

Nepal Social Immersion Programs **Social Justice and Social Work in practice -**

A personal, professional and cultural deep dive into Nepal.

How did this come about?

After spending the better part of each year since 2014 exploring the Nepali Himalayas and its rural communities Wiebke has developed partnerships with many non profit organisations and change agents in Nepal and built a powerful partnership with Nireka Adventures which saw the successful launch of the Nepal Social Immersion programme in Kathmandu/Nepal in 2017.

This has come out of an igniting meeting with Satish Man Pati, owner of Nireka Adventures, who shares a passion for people – local and global - social justice and empowerment of the disadvantaged and underprivileged. Satish has in his own right enabled many whose paths he crossed to grow beyond their imagined limits and become successful supporters of their families and communities. In meeting Wiebke this intuitive and deeply embodied practice of living in support of others and learning from and with others has found a professional platform in the design and implementation of the Nepal Social Immersion programmes.

What does the The Nepal Social Immersion Programme seek to do?

- Provides true and meaningful encounters with Nepali People
- encourages cross-cultural learning and increases knowledge and experience pertinent to Nepal's social, cultural, environmental, economic, political and historical reality;
- provides exposure to community development challenges as well as environmental and social justice issues in the Nepali context;
- increases personal, community and global leadership potential;
- raises self-awareness and provides personal development and reflection;
- utilizes a community context to increase effectiveness and expertise;
- builds international networks and relations; and
- establishes long-term international partnerships.

Five pillars are the foundation of this programme.

1. The development of meaningful and authentic personal relationships with Nepali professionals and peers build the core of this programme

Over the entire course of the programme we match the group of international participants with Nepali peers/colleagues who are practitioners or present/ previous beneficiaries of the social development field of Nepal's NGO landscape. Thus the course is set up to allow for cross learning at all times and on all levels: personal, professional, cultural. The facilitators bring extensive experience in the Nepali Social Sector practice and policies as well as global comparison of the same. The core competencies lie in facilitating processes of personal development and self-awareness in the context of a drastically challenging and different social, economic, cultural and professional environment.

2. The use of the mountains as a development tool to bridge the cultural and economic divide and build a foundation of trust and authentic relationship in the group

In the mountains the international participants and the Nepali group will build meaningful relationships in a learning environment that can be adventurous, challenging and gentle at the same time. We use the mountains to create a space for connection with oneself, each other and Nepal. We will time in the mountains without requiring special experience in hiking or too much mountain fitness. Nepal is the home of the Himalayas - we will walk through villages and connect with the rural Nepali life as we make our way through the mountains. On foot we explore the surrounding mountains of Kathmandu along with our Nepali peers. Our guides are experienced Nepali mountaineers who bring their own story to the course and thus enrich the multifaceted experience of Nepal. Friendships across any perceived or actual differences are built quickly in the mountains on a joint trek when challenges, achievements and moments of beauty become shared experiences.

3. Focus on personal development and self-awareness

Unlike many other international immersion programs we focus on the importance of acknowledging the personal transformation process that inevitably accompanies this international experience in Nepal. The exposure and immersion in a cultural, social and economic context, possibly counter opposite to one's own, leads to the emergences of many questions. Often a process of re-evaluation of one's personal values and societal norms can be part of our experience. We use a considerable time in the mountains towards the beginning of the course to set the tone, establish trust and allow for self-reflection and intention setting. This is done with the group of Nepali peers who are as much participants of the program as the international visitors. Regularly throughout the course reflective learning dialogues are facilitated from the early days in the mountains to the Community immersion days that follow.

4. Community and NGO immersion:

During the community immersion part of the course the Nepali peers/colleagues are met in their own workplace environments – now professional and cultural “deep dives” are facilitated through one or more of the following components:

- Observation of local practice (Clinics, Schools, Community Development projects, Family Support Outreach, Children's Homes and Care Centers, ...) through a range of NGO visits and engagement with local agencies
- Work shadowing of Nepali Social Work peers by way of 3 or more Day Internship Placements in our partnering NGOs
- Home Stays in the local communities
- Providing service to Nireka Adventures partners: research, programme involvement, systems development and/or facility improvement.

Because of the foundation of trust and friendship that has been built between the international and Nepali participants in the mountains the conversations and critical engagement with each other in the workplace has depth and authenticity. Maximum learning in the short time of exposure and engagement is thus possible.

5. Multi Stakeholder Learning Forum

A facilitated forum centered around critical issues discussed in a Nepali and global context -

At the end of the two to three week experience we may organize a Learning Forum with relevant Nepali role players and stakeholders from Educational, Government, Corporate and/or Public sectors. This conference day aims at offering a multitude of perspectives of the topic of social justice in development in Nepal. Thus the personal experiences of the previous two weeks of the course will be contextualized.