



2019

LAWUDO TREK REPORT

Live with compassion. Work with compassion. Die with compassion.

Meditate with compassion. Enjoy with compassion.

When problems come, experience them with compassion.

— Lama Zopa Rinpoche



All of our group with guides and porters in front of Lawudo Gumpa with, center, Rinpoche's brother and sister, Sangay-la and Ani Samten-la, and Ven. Robina.
Photo Ven. Khadro.

Lawudo Treks have raised US\$74,000 so far

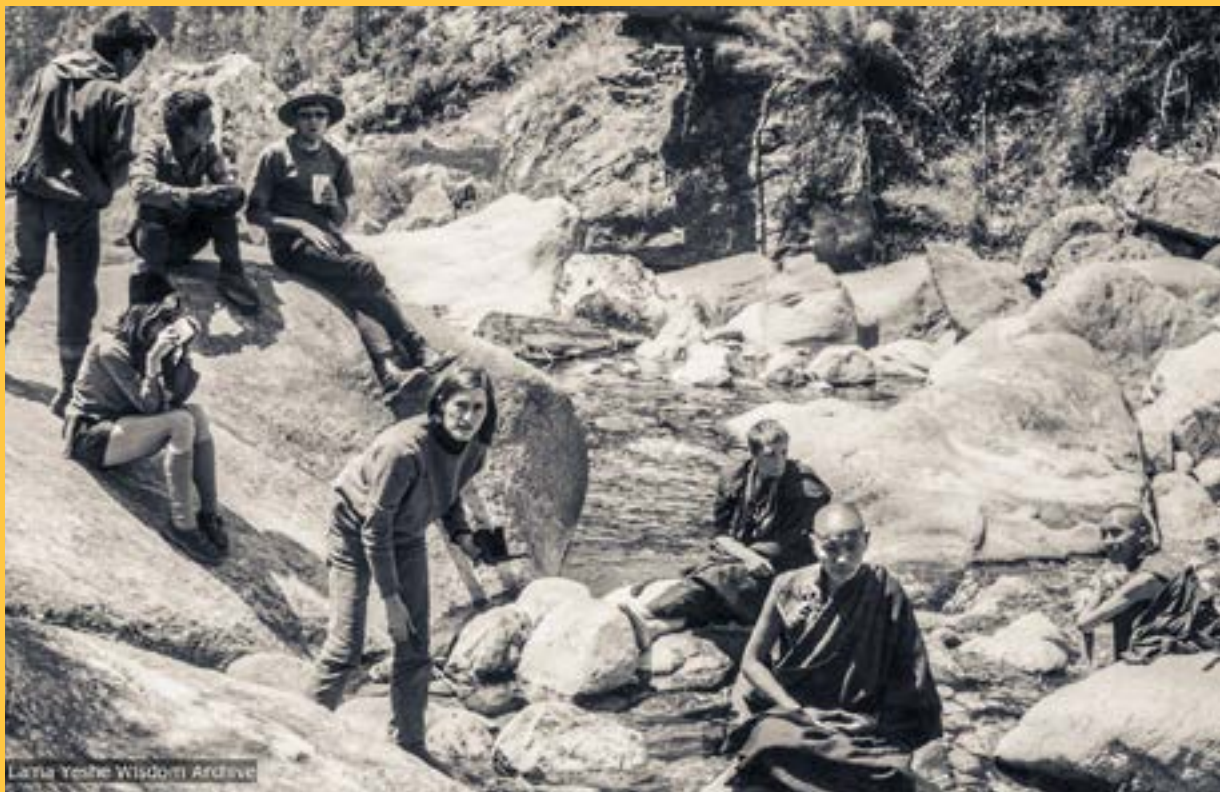
JULY 2019 | KRISTINA MAH

Twenty-six people participated in this year's Lawudo Trek, 21 March – 4 April, our third. We started with two days at Kopan, Lama Zopa Rinpoche's monastery in Kathmandu, and after four days of walking, accompanied by our amazing Amber Tamang and his team, we spent five days in retreat at Rinpoche's cave and monastery, 14,000 feet above sea level on the side of a mountain in Everest National Park in Solu Khumbu, the lower Himalayas.

As with previous years, \$500 of the cost for each person has been offered to Lawudo. Half of the donation goes to a project close to Rinpoche's heart: building a replica of Guru Rinpoche's Pure Land, *Zangdok Palri* – Glorious

Copper-Colored Mountain – at Lawudo. The other half of our fundraising goes to Sangay Sherpa-la, Rinpoche's brother and director of Lawudo, to use for maintenance and development.

We raised an additional \$19,000 last year for improvements at Lawudo, which, including the \$55,000 from the treks themselves, brings our total since 2017 to \$74,000. During our time at Lawudo we have observed that the three issues that have enormous impact on livability at Lawudo are water, electricity and cooking – and they are all inextricably linked. A fourth, toilets, affects the comfort of the older residents of Lawudo and the visitors who come to retreat year-round.



The first time Western students of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche trekked up to Lawudo, spring 1969. Photo Judy Weitznaer.

Participants from the 2018 Lawudo Trek were inspired to help solve these problems. Doug Kirkpatrick, MaryEllen Kirkpatrick, and Scott Johnson analyzed problems and discussed solutions with Sangay-la. Amber, once back in Kathmandu, also provided advice on costs of materials, labor and transport.

The project was initiated by Ven. Robina and managed locally by MaryEllen. We raised the funds, and in autumn 2019, MaryEllen returned to Lawudo for two months to oversee the first installation of the improvements:

- six solar panels that power the electricity to the gompa, library and house
- eight toilet seats and two commodes
- a new main stove – now smoke no longer fills the kitchen!
- an induction stove and new pots and pans installed better-quality wiring in Rinpoche's rooms above the cave
- provided heated mattress pads for Ani-la and other full-time residents
- provided the means to heat the water in the bath house
- mattresses and pillows and other small homely touches in the guest rooms to make them more comfortable.

“Forget sex, drugs and rock and roll – attachment to them is nothing in comparison with our attachment to comfort!”

— VEN. ROBINA

We will continue to support the projects and improvements at Lawudo however we can. You can read more about the Lawudo Improvement Projects [here](#).

Since then also, availability of water has been radically improved. Sangay-la informed us that his long-held wish for a pipeline to bring water directly to Lawudo from a lake in the mountains, a full-day's walk away, has finally been realized. The pipeline meanders for more than five kilometers across two mountain passes.

Now Lawudo and villages in the area have running water twenty-four hours a day. This is really amazing! We'd



“The trek was challenging and amazing all at the same time. It brought out so many of our good qualities.”

— JUNE



often be reminded by Sangay-la and Ani Samten-la, Rinopche's sister who manages Lawudo day to day, of the preciousness of water and the sometimes dire scenarios of having to wait for the snow or rain to fall in order to have water. Even Amber commented on the immense luxury of having running water, as some parts of Kathmandu, including his suburb, have to buy tank water for their household needs.

We started our journey together, as always, on a hill north of Boudhanath. Ven.

Robina had arrived a week earlier to give a course.

This year, our trekkers came from eight different countries, more than either of our previous treks – Australia, Austria, Germany, Great Brittan, Mauritius, Poland, Slovakia, and the USA. Another interesting fact from this year's group was that we had the most widely distributed age range. Our oldest and youngest members, Donna Richeson and Reece Richeson, also happened to be related

Top:

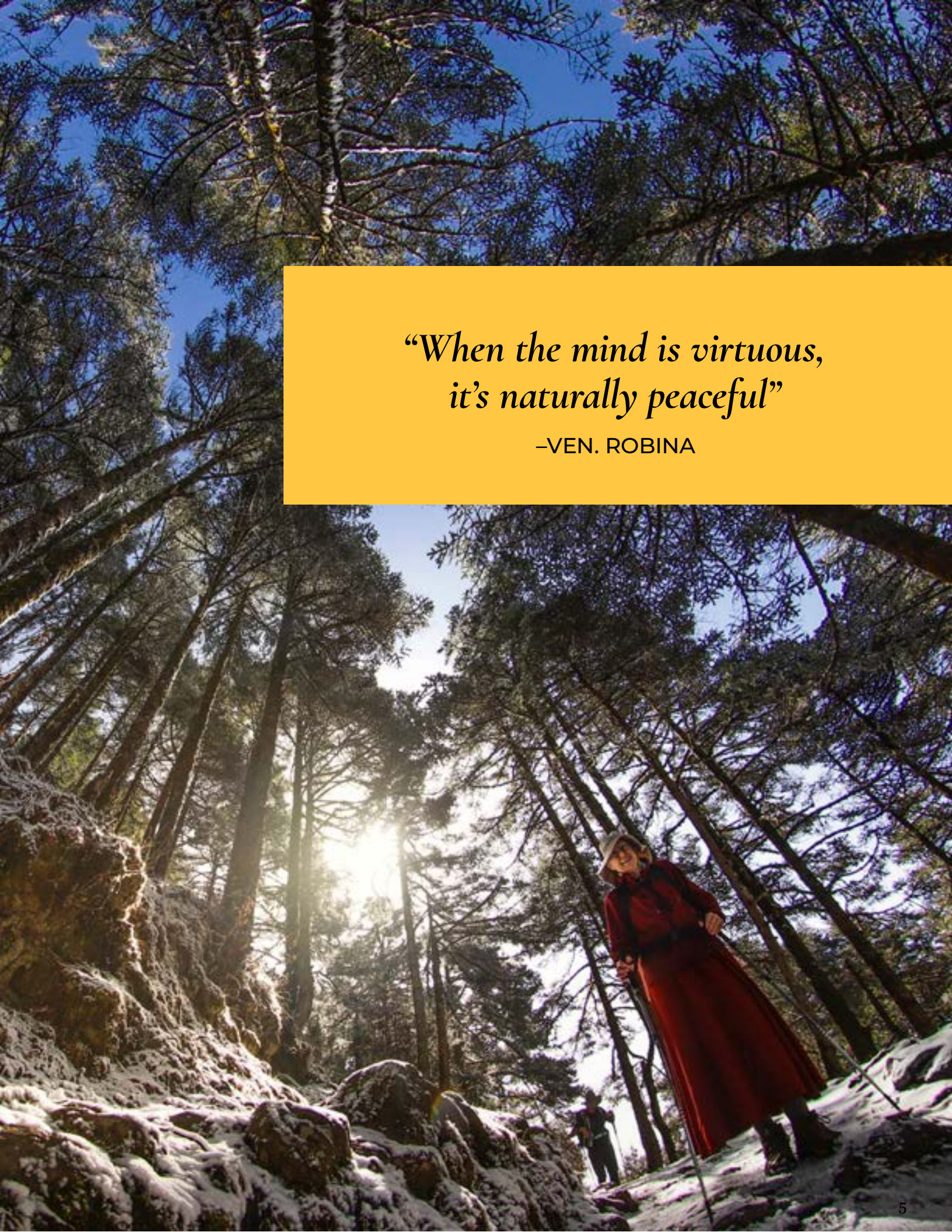
All of us in front of the Sherpa Lodge at Phakding on the second day of walking. After yoga with Ewa, Ven. Robina led us in a short prayer and reminded us to keep an expansive motivation as we continued our journey to Lawudo. *Photo Kristina Mah.*

Bottom:

(Left to right) Ioana, Reece, Chuck, Ewa and Sharon listening intently to Ven. Robina in the meditation room in Zamlung Guesthouse, our Namche lodge. *Photo Kristina Mah.*

Page 5:

Ven. Chödrön in the pine forest after entering Sargamatha (Everest) National Park. *Photo Ioana Brănişteanu.*



*“When the mind is virtuous,
it’s naturally peaceful”*

–VEN. ROBINA

*“Venerable
Robina helps us
shake free (even
temporarily)
of the small,
‘self-pity-me’
ego mind.
What greater gift
could there be?”*

— KEVIN



Top left:

Donna and Reece, our grandmother and grandson team, walking together between Namche and Lawudo.
Photo Kristina Mah.

Top right:

(Left to right) Soojita, Kai, Catherine, Sharon who also joined us in 2017, Richard, Ven, Chödrön and Bill happily accustomed to the suspension bridges.
Photo Ioana Brănișteanu.

Bottom:

Namche Bazaar at sunrise covered in a blanket of snow. *Photo Kristina Mah.*

as grandmother and grandson.

“Being able to do this trip with Reece was a blessing, because he had no background in Buddhism at all,” said Donna. “He had his own anxiety about the trek, and I was amazed at how much he really loved it... The generosity of relatedness toward Reece was so noticeable. Everyone was so kind, so related, so willing to jump

in and help when needed.”

As usual, we received teachings from Ven. Robina at Kopan before setting off on the trek. Many of the group had never walked up a mountain before. Telling us about her own first time – our first trek in 2017 – she recalled how difficult it was. “Forget sex, drugs and rock and roll – attachment to them is nothing in



Top:

Ven. Robina gave us a teaching in the cosy cafe at Mount Kailash Lodge at Monjo. The cafe lattes were appreciated.

Photo Kristina Mah

Bottom:

Walking together up the hill after Namche. (Left to right) Monique, Soojita, Catherine, Ven. Chödrön, Richard, Kai, Bill, and Christine. *Photo Glen Mahoney.*



comparison with our attachment to comfort!"

In a meeting earlier, Ven. Robina received blessed pills, "for immortality," from Rinpoche for each person in our group with the advice to take one every day. They were from Maratika, a holy place related to Guru Rinpoche.

The following morning we set off from Kopan. Over the past three years, we have thankfully improved our efficacy of negotiating the 4am departure from Kopan to catch the first flight out from Kathmandu to Lukla. This year it ran as smoothly as it ever has, and we arrived at

Lukla's Himalayan Trekking Lodge for breakfast to be greeted by Dawa Sherpa-la, the widely-known lodge owner in the region.

After breakfast, Ven. Robina, escorted by one of our guides Mahesh, went to catch their first helicopter to Phakding. Earlier in the year, Ven. Robina had informed us about her

torn meniscus. We happily arranged helicopters for all the legs of the journey from Lukla to Lawudo and back for her and others.

Seventy-four-year-old Donna, however, decided to walk. She managed the entire way to Lawudo. It was truly inspiring. "The trek combined with altitude was much



more strenuous than I anticipated,” she recalls. “I did not really comprehend how difficult it would be. I think it boiled down to just sheer will power for me to get up there.”

Many of our group reflected on the sensation of outward physical challenges and the inner joy of experience. “The trek was challenging and amazing all at the same time. It brought out so many of our good qualities. The kindness and generosity of all who were part of the trek,” said June.

“I was in awe every day of the magnificence and splendor of the mountains,” she continued. “The people and the animals all living and working in such beautiful yet harsh environment. I found that all this translated into my inner journey in a positive way.”



June came on the trek with two friends, Jane and Deb, from the FPMT center, Langri Tangpa, in Brisbane, Australia. Jane had a similar feelings. “Amber stated right at the start of the trek that we were beginning as a group and that we would support and care for each other to finish as a group – no one would be left behind. And they delivered on this promise – friendly, knowledgeable companions who created all the conditions for us to succeed and were always there beside anyone who needed extra support before they even knew it was needed. My most cherished memory was when Man (one of our guides) walked back down the mountain from Lawudo with hot, sweet tea and biscuits for Donna and myself – best cup of tea I have ever had!”



Lawudo offers majestic views of the Himalayan mountain ranges. There was no question that we could feel the powerful energy. It is a holy place that great teachers, beings and meditators have blessed with their presence. Nevertheless, the hurdles of the journey of getting to Lawudo are matched with challenges of the day-to-day retreat experience in the extreme and remote setting. It is a rare opportunity, to

Top:

Amber and Glen. *Photo Harald Weichhardt.*

Middle:

(Left to right) Richard, Bill and Chuck at our farewell dinner. *Photo Kristina Mah.*

Bottom:

(Left to right) Christine and Catherine enjoying the delicious tea at Mende, overlooking the Khumbu Valley before the last hill to Lawudo. *Photo Dawn Mills.*



*“I felt I was
being taken
care of by
big sisters
and brothers.”*

— SOOJITA



combine the physically challenging journey to Lawudo, while practicing awareness of our thoughts and emotions at each step of the way.

Our retreat at Lawudo is the heart of this entire adventure with Ven. Robina. The environment at Lawudo provides a fertile sanctuary for putting into practice what we were listening to in Ven. Robina's teachings. Kevin, a long-time student of Ven. Robina's was in the area and joined us for part of our retreat. “Venerable Robina helps us shake free (even temporarily) of the small, ‘self-pity-me’ ego mind. What greater gift could there be?” he said.

For some of our group, this was their



Top:

(Left to right) Ani Samten-la, Sangay-la and Ven. Robina with Kristina in the background as we said our goodbyes.
Photo Monique Potts.

Middle:

(Left to right) Dawn, Soojita, Ewa and Glen in tree pose after lunchtime yoga session in front of Rinpoche's cave.
Photo Berit Krausse.

Bottom:

(Left to right) Reece, Sharon and Christine admiring the view from Kunsang Yeshe's *chorten* that looks over Lawudo. There is a plan to repair it after it was damaged in the 2015 earthquake.
Photo Kristina Mah.



Top left:

Ani Samtem-la enjoying the sunshine on the gompa steps.
Photo Harald Weichhardt.

Top right:

The warmest building at Lawudo where we would gather for dinner. Inside is the main kitchen and dining room.
Photo Harald Weichhardt.

Bottom:

Those who walked back to Lukla farewell the Monjo lodge family owners who took care of us. We were all blissed out from the retreat.

first experience of a Buddhist retreat. “I’ve had an interest in Buddhism for many years but never really got it or knew what to do about it,” said Dawn. “This is one of the reasons I went on the trek – I wanted to know and try to understand more, and the trek and retreat gave me this. It brought lots of disparate ideas, previous reading and experiences together and has provided me with a path and a teacher that I

can now follow.”

Donna felt that the trek up to Lawudo returned her to “that tender place in her heart.” Invoking “a sense of how things existed decades and centuries ago – very elemental, very peaceful, each person fulfilling their useful role. To hear Dharma teachings within this context was beyond special. Who would not immediately fall in love with Ani-la Samten!!”

Alison thought our group dynamic worked really well and felt we really gelled well. “Robina was amazing as always”, she said. “She explains things so well for the Western mind!”

Soojita was touched by the “team spirit” of the group. “I felt I was being taken care of by big sisters and brothers. I did not feel afraid or doubtful at any time... And Venerable Robina – Wow!! Meeting her has



We met Rinpoche with Ven. Robina just in time at Khachoe Ghakyil Ling Nunnery. Nuns in the foreground of the photo (below) were greeting Rinpoche with the *gyleings* as we approached Rinpoche's car. Ven. Robina offered Rinpoche a statue of Guru Rinpoche from all of us and we received his blessing before he walked into the gompa to give teachings. Photos Bill Kane (top left and bottom) and Monique Potts (top right).

been like an enormous wake up call. I cannot put in words."

The conditions of a retreat in the Himalayas make the Dharma so visceral. In one of the first teachings with Ven. Robina at Kopan, she reminded us of the advice that Rinpoche had given her that by doing

prayers and practices and receiving teachings during such a trek or while doing a pilgrimage to the holy places of the Buddha, people feel they are "more than a tourist."

Sangay-la told us during our first trek that so many people come to Nepal and never see or do anything related to Dharma. Doing this trek to Lawudo and doing a retreat there is the best kind of trekking, the most beneficial.

The retreat over, we made our way down to Lukla, most walking and many taking helicopters. Astonishingly, Ven. Robina showed a surge of energy, lightness and painlessness in her knee. She proved her agility when she walked so fast down from Lawudo to Mende at the bottom of the hill, that she had to wait at the helipad for the others in her group to catch up! "I've no idea



An auspicious end to an auspicious trek! Photo Bill Kane.

what happened!” she said. “It was effortless running down that hill.”

Part of our luggage in the helicopter were two sacks of delicious Lawudo potatoes – one for Rinpoche and one for the nuns of Kachoe Ghakyil Nunnery, gifts from Ani Samten-la and everyone at Lawudo.

At first, the helicopter had no interest in carrying potatoes. Ridiculous, they thought! A complete waste of space. Finally, after telling them that the potatoes were for Rinpoche, who is famous and loved in the area, they happily let them on board. And Buddha Air, who flew us down to Kathmandu, did not charge us for excess baggage for the potatoes when they learned who they were for.

We decided to request a quick meeting with Rinpoche, to tell him about our experience this year and to offer a statue of Guru Rinpoche

– and our potatoes. We heard he was heading down the hill to give a teaching at the nunnery. Ven. Roger, Rinpoche’s attendant, agreed and said we should meet Rinpoche at the foot of the steps at Kopan, just before Rinpoche got into the car.

At our hotel, we piled into two vans but soon realised that we wouldn’t make it – the traffic was terrible. We texted Ven. Roger; but he replied we were too late. Rinpoche had already left. Ven. Robina urged us on. She seemed unfazed by the impossibility of our goal. She said we must continue to make the effort no matter what the result!

We decided to aim for the nunnery instead, which was closer to us than Kopan, hoping there would be a moment to meet Rinpoche before he walked into the gomba. As we approached, we spotted Rinpoche’s car pulling up to the gate – again, too

late. But no, the watchman couldn’t be found to open the gate! We all leaped out of the vans and jogged behind Rinpoche’s car to greet Rinpoche at the gomba entrance, just as he stepped out.

Rinpoche was so kind, greeting us so warmly and laughing delightedly. Ven. Robina offered Rinpoche our statue of Guru Rinpoche and I explained how much we had raised since our first trek and how the money was allocated.

An auspicious ending to a very auspicious trek!

Join us in October, 2020!

Visit LAWUDO-TREK.ORG

Email hello@lawudo-trek.org

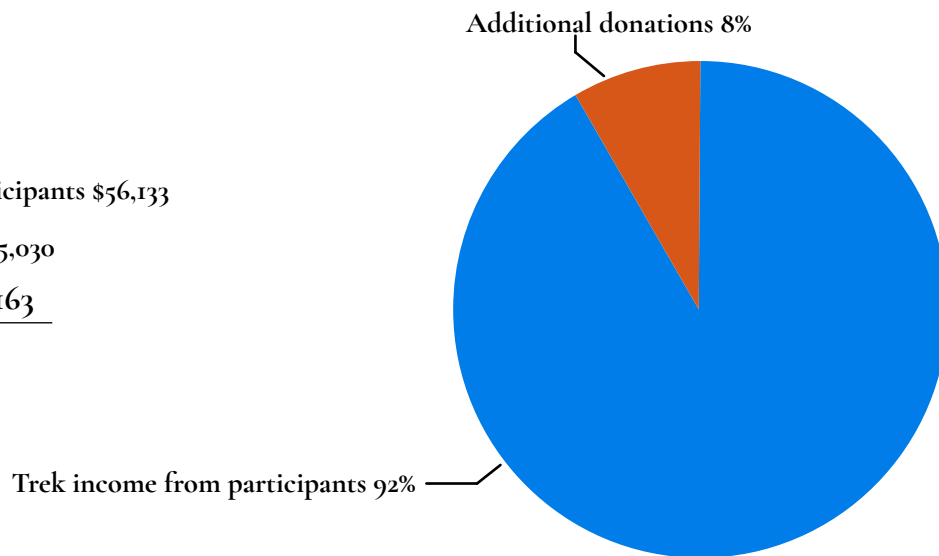
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2019 TREK INCOME

Trek income from participants \$56,133

Additional donations \$5,030

Total income = \$61,163



2019 TREK EXPENSES

Accommodation and food \$14,160

Administration \$3,230

Bank fees \$2,251

Course materials \$849

Donations \$13,250

Flights \$15,461

Ground transport \$600

Marketing \$730

National Park entry fees \$1,196

Public liability insurance \$703

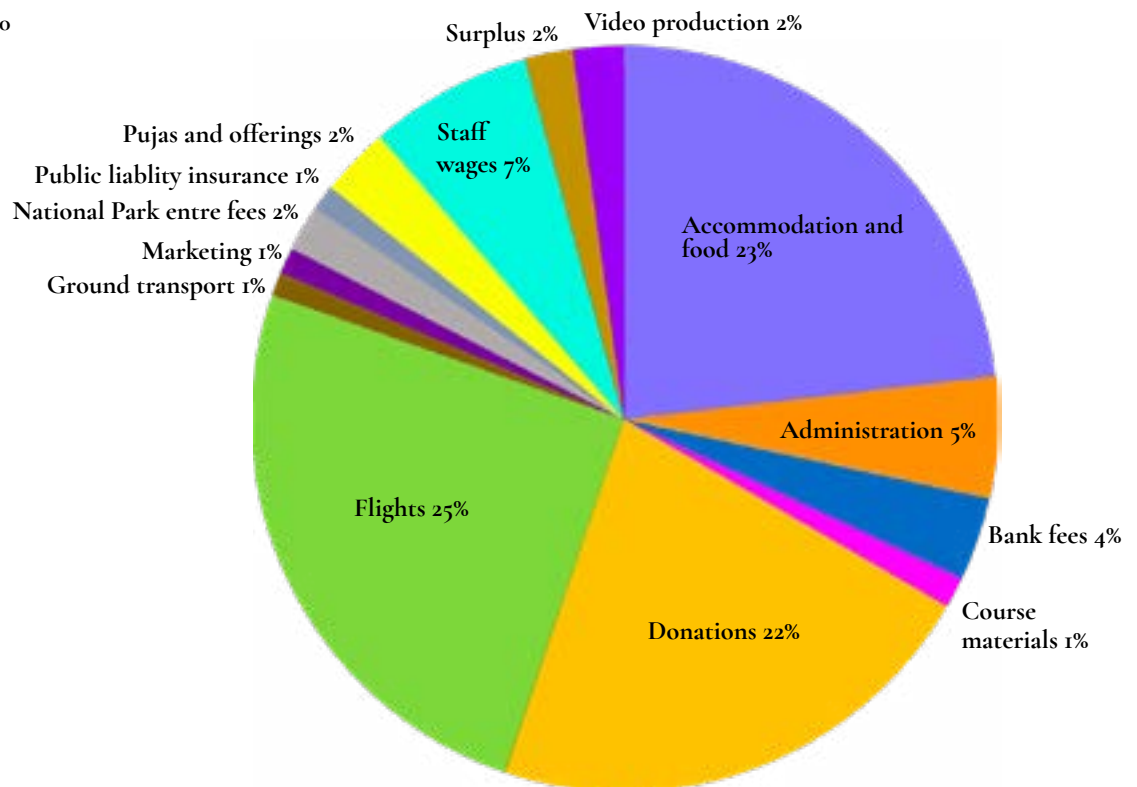
Pujas and offerings \$1,803

Staff wages \$4,300

Surplus \$1,280

Video production \$1,350

Total expenses = \$61,163



Join us in October, 2020 for the Fourth Annual Lawudo Trek!

FOURTH ANNUAL LAWUDO TREK

1–15 OCTOBER 2020

Join Ven. Robina Courtin for our fourth annual fifteen-day Himalayan adventure in October 2020 – from Kopan, Lama Zopa Rinpoche's monastery in the Kathmandu valley, to his cave in Solu Khumbu in the mountains of Nepal. **The US\$2,285 package includes US\$500 donation to Lawudo, internal flights, teachings, food and accommodation.**

In 2019, 26 participants raised US\$13,250 for Lawudo. Our three Lawudo Treks have offered some US\$55,000 to Rinpoche's Cave and Monastery and to Rinpoche's Guru Rinpoche Pure Land (Zangdok Palri) at Lawudo.



All of our 26 trekkers, with Sangay-la, Ani Samten-la, our guides and porters and Lawudo staff at Lawudo Gumpa, April, 2019. Photo Ven. Thubten Khadro.

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PROFITS GO TO LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE'S CAVE AND PROJECTS AT LAWUDO



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