



Project – Hitaishi

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Introduction

Travel is an experience of series of unexpected adventure. The more places you experience, more knowledge you gain. There are so many places unobserved within Nepal itself but according to our Nepali society, traveling is considered as a risky, not meant for girls. They are considered as a delicate treasure of the society who is supposed to be protected. Thus, we girls ourselves feel that travel is for physically awesomely strong people. But it's less to do with physical strength and much to do with mental strength. A girl becomes more independent and skillful after every travel but they have a very hard time convincing their family to let them travel and they need to tackle so many obstacles much more than boys do for travelling.

With an initiative to create opportunities for women to travel and get involved in various community work with like-minded women in a welcoming and safe environment, Girls Empowered by Travel – Nepal, youth led nonprofit organization has initiated a social project Hitaishi under Rural Urban Exchange Programme. "Hitaishi" is a Nepali word used to signify a close friend in Nepali society. This project consists of two major aspects i.e. travel and social work. Through this project four selected young girls (above 18 years): Vidhya Bista, Manisha Dhital, Sadikshya Poudel and Prekchhya Shrestha along with the program officer of GET, Ms. Pabitra Majhi has been provided with an opportunity to travel Terai Region, Sarlahi, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sindhuli and Rautahat district. The five days (24-28 January, 2018) of the trip includes the complete package of exploring new places, getting to know the social and cultural lifestyle of Terai communities i.e. Mushar, Majhi, Bishwokarma and other Madhesi communities from close up and experience their life styles as well as making new friends from rural community. The participant had also involved in various social events like stationary distribution to Mushar children, awareness programme on menstrual hygiene/ health education, self defense training for young girls, importance of girls education, merits of timely marriage and demerits of early marriage.



Objectives:

- To provide safe travelling opportunity to the young girls (urban and Rural) to the different places of Nepal
- To exchange the knowledge and skills between Rural and Urban girls.
- To learn about different lifestyles of various communities, their culture, way of living.
- To know the problems of different rural communities and share the knowledge, solution and skills which we have. Thus by promoting the leadership skills of girls.
- To break the stereotype concept that women couldn't/ shouldn't travel and encourage families and parents to allow their daughters to travel.
- To make young girls more confident, self dependent and strong.

Activities:

Our journey began with an 8 hours jeep ride from Kathmandu to Sarlahi. While on the way we enjoyed beautiful greenery landscape scenery of Sindhuli where Selfie Danda was the most exciting place where we enjoyed the strong wind. We explored the local market Bayalbas and went around observing the sales ranging from colorful bangles to fresh vegetables, sales of live stocks and huge variety of fishes so on. Next day ,we cycled around Sagarnath village and also rowed boats at Naadiban taal (lake). According to the local people, this lake is holy place where Lord Shiva used to come here to get bath. The most adventurous experience of the trip was the epic rock climbing we did on our third day at Nunthar, Bagmati with the scenery of the peaceful flowing rivers down the tall green hills. However, the most heart-warming incident happened mostly at Babarjung. This place is mostly inhabited by Dalit Mushar communities and we loved to experience their culture. We were invited to the marriage ceremony happening in their community, we also visited the nearby community school which consisted of only one room, filled with more than 50 students of different age groups and we did a small contribution by providing stationary items (Copy, pencil, eraser, sharpner) to those students. The best thing about all the communities that we visited were the warm hospitality shown by the people. People used to come at our place and wanted to share their prevailing problems and so many stories. We listened them very carefully. When you meet new people, you encounter new stories. Though one cannot live many lives at the same time, we can always listen to the stories of people from a new environment to get an insight of their lifestyle.



During our stay at different communities, our Hitaishi girls participant were introduced to other 12 young girls in those communities who were of similar age. They were introduced to three rural girls each and make a bond with them as their "Hitaishi. One of the important objectives of this travel was the exchange of knowledge. So that We learnt from the community we were in and also tried our level best to share our own knowledge and skills with them. The women of Babargunj taught us to prepare their popular cultural food "Thekuwa" at evening besides their busy household schedule and enjoyed by dancing on Bhojpuri songs sung by them. Two night, at Sagarnath and Babargunj village, we conducted an awareness program with various topics that included child marriage, menstrual hygiene, importance of girls education, etc. Our girls participant also taught self-defense techniques to other six young girls of Kalinjar village gathered on the banks of the river, all these sharing sessions were surely effective. Apart from Sarlahi, we also visited Dhanusha district in order to explore Janakpur where we visited Janaki Mandir, Swroga Dwar, Biwaha Mandap, Bhutnath Temple, Ganga sagar Lake and two more things that we could not forget is Janakpuri lassi and Paan, which were the best. On the last day, we visited the Namuna Basti, Bardibas, Mahottari built by Dhurmus-Suntali Foundation. This trip began with five unknown people travelling together and we returned back as five close friends who had now shared an entire learning process together. We realized how empowering can travelling is, especially for girls in our country as we have a hard time receiving permissions to travel. We hope more girls get encourage to travel and experience their own story of empowerment.



Conclusion:

Traveling teaches you to trust in ourselves, empowers us, compels us to decide for ourselves, shows us our real strength, broadens our mind and helps us to accept other people's perspectives and ideologies. Travel is an experience that sees no gender and we need to break this concept and encourage families and parents to allow their daughters to the world outside and experience the thrill of travelling. This trip began with five unknown people travelling together and we returned back as five close friends who had now shared an entire learning process together. We realized how empowering can travelling is, especially for girls in our country as we have a hard time receiving permissions to travel. In addition, We also learnt that travel doesn't only change the traveler but we can also change and help many communities through this. Therefore, we hope more girls get encouraged to travel and experience their own story of empowerment.

