

Best Birthday Ever!

Description

The most unusual one, anyway. Unique. What made it so? That's the goal of this week's post — to tell this tale.

As far as celebrations go, my 69th will probably be the acme of unusual birthdays, as I don't see it being surpassed next year for my 70th birthday, or beyond. (Although having more of my family around would make it so!)

Having another lull in the work, coinciding with the Chinese New Year celebration closing down the Hong Kong office for a couple of days, we decided to go on another excursion to see more of what Nepal has to offer.

We searched online and settled on Sapana Village Lodge, a very serene, peaceful (Sapana means Dream in Nepali) oasis as the place we would stay Monday and Tuesday night and experience the delights of a two-day tour package.

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Our room



Very nice!





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Of obvious interest to Taunya!



Eager to get back into gardening

Sapana Village Lodge is right next to Chitwan National Park, which is located in the Terai, the subtropical southern part of Nepal. The first national park in Nepal, Chitwan National Park has been designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site “in recognition of its unique biological resources of outstanding universal value.” No kidding!





The best thing happened shortly after we arrived. We got to feed an afternoon snack to the “retired” (from tourist-riding service) elephants (all of whom were female). Given a basket of fruit (apples, unpeeled bananas, watermelon chunks) and vegetables (potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower) — with a little trepidation at first (which soon vanished) — we gingerly held out the snacks and were enthralled as a powerful trunk reached out and waited for us to put it in the tip (nostrils?!). Thus firmly clutched (maybe

even with a little suction!) she curled her trunk around to deposit the goodies in her mouth. Then stretched it back for more! I had a powerful feeling flow through me while touching the trunk, the ear, and looking up into the gentle, intelligent eyes of this magnificent creature. It was unforgettable!

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The early-next-morning canoe trip took us down the river at the edge of the jungle. What a glorious ride! Taunya took some amazing photos. So many birds to see! And more than one crocodile (snout — actually head) and lair. (We saw many more of them and more than their snouts later that day.)







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Mugger crocodile



Croc lair









Leaving the canoe, we walked through the jungle to where we would have breakfast and saw a rhino from across a clearing!

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Walking in the jungle







Rhino with bird on board

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Built by termites, a very solid home!

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Explaining the difference between elephant poop and rhino poop

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Breakfast!

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Vines like pythons choking trees

The afternoon jeep safari took us deep into the jungle to look for more wildlife. We missed seeing any wild elephants or tigers, but our guide pointed out footprints of both. We also saw deer and peacocks and more crocodiles on the opposite bank of the river and in the breeding center. And another rhinoceros up close as it came near and sauntered across the road right in front of us!

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Ready to safari!



Tiger footprint

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Elephant footprint

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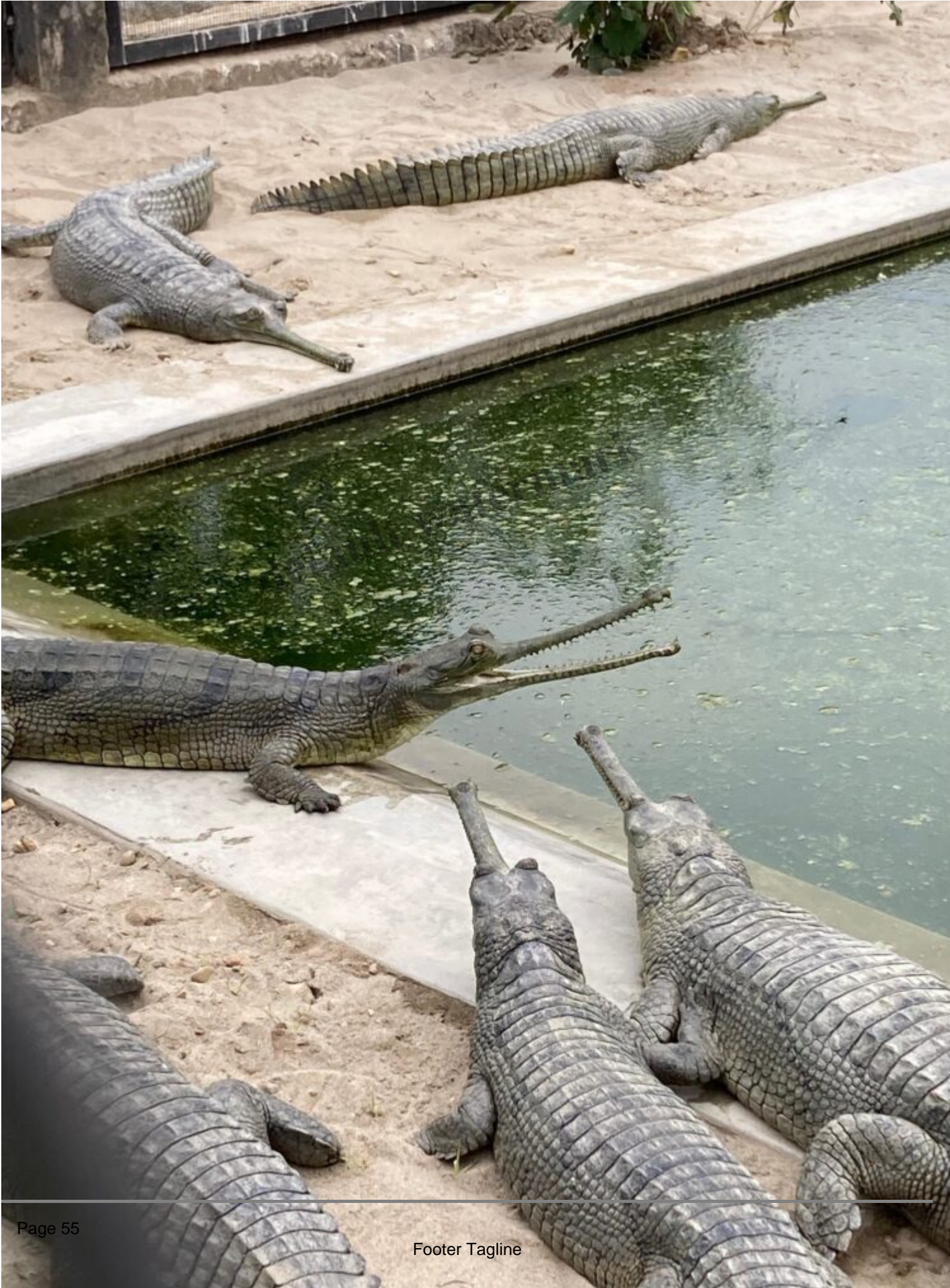
In the wild

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Gharial crocodile at breeding center

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Peacock strutting his stuff

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Spotted deer



Can you spot it?











To end our fantastic day!

We met as part of our group some delightful people, who we got to know a little. Dennis and Laura, a young vacationing couple from Frankfurt, Germany. She is an HR professional for air traffic controllers, and he works for a banking startup. Isabel, a professor of biology at the University of Porto, Portugal, was there with a group of colleagues, mainly to attend a conference. She accompanied us to the Tharu Cultural Dance celebration Monday night, where, at a general invitation from the performers, Taunya strutted her stuff!

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The nearby village we visited



Typical house



Typical sight

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Rare sight (we hardly ever see horses here)

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Kids being kids

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As close as we got to seeing a real tiger

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Drying millet



Elephant bathtime

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Shaking dirt off her food

<http://firstthreeodds.org/wpcontent/uploads/2024/02/elephants-getting-walked.mp4>

<http://firstthreeodds.org/wpcontent/uploads/2024/02/lively-goat-herd.mp4>

Other animal sightings

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The badminton court we used before leaving (in the far left)

All in all, a most memorable excursion, and a reminder of the beauties of creation and the marvelous workings of the natural world. But while there are so many more of these types of experiences that could fill to overflowing anyone's bucket list, I think the best-yet-to-come will completely overshadow anything this world has to offer.

As recorded in Scripture — Isaiah 64:4 —

For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.

— and echoed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:9 —

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

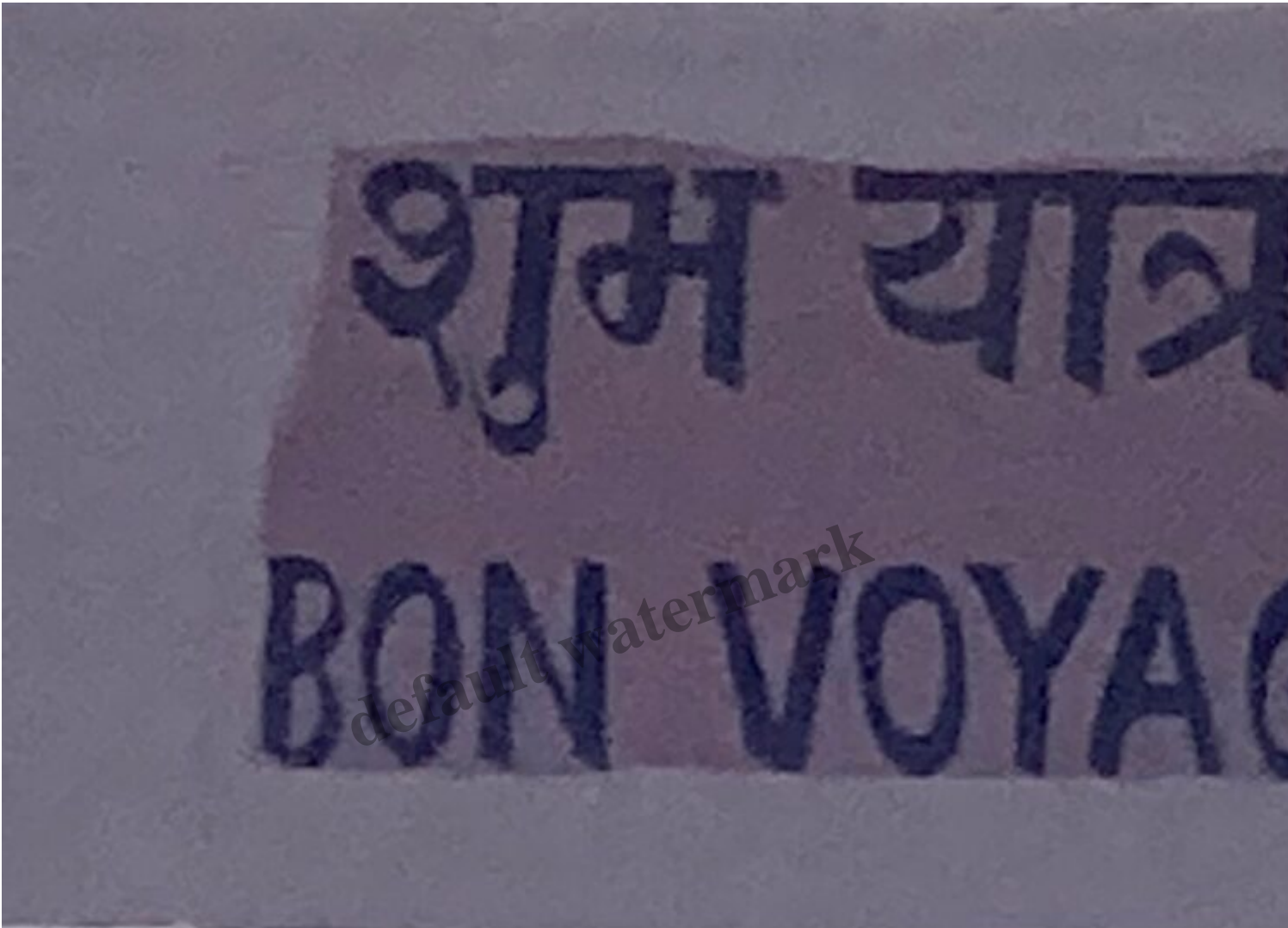
Loving God and waiting for Him. It will be worth the wait!

Another entry for the [“Whose Language Is This, Anyway?”](#) file:



The British use the first three meanings, we Americans mostly use the fourth.

And one for the “Who Would’ve Thought We Would See This in a Nepali Airport?” file:



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