fun to once again see Nepal through the eyes of newcomers. At first they seemed pretty overwhelmed, but they quickly adapted to the traffic (the “death seat” in the front of taxis was a hot favourite) and to life in this corner of Asia.

One morning we got up at 4 a.m. and set off for Kopan nunnery. There we joined 370 Buddhist nuns in their morning prayer. It was really neat to meet and pray with these women who had prayed for me after my cancer diagnosis. So much of my visit to Nepal seemed to be meeting old friends and rejoicing with them over my good health. Gift!

The seven-hour drive south to Chitwan gave our group an opportunity to see how life is lived outside the Kathmandu



Mary Martin (far left) is joined by friends from Canada on her return visit to Nepal.

valley — the traffic on the highway, the teashops, the towns we passed through. Riding (and washing) elephants was the highlight of our Chitwan visit, though walking through the jungle and finding a rhino was also pretty exciting. We saw loads of crocodiles as we drifted down the river in a dugout canoe.

## The trek

We spent a half day back in Kathmandu once again visiting the bank machines (it took several attempts, as often they were not working or had run out of money, or there was no electricity, or ...) and doing a bit of shopping in preparation for our trek.

We set off about 7 a.m. to drive north of Kathmandu — a very winding road with steep cliff drops and hairpin curves. The road was mostly paved, and we had a good driver, and so arrived at Hotel Peaceful by about 3 p.m. There we were met by Mukhiya, our sirdar and good friend, and our four porters. We were greeted with prayer scarves and a welcome drink of seabuckthorn juice. Some tried the showers (attached loos!) but got only cold water.

By 7:30 the next morning we were off, following the river up and up and down and up through bamboo forest and across suspension bridges strewn with prayer flags. The bridges were actually very high quality, and the need for prayer flags did not seem as acute as some bridges I had been on.

After a day or two we all settled into our rhythms. By Day 3 we were up to about 11,000 feet and the weather had cooled right down. By Day 4 we were in the snow, though it really



Riding (and washing) elephants;  
prayer flags along the route;  
rhodos in bloom;  
Himal snow-capped peaks;  
navigating steep stone steps;  
KUSMS physio faculty.

wasn't all that cold. It was so nice to be ambling once more in my much loved Himal, and to gaze up at the snow-capped peaks as we walked past walls of carved prayer stones and waving prayer flags. We stayed two nights in Kyangjin Gomba — the chocolate cake in its bakery was to die for. Great cappuccino too!

Altogether we spent eight days trekking. It was hard work, but just so good to be up in the Himal once again. And the rhodos! We walked through hours of rhododendron forests, with the trees arching over us, laden with red and white and pale pink

blooms. Those rhodos kept me going up many a stone step!

I had forgotten just how much work it can be. The last time I did this trek was in 1987 — I had not given much thought to what it might mean to be 26 years older!

When we arrived back at Hotel Peaceful we learned how to make hot water come (ask the manager to turn it on!) So we showered and had a celebratory beer.

Later in my trip I met with the physio faculty of the Physiotherapy School of Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences (KUSMS), the programme I had helped to start in 2002. It was so special to find them engaged and enthused about their work, and so competent. The assistant dean spoke very highly of them: "Whenever I give them a task they do it perfectly." He is keen to look at starting a Masters Programme in Physiotherapy — such a far cry from the diploma course I got started in 2002. It continues to be the only Physiotherapy training in the country. What a thrill to see it thriving.

I had a wonderful four weeks away. How blessed I am! ■

## Join VICS and you are in it for life

Once a VICS volunteer, always a VICS volunteer. That's why I get to come to the annual reunions. I act as an "eye" for VICS in Africa. I meet current volunteers, see projects that could be undertaken by future volunteers and in general keep an eye on today's volunteers and their work, especially the projects in Nigeria.

My first contact with VICS was in South Africa. I was struck by the wonderful work the volunteers were doing as they donated their lives to the service of the needy there and across the world. You can't but be touched by their kind of sacrifice — it makes a very powerful statement. It is almost like becoming a priest or a Spiritan — abandoning your own roots so as to go out and proclaim the good news. That resonates with me from my Spiritan background. The volunteers accept what we accept — to be uprooted from our own cultures, to go someplace else; not just to go and teach, but to listen so as to be able to work with them. I really appreciate that approach. I have come to admire how people can give themselves so much to other people. This really touches me. Thank God VICS is a Spiritan product. — Daniel Abba CSSp