

Nepalgunj, 29.04.2018

## Simikot or The gateway to Mount Kailash

While writing about Simikot I am sitting here in Nepalgunj which is a 45min flight away and the main trading and connecting city in the west of Nepal. All flights to the mountain and northwestern districts are going via this city right next to the border to India. It is dusty and busy, the streets are filled with „thempas“ (little motor rickshas) and it's 30 degrees already at 10 am in the morning. That's a bit of a harsh weather change compared to the rough mountain climate in Simikot. Only two hours ago I was wearing a sweater and my rain jacket and was still not feeling exactly warm. I wish a bit of the mountain wind would find its way down here. I fear I'll just be melted away until my bus arrives here tonight at 6.30 pm. It will be a cosy and comfortable night in the bus until I will hopefully reach Kathmandu tomorrow morning.



Compared to the 7 days of hiking the flight just now seemed like a wink of an eye and although it was really loud in the plane and also a bit shaky I really enjoyed the view during the flight. I could watch the mountains becoming smaller and smaller until they disappeared and instead of them there were dusty and brown fields and a few minutes later we already landed in Nepalgunj. Luckily I could follow a young man from Simikot to the Karnali Hotel, a hotel owned by a young guy from Simikot, where I'm sitting now, spending my time procrastinating (and melting away) and waiting for my bus in the evening.



My days in Simikot passed so fast, although I spent almost a week (6 days) there. Simikot really is a special place so I want to tell you something about it. Simikot itself has an altitude of about 3.000m above sea level and is surrounded by some very impressive, snow-covered mountains. From there, it would only take 3 days to walk to Tibet and with its little airport Simikot is the gateway to Mount Kailash, the sacred mountain of four different religions. That's also the main reason why you would find a lot of hotels in Simikot and funnily I spotted more tourists there in the first two days than during my whole time in Jumla. (Although Jumla has a road access which has a massive impact on the availability of goods and on their prize.) But also Simikot itself is worth a visit, even without seeing the Mount Kailash (that's how I did it... maybe if I come back someday I might want to see it too. But for now I was happy with the mountains and the nature around Simikot itself.) The nature here is really beautiful and still very pure. Because there is no road access, you won't find many vehicles in the streets of Simikot (and also not so many vehicle accessible roads) and therefore not much noise. Every now and then you can hear a tractor rolling and bumping over the uneven gravel roads but that's about it. It's also safer for the children, walking around in the city without the danger of crazy traffic. But therefore Simikot is also pretty much cut off of the rest of the world. There are some road constructions in progress but it will still take a very long time until they will actually connect to a bigger road system.



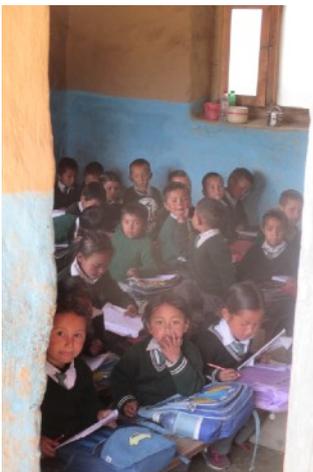
The main reason why I came to Simikot was because I wanted to visit the 4th branch of the Kailash Bodhi School here. The school came to Simikot in 2008 and a big L-shaped school building was built. The building is made of stones, clay and wood and has a very impressive mountain view from its gallery - which is running along the whole complex and which is connecting all the classrooms with each other and is accessible from the school yard (where the assembly are held) as well.

Tsewang Sir, the principal, told me that their school was the first building to introduce the blue metal roof to Simikot. (Which is a blue corrugated iron that is used to build the roofs.) If you have over the city rooftops, by now, 10 years later, you will find a lot of houses being topped with the blue-shining metal.

The building was in main parts financially supported by the „Patenschulen e.V“ organization located in Tübingen, Germany ([www.patenschulen.de](http://www.patenschulen.de)). Nowadays, they are still supporting 20-30% of the children by covering their school fees.



The school offers the unfortunately in Nepal still very rare chance for good education to about 400 children from Simikot and the surrounding villages. And luckily the school is sparking a change in the people's minds. The available spaces in the school are all filled and the parents care more about the education of their kids in these days. The school has a very good reputation in Simikot and the difference in the level of education between the Kailash Bodhi School and the state schools is very high. If a child changes from the KBS (Kailash Bodhi School) to the state school it has to be put 2 or 3 class levels higher than his peers. Also in school competitions within Simikot the participation of the KBS is mostly feared within the opponents from the other schools.



I visited the KBS in Simikot for a few days and it was interesting to see - especially because I've also been at the other two branches in Kathmandu and in Jumla. A lot of things are similar, like the school uniforms, the morning prayers, the school song and the structure of the lessons. But somehow it's of course also different because it's a different school with different teachers and students.

I didn't get to know everyone as well as in Jumla but I could also feel here as well, that the main importance is clearly set on the high level education. The English knowledge of the students from class 4 on (the same age as the youngest class I thought in Jumla) was mostly very good so they could understand me. I went to every class once to tell a bit about me and about Germany and to give them the possibility to ask some questions. And I really really enjoyed these classes because the students were so interested and it was so good to speak with them. (Although if I'm very honest I sometimes reached the limit of my knowledge as questions came up like: who was the very first king in Germany? Or who was the first scientist in Germany? Or what's Germany's national flower? - It's the Cornflower by the way... Also for the names of all the German football players I would have needed the help of my brothers. Oh yeah and also I was a bit unprepared when they asked me for my aim for life. Which was, interestingly, a question I got asked more than once.)



The days passed here as well faster than I thought they would. I spent the afternoons going for walks, enjoying the view and (of course) drinking Nepali tea and suddenly it was Saturday already. The Saturday is the only day off in Nepal so we planned on walking to Tsewang's (the principal) village called Torpa. He told me, that when he walked there 4 or 5 years ago with Winfrid and Barbara and some other members of the „Patenschulen“ organization it took them 4-5 hours because the path was so difficult to walk and went up and down along with the tops and the valleys of the hills. But when he went there with me, it only took us two hours, thanks to a big and almost straight road which is being built at the moment. It led us about half of the way. Then we followed a small, but therefore almost completely straight trek for the second half. We were walking quite fast, so it would be wrong to say that I wasn't tired and happy when we were back home in the evening. But I can imagine how much more difficult it must have been a few years back.

The walk was beautiful and took us along the hillside, the surrounding varying between trees, shallow bushes, grass and flowers, rocks and little streams. After some time we could see Simikot on the other side of the hill. It's not so very big (it only has about three to four thousand inhabitants) but compared to the little villages around Simikot with the small houses made of stone and covered with clay it looks big and modern. The runway which belongs to the small airport is the first thing you will see, but if you take a closer look you will also spot the school with its big L-shaped building and the blue roof. In the background behind Simikot you will see the snow-covered mountain range and in front of it there is the valley with the Karnali river.



After two hours of walk we reached Tsewang's village. It consists of about 20 houses and the entrance to it is marked by a big gate which is decorated with detailed paintings of gods and it protects three prayer wheels inside of it from wind, snow and rain.

The house of Tsewang's parents is situated on the lower end of the village. Beneath it there is a little garden with blossoming apple trees. The principal's mother made some really good rotis (thin breads) and tarkari (curry vegetables) for us and we had some real cow milk with a pinch of salt (which does taste better than it sounds like). It was very good and almost all of the food was locally grown and organic.

The house is big and warm and has a large and traditional living room and kitchen, where the whole family can sit around the fire together. Tsewang's mother was cooking on the fire, like almost all of the women here in the rural parts of Nepal do and it was quite interesting for me, to watch her while she was doing these very experienced movements. When we arrived we got a sacred scarf and a bit of ghee on our hair which is a blessing in the Buddhist tradition. (It also smells very sacred and automatically makes you feel like you haven't washed your holy hair in a very long time).



The view from the rooftop of the house (which is flat so the barley can be tried and beaten on it) was - if possible - even more stunning than on the way there. We could see even more mountain tops and valleys and I was absolutely happy to just sit there for a few hours, enjoy the view and see the eagles circling underneath me.

After 5 1/2 hours it was time for another ghee-blessing and to say goodbye (of course not without having some chia-tea before) and we walked back to Simikot. On our way back we got to see how the digger (that was used to build the big road) was being repaired, which was a nice and interesting break. We reached Simikot just in time before it started to rain ( a little bit). Back home, we had some very delicious Ti-Momos (which is the short form for Tibetan-Momos and tastes a little bit like a „Dampfnudel“/ steam-noodle just that it's salty and you eat it along with some vegetables, Dhal and tomato-prickle) and after a hot shower (yes you are so right - I was absolutely very exited about the luxury of having a hot shower here), I happily cuddled up under my blankets - at night it's still quite cold up here - and went to sleep.

The next morning it was time for me to say goodbye to Simikot and Tsewangs family and all I can say is, also here I was welcomed with so much kindness and care and I'm very thankful I got to see another so special place and got to meet such wonderful people.

Thank you - थान्क यौ