

It's not every day that you get to cross the country's border in a car, and if you are talking about going to a country that is as beautiful as Nepal, then there's not much that can beat that.

There were eight of us. Vineet and I were the designated drivers from ScoutMyTrip and the rest were bloggers who signed up to write and chronicle our journey into the Himalayan ex-kingdom. We decided to cross at the Sunauli checkpoint and, therefore, started from Gorakhpur in our vehicles. I was driving the old Scorpio 2600 CC beast and Vineet the new-age ford Ecosport Petrol.

We left Gorakhpur at 4:00 am to reach the border—90-km away at 6:30

The Nepal connect

Deepak Ananth comes on a cross-country roadtrip to Nepal from India

Traveller's Tales



am. A quick cup of tea and after completing the formalities, we got the SIM cards to access internet and calls in Nepal. A tip — the border has many stores that give you SIM cards. Choose the Ncell cards, follow the instructions to recharge a daily or 3-day data package.

Time seems to twaddle slowly in Nepal. A quick breakfast turned out to be a long drawn affair, but we weren't complaining. The views and vistas were to die for! Bread and omelettes, and *parathas* were gulped down with copious amounts of tea and the team proceeded.

We were to cross the Narayanghat section of this road before 11:00 am after which the roads would be closed for renovation. Most of the roads in this section are under construction, therefore, the travel was slow. We reached Narayanghat at 10:30 am to be greeted with a huge line and were informed that the road was closed till 5:00 pm! A quick check on Google gave us an alternate route. After checking with the local officials, we proceeded towards Hetauda.

Driving on these roads would be tough. There are more stones and slush, and treacherous mountain terrains that welcomed us to the Chitwan forest roads. We were slow on the narrow single lane path that took us up and away into the mountains. The Scorpio climbed the terrain with ease while the Ecosport struggled many times at the hairpin bends. But with a few pit stops to cool the engine, we managed to reach the summit.

The roads are full of diversions due to construction. There are no petrol

stations on the route so filling up as you enter the border is a must. Toilets and restaurants are also far and few in between. Start early as the minimum time to cross this belt is around 14 hours and the distance less than 250-km! In certain places, we had to get down and push the cars through slush and rubble as the wheels would not get traction. Each stretch of basic roads would get cheers from the team and the only thing that kept us going were the views and pure adrenaline.

The last 20-km into Kathmandu took us one and a half hour! A final check at the city border and we entered the town at around 9:00 pm. Tired, dirty but extremely satisfied, we had successfully travelled the border crossing that most people do not take. Truly a road less travelled.

A few lessons that we took away from this trip:

1. Always plan for an exigency. We had noted route alternatives well in advance and were sure that the directions that we were heading in are correct.
2. Carry lots of water and snacks with you. Fruits and dry fruits or energy bars are always handy.
3. Try to keep an offline map handy. If you are comfortable using paper maps, then great, else the offline Google maps are a must. Network is dicey and rerouting the directions in the mountain range creates havoc!
4. Always, always please keep a happy constitution. It is tough going on nonexistent roads! So learn to enjoy the drive. The drive is tough, but the best

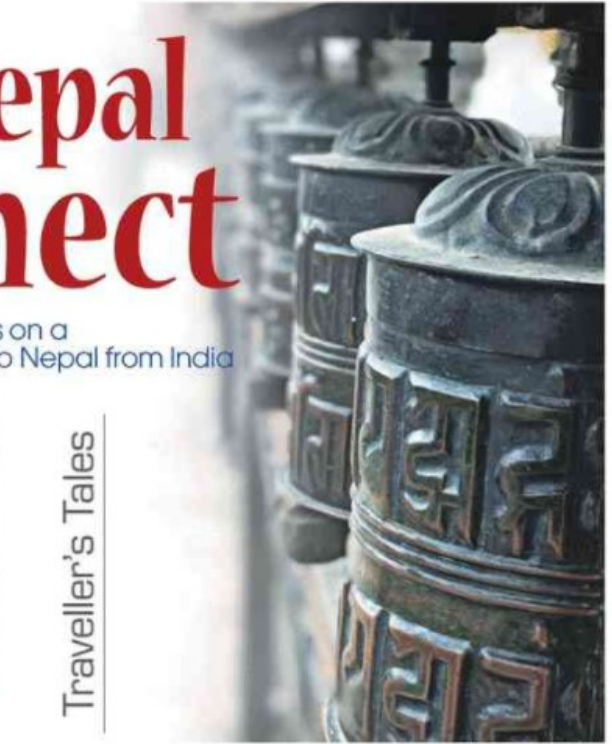
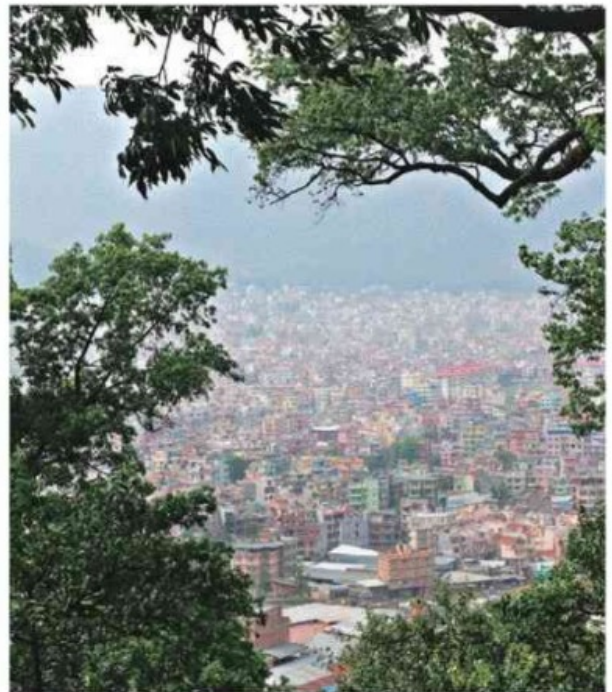


Photo: Courtesy Deepak Ananth



things in life are not easy. Every turn showed us a different portion of the mountain that took our breath away. Nature is in full bloom all along the road, river beds curving gently below us, the majestic trees towering all around us, the nippy biting cool breeze that rejuvenates every curve and removes the bone tiredness that you feel, makes for an unforgettable experience.

Nepal is a beautiful land, raw in welcome, but welcoming nevertheless. Do plan to drive there once at least and you will not regret it!



The author is the co-founder of Scoutmytrip.com — a travel website that helps people plan their road trips better. The team travelled to Nepal in association with OYO Rooms