

And the moral of the story

In a land of cotton, polyester is best forgotten

By IRIS SANDERSON JONES

When asked to name the highlight of a trip, I often remember later some memorable incident not listed in the travel brochures. Like cows. In two Hindu countries like India and Nepal, cows are more than a religious and philosophical conversational topic.

Sometimes they are a problem. If you have ever seen a parade horse leave a pile of manure on the street, you'll understand my point. It is one thing to know in your head that Hindus harbor sacred cows. It is, however, another thing to find them walking around parking lots, holding up rush hour traffic or eating the corn spread out by a frustrated farmer.

Every traveler to this part of the world has at least one cow story. Sheila Holden of Farmington remembers a day in Calcutta when a bank was closed because a cow chose a revolving door in which to settle its frame. I have seen an Indian market man, with a basket of lettuce over

his shoulder, jump into action when a cow started chomping at the lettuce.

When you ask local people about their sacred cows, you get interesting answers. Many Indians eat meat, but beef sells for half the price of goat's meat because beef is not in demand.

It is illegal to slaughter cows in Nepal, but you will find beef on the menu.

There are cows in single-file and in herds along every farm road, and they would seem to be good milk providers.

At least one restaurant in Nepal told me disgustedly that he serves the milk of water buffalo because the cows don't give enough. They are not bred selectively and they're scrawny.

IT IS EXHAUSTING to travel in countries like India and Nepal because you are constantly bombarded with information and impressions of many different aspects of a foreign culture. Cows are only one of them.

TRAVEL LOG of Iris Jones



By the time we had traveled for three weeks in the Indian subcontinent and were winding up our trip to Nepal, we were spent.

It's a kind of sensory indigestion, a circuit overload, that comes from absorbing too many things in too short a time.

It was in this mood, our weariness compounded by dysentery, that we walked one day down the street of the ancient city of Bhadgaon, also known as Bhaktapur, in the Katmandu Valley of Nepal.

We toured the royal palaces, walked the tiered temples, photographed the people in their doorways and the drying corn and

red peppers in the square.

We wandered down a narrow stone street, between open-fronted shops, where women squatted, children slept and men smoked pipes and chatted. The shopkeepers watched us go by.

Rounding a corner, we were confronted by a large white bull standing aimlessly by the road. Micky, my husband and photographer, couldn't resist that picture. When the shutter had snapped, the bull decided to walk along with us a way.

A few steps down the street the bull decided to pull his horse-on-parade act, depositing his diarrhea

on the street. Apparently, he, too, had dysentery.

Micky leaped. And then cursed as the grime found its mark on the back of his brown polyester slacks. I could imagine how all this would look from a flying saucer.

Here were two weary travelers with too little sleep and too much sensory overload, walking down an ancient stone street in the Himalayas being spattered with manure by a sacred white bull. It was too much and I started to laugh.

"Don't laugh too loud until you look at the back of your new pink skirt," Micky said indignantly. I laughed harder.

I became the sightseer and the sight. They don't really see too many people in brown slacks and pink polyester skirts in Bhadgaon, Nepal.

I'm sure they had a story to tell while they squatted by the road that night, about two tourists seen stumbling down the street laughing hysterically.

BITS AND PIECES — Farmington

Hills Parks and Recreation has designed exactly the kind of trip needed by confirmed travelers who can't take time to get out of town this time of year.

A Christmas Shopping Spree included as a guided tour of the Renaissance Center, a shopping trip downtown and lunch at the Plaza Hotel Thursday, Dec. 7. The bus leaves Farmington Hills City Hall at 9:30 a.m. and returns at 3:30 p.m. For information, call 474-6115.

The three big tour destinations among Wayne and Oakland County travelers, who are swamping tour offices for Christmas travel, are Mexico, the Caribbean and Hawaii. That's according to Jack Thomas of Elliot Tours, who is convinced this week that "everybody in the state is going away for Christmas."

If you are a traveler or a travel agent, we'd like to hear where you or your clients are going for Christmas. Call me at 256-3366, or write 22170 W. Nine Mile, Southfield 48075.

Katmandu

Palaces to poverty, a land of contrast

By IRIS SANDERSON JONES



The Nepalese helicopter is a primary form of transportation.

tight white leggings, suit jackets and Nepali caps drape visitors with garlands of fresh flowers. On the terminal veranda, young men in denim lounge against the railing, and, in the parking lot, cows wander among the cars. The Rockies, it's not.

In quick glimpses from the road, Katmandu is a Hollywood movie come to life. A Gold temple tops above two-story brick buildings beside the paved road. Monkeys roam freely, cars move amid bicycle carts; people move in and out of darkened narrow wooden doorways.

This and other cities in Katmandu Valley are much as they have been for centuries, but two-lane highways and some modern buildings have been added.

SEVERAL HOTELS are available in the city and on the outskirts. The Soalle Oberoi, part of the world-wide Oberoi chain, is a multi-story hotel with swimming pools, gambling casino and western restaurants. Menus are international.

Local tour companies will take you to the Monkey Temple, set in a golden glitter of rooftops above the city; the old city streets with their royal palace and adjoining temples; the neighboring cities of Patan, and Bhaktapur—local places of interest.

They will also arrange tours along the terraced rice fields to Pokhara, at the foot of Annapurna; mountain window seats on the daily flight to circle Mount Everest; trekking; or to Jungle Tops, where you can camp in relative style among the animals of the mountains.

There also is smaller English-style accommodations like at Dwarika's Katmandu Village Hotel, a small brick inn set among English gardens and grapefruit trees.

Here the Shrestha family is trying to preserve and restore the carved windows and doorways which are visibly falling down all over Nepal, and replaced by simpler modern frames.

Tourists may hunger for the old world of this Hindu kingdom, but the local people value contemporary goods. Nepalese boys will ignore a golden temple to point out a modern hotel, and the young want nothing more than a pair of American blue jeans.

The government is determined to encourage tourism while preserving tradition. A first-class presentation of authentic costumes dances from around the country is presented weekends by the Nepalese Culture Society, followed by an authentic Nepalese dinner.

These are facts that tourists must know, but the real experience of Katmandu and Nepal is on the streets and on the mountainsides. Often a bus is stalled for one of the colorful festivals, held every few weeks, which help the poor to survive their otherwise dismal lives.

In a huge soccer field, people buy goats to sacrifice in the temple. But they are practical people, for after the sacrifice, they eat the goats. Foreigners cannot enter the sacred inner temples where sacrifices occur.

Outside an ancient royal palace, a carved figure of a king sits high above the street. He faces the golden doorway of the living goddess of his realm, a young girl always chosen from the same family to symbolize the living gods.

She remains a living goddess until she reaches at puberty, or from some inadvertent wound. Until then, she lives in her quarters high above the street, appearing only for holy days. She cannot come down to play, but the street children can go up to her quarters to play.

On the highway, built by the Chinese towards Pokhara, an educated guide with an English accent talks about cows. He says, "If this bus hits and kills a cow, the driver will go to jail for five years and I will go to jail for three years. If I must choose between hitting a cow and a man I will hit the man. If I thought the driver would hit a cow, I would grab the wheel and drive us off the road." Just one of many reported, but unconfirmed penalties for such an act.



From a bevy of open-air markets to one of the last colonies of flower children in the world, Katmandu offers an interesting array of both old and new. (Photos by Micky Jones)

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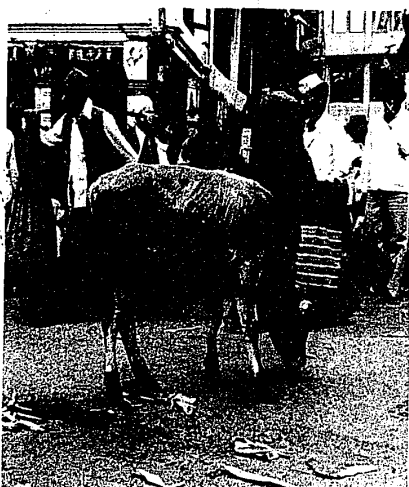


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Cows here, cows there, cows everywhere.