



Hiking in Pokhara, Nepal

Highlights From Our February - May 2024 Educational Trips To Nepal, Bhutan, Switzerland, Sri Lanka and Edinburgh's Newest Hotel - 100 Princes Street

Dear Friends,

As befits a 20-year anniversary of Rebecca Recommends, we have been busily traveling since the start of 2024. Read on for highlights of the FAM trips we have hosted so far this year, including in [Nepal](#), [Bhutan](#), [Sri Lanka](#), [Switzerland](#), and [Edinburgh](#). There are so many wonderful images from these FAM trips that we couldn't share them all in this highlights newsletter. Please visit [HERE](#) for our expanded gallery.

The Rebecca Recommends team also had the opportunity to travel to Croatia with in-country specialists, [Dinaric Adventures](#), spent wonderful nights with [The Red Carnation Hotel Collection](#) and [The Hari](#) in London, and enjoyed the incomparable hospitality of [Park Hotel Kenmare](#) in Ireland.

On the horizon is Africa with [Exeter Safari Company](#), Greece with [Curated Greece](#), and Egypt with [Exeter Safari Company](#) and [Kazazian Cruises](#). In 2025, we are heading to Australia and New Zealand with the award-winning [Southern Crossings](#) and Croatia with [Dinaric Adventures](#). We look forward to sharing these FAM highlights with you too.

Hosting FAM trips is just a small part of the Rebecca Recommends role on behalf of our clients and we have thoroughly enjoyed our adventures over the last 20 years. There is no better way to experience a destination or hotel than through first-hand experience as we know this gives you the tools you need to have educated conversations with your clients as you plan their future travels.

Do reach out to us to register your interest in a future Rebecca Recommends FAM trip.

Fondly,

Rebecca

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Nepal



Our FAM Group to Nepal

Most people think of mountains when they hear the name Nepal – and that would be accurate, as Nepal is nearly 75% mountains and has 8 of the 10 tallest peaks in the world, including Mt. Everest at 29,032 feet.

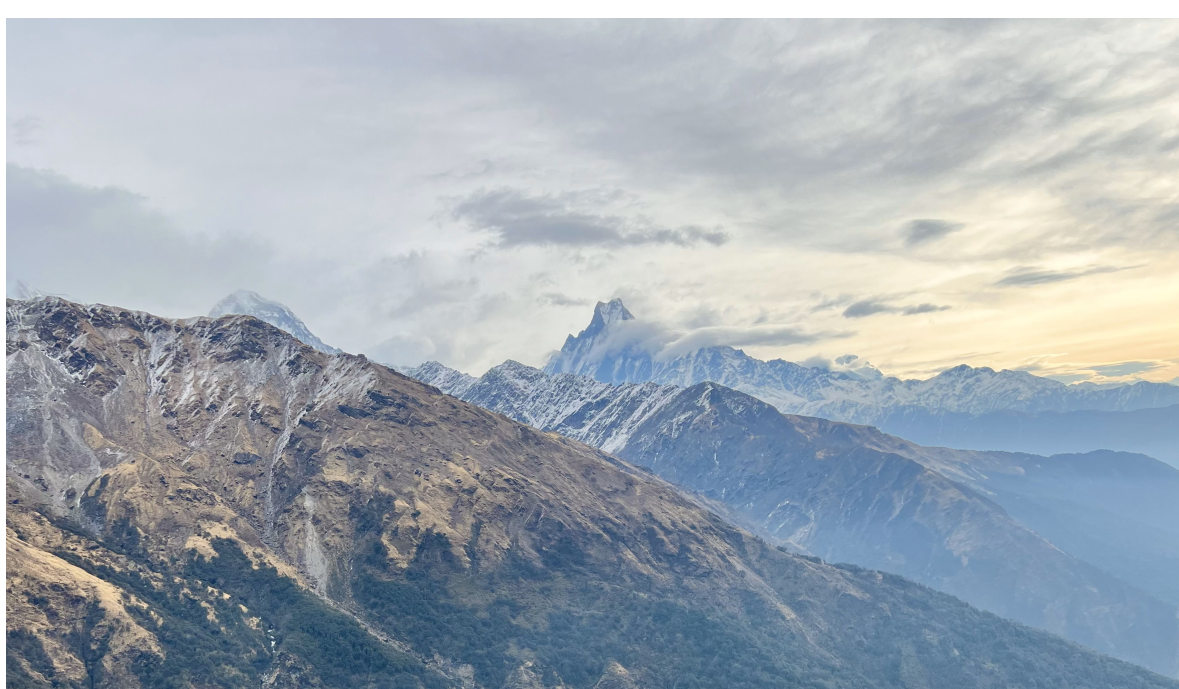
On a February FAM trip with advisors from all over the U.S., our [DMC Ventours International](#) and hotel clients [Dwarikas Hotel](#) and [Dwarika's Resort](#) revealed so much more of this diverse country. We started in the colorful capital city of Kathmandu, an ancient city that reflects 2,000 years of peaceful co-existence among its people, which has created a unique blend of Hinduism and Buddhism. We ventured on to Chitwan National Park, Pokhara, and Mustang, ending the trip back in the Kathmandu Valley, with a spectacular Everest helicopter experience.



The Nepalese are among the kindest and most gentle people in the world. Their greeting, “Namaste,” is said with palms together and with a slight bow to the person you are meeting. It literally means, “the divine in me honors the divine in you.” This outward expression of goodwill toward all was genuinely conveyed to our group throughout the country.



The Nepalese are known for their warmth and hospitality, and The Dwarika’s family did not disappoint. The Dwarika’s Hotel is truly an oasis of calm in the middle of Kathmandu, a living, breathing museum of Nepali craftsmanship. It feels like a protected village with restaurants and stores, lounge areas to have a drink and play a game of Bag Chal – a tiger and goat board game we all loved (and many of us brought home), and beautiful rooms and suites that look out onto it all. The attention to detail was fabulous. Many know the story of the grandfather, the late Dwarika Das, who rescued wood carvings throughout the city from destruction – windows, doors, trim, walls, statues. He saved and lovingly restored these pieces until they were used to build Dwarika’s in the 1970s. Nepal has eight World Heritage Sites and has won two Heritage awards – one for the city of Bhaktapur and the other for Dwarika’s Hotel.



The mountains are always calling in Nepal, and each step of our FAM brought us closer and closer. Pokhara Valley has been known for being a hippie hideaway but has recently grown into a launchpad for some of Nepal’s most popular treks and rafting expeditions. Tiger Mountain Lodge, our splendid mountain retreat, occupied a ridge above the valley – just over 3,000 feet above sea level, but with a grandstand view of the Himalayas, including 26,000-foot-high peaks. Our days were spent hiking trails created and utilized by local residents.

Our next stop was Mustang, an area of remote beauty in the north of Nepal surrounded on three sides by Chinese-held Tibet. (Visitors weren’t allowed in Mustang until 1952 and very few came until it was opened to limited tourism in 1992.) We stayed at the newly opened Shinta Mani resort, perched on a hillside with front-facing views of the sacred Nilgiri Peak. All-inclusive, stylish, luxurious, and friendly beyond compare, the resort’s outdoors team kept us busy hiking and exploring local mountain villages during the day, while their spa and restaurant team prepared wonderful offerings in the evenings. Our favorite was a multi-course Momo night – where even our dessert was a delicious dumpling!



The Crystal Chamber at Dwarika's Resort.

You can't leave Nepal without looking inward, and [Dwarika's Resort](#) in Dhulikhel was the perfect last stop to ensure we all re-entered the world with a better understanding of ourselves. The resort's in-house Ayurvedic doctor, meditation, yoga, art, and astrology masters, Hindu priest, and visiting monk are on hand to provide guidance.

The Nepalese have a strong belief in Karma, the belief that our actions and activities influence our health, happiness, and well-being. Dwarika's Resort offered so many opportunities/activities to nurture ourselves and improve our mental and physical well-being. Some of our favorites were their Himalayan salt house and crystal chamber, chakra balancing class, singing bowls experience, and walking barefoot through their meditation maze.

If that wasn't enough, Dwarika's Resort also has a helipad from which we experienced an incredible, once-in-a-lifetime helicopter trip overlooking Mt. Everest – the perfect ending to our Nepal educational adventure.

The Hidden Kingdom of Bhutan



A spectacular view of Tiger's Nest.

Nestled deep in the eastern Himalayas between India and Tibet, the simple pleasure that Bhutan offers gives a sense of kinship with the people and their love for the land. As recently as 1961, all entry into the kingdom was still on horseback. Druk-yul, the land of the thunder dragon, is only just emerging from the mists of its self-imposed isolation. The last Shangrila is an exotic land of high mountains and lush valleys, snow-clad peaks with clear running springs, a pristine ecology, and an incredible wealth of wildlife.



Penakha Gong



Punakha Gong

Architecture remains one of the most striking features of Bhutan, with a distinctive style and color characterizing every building and house in the kingdom. The Dzongs themselves – imposing 17th-century structures built on a grand scale without drawings and without a single nail – are outstanding examples of the best in Bhutanese architecture. Patterns of rich colors adorn every wall, beam, pillar, and door in traditional splendor.

Our February FAM trip took us on an enchanting journey with [Ventours International](#) through three of the seven valleys of Bhutan to explore this hidden kingdom. Along the way, we took in the majestic Himalayan views, hiked along river trails at Gangtey, a place of peaceful monasteries and flourishing wildlife, visited many of the architecturally stunning Dzongs, and, of course, made a pilgrimage to Tiger's Nest, perched precariously on a sheer rock face 3,000 feet above the valley floor.

There is no doubt that the feeling of being completely off the beaten path, with specially arranged rituals along the way, cleanses one's soul. Abbay King Lovell with Brownell Travel joined our FAM and her "Just Back From" article was published in Luxury Travel Advisor Magazine in May. In it, Abbay recapped our FAM trip beautifully; we encourage you to [read her story here](#).

Switzerland



*One of the spectacular views in **Zürich**.*

Switzerland’s popularity continues to grow, becoming more appealing to the seasoned traveler as a year-round destination. Some of the most coveted ski resorts in Europe for winter fun give way to warm summer days when the temperatures remain comfortable for exploring breathtaking mountains and endless lakes surrounded by lush valleys and discovering celebrated cities such as Geneva and Zürich.



A lovely view of Hotel Storchen.

In April, Rebecca Recommends was privileged to host an insightful FAM trip across Switzerland in conjunction with [The Living Circle group of hotels](#) and [Hotel d’Angleterre](#) – part of The Red Carnation Hotel Collection.

The standout for the wonderful advisors who joined the FAM was the diversity Switzerland offers. We discovered Geneva’s French nuances and stunning lake, Zürich’s “world-famous” Sternen Grill Bratwurst, and finally, [Castello del Sole](#) in Ascona, on the Swiss-Italian border, where the Mediterranean influences shine through at this lakeside resort.



A beautiful wine-tasting experience at Castello del Sole, Ascona.

Presided over by charismatic General Manager Jean-Vital Domezon for more than a decade, Red Carnation’s [Hotel d’Angleterre](#) is poised on the edge of Lac Léman (Lake Geneva) and deftly combines genuine Swiss hospitality with British elegance. The historic hotel is a Genevan landmark boasting views of the famous Jet d’Eau and Mont Blanc beyond. We stayed in beautifully adorned rooms with stunning views across the lake (the largest in central Europe with a total area of approximately 583 square kilometers) and enjoyed a night of live music at the infamous Leopard Bar, the hotel’s late-night venue for cocktails and dancing.



A walking tour of Geneva’s Old Town, with its cobblestone streets and little alleyways topped by Saint Peter’s Cathedral, took us back in time to the era when Savoy Counts tried to assert their claim over this charming city. We navigated the efficient Swiss train network and moved easily from Geneva to Zürich for a two-night immersion into everything The Living Circle celebrates in this charming city. The group’s hand-picked first-class hotels and restaurants are set in incomparable locations that stir the soul and provide fresh ingredients for decadent, locally inspired dining. While we were staying at the boutique-style [Widder Hotel](#) in the heart of Zürich’s historic Old Town, we were treated to a dine-around experience, taking The Living Circle’s beautiful boat from the private dock at the riverside [Storchen Hotel](#) across Lake Zürich for a gorgeous dinner at [Alex Lake Zürich](#).



A fantastic dine-around experience in Zürich.



Enjoying The Living Circle's beautiful boat at Castello del Sole.

A scenic drive from Zürich with a quick stop at Lucerne took us to our final Living Circle property, [Castello del Sole](#) in Ascona. This hidden gem was a highlight of the trip for many of the advisors, who loved the authentic feel of this lakeside resort that is walking distance to the town of Ascona. A member of the group commented:



“This was a magical place in a magical town and I cannot wait to share it with clients, too! I loved everything about it in the sense that it checks so many boxes – from spa to pool to bike rides along the lake and the golf course on the way into town, from green pastures, hammocks, and lakeside leisure to boat rides on the lake. From relaxing to active preferences ... it has it all. And then you bring in the incredible cuisine, the locally farmed food, the fabulous service, and attentive staff ... I could go on and on and on. I will be back here at some point and can't wait to spotlight it on repeat for my clients.”

Our five-night, whistle-stop tour of Switzerland was designed to explore the highlights and diversity of the country and to introduce the travel advisors who joined us about how to pair Switzerland with other European destinations and how to navigate the country. One of the main takeaways is that Switzerland is a destination in its own right, and while there can be a tendency to overschedule a European trip, Switzerland can absolutely be the highlight.

Sri Lanka



A fisherman on his way home from a successful day. Photo credit - Lila Fox

Sri Lanka, the land of serendipity and of happy surprises, is not just a destination; it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience! This captivating island has retained its irresistible beauty, charm, history, and culture in our ever-changing world and offers ancient ruins, wildlife safaris, scenic beaches, and heritage. In May, our luxury [DMC Ventours International](#) and hotel partner [Resplendent Ceylon](#) hosted a curated group of hand-picked travel advisors for a Sri Lanka FAM. From the moment we were greeted at the jet bridge by the VIP assistance arrival service, we knew we were in for a luxurious and exciting adventure.



Hiking up the 1,200 steps to the summit to enjoy a spectacular view from Sigiriya.

Ventours and Resplendent Ceylon's itinerary was expertly crafted and beautifully executed. Our trip began in Colombo, a vibrant, bustling city, where we explored the highlights of the city and acclimatized for our intrepid journey. From there, it was onwards by private plane to the Cultural Zone, featuring Sri Lanka's ancient kingdoms. We admired the medieval city of the World Heritage Polonnaruwa and Cave Temple at Dambulla and enjoyed a visit to a spice farm. We hiked to the top of Sigiriya, up 1,200 steps to the summit and the most spectacular panorama of the surrounding jungle. We road-tripped to Kandy's enchanting city, marveling at the magnificent Temple of the Tooth and performances by the famous Kandyan dancers. We journeyed by train to Hatton right in the heart of the tea plantations, stepping back in time to the beautiful [Ceylon Tea Trails](#) and enjoying their famous tea and flavorful food. From there, we took a seaplane flight on a safari expedition to the [Wild Coast Tented Lodge](#) to witness the majestic elephants, leopards, and birds at Yala National Park. Our adventure culminated at [Cape Weligama](#), where we dipped our toes in the surf and strolled the sand along the endless coastline, and visited a working cinnamon estate and the ancient trading fortress city of Galle.





A few of the animals seen at Yala National Park.

This was a first-time adventure to Sri Lanka for everyone, during which we saw so much and fell in love with our guides and drivers. We experienced some of the most luxurious hotels and immersive moments that perfectly blended culture, opulence, service, and modern amenities. What sums it up is the welcome we received from the warm Sri Lankan people with the biggest smiles. We laughed, we danced, we ate and drank the best of cuisine ... we didn't want to leave.

100 Princes Street, Edinburgh, Scotland



The opening of [100 Princes Street](#) was a much anticipated event, and [The Red Carnation Hotel Collection](#) timed an educational FAM with The Departure Lounge to perfectly coincide. On April 15th, these advisors and I were the very first to see the new property and were greeted upon arrival by a wonderful Scottish bagpiper who led us all up the beautifully muralled staircase to the heart of the hotel, The Wallace. There, we all stood in awe of the view before us - Edinburgh Castle in all its glory. It was so close, you felt like you could reach out and touch it, and I'm not embarrassed to share that a few of us had tears in our eyes.



A magnificent view of Edinburgh Castle.

Over the course of the next two days, we learned the fascinating history of the building. This 30-room boutique hotel was once the headquarters of the Royal Overseas League, and the painted mural that covers the length of the beautiful five-story staircase, tells the story of the journeys of Scottish botanists throughout the Victorian era. (Of course, there was an elevator, as well, but the staircase was so beautiful, that none of us took the lift during our entire stay.)



The meticulous attention to detail throughout the hotel further tells the story with rich furnishings, embossed leather wallcoverings, and carefully chosen antiques for The Wallace and other public areas, as well as gorgeous tartans and polished antiques throughout the guest rooms.



Don't miss experiencing how the stunning Araminta Campbell creations are made.

It was easy to explore both Old Town and New Town, as Princes Street joined the two. The 100 Princes Street team has also created a selection of unique experiences in Edinburgh and throughout the countryside that are available for guests. Experiences like creating your own gin or perfume, taking a day to go fishing in Upper North Wark, or going behind the scenes at Araminta Campbell to learn how each of her exquisite Scottish scarves throws, and textiles are created.



Like every Red Carnation Hotel, however, it's the incredibly professional and thoughtful staff that was the most memorable part of our stay. Each staff member went out of their way to ensure we were comfortable and enjoying ourselves.



Malcolm Hendry, the Managing Director of 100 Princes Street, invited everyone to a private dinner in Ghillies Pantry our last evening at the hotel, and surrounded by an impressive collection of scotch, entertained us all with his dramatic, "Ode to the Haggis." The food was fabulous - even the Haggis - but I'd recommend tasting it before you know what it is!

For more information on any of the FAM trips mentioned here, or about upcoming FAM trips with Rebecca Recommends, please connect with us at vip@r-recommends.com. We always love to hear from you.

Rebecca Recommends is a privately-owned company providing representation services in North America for more than 20 years.

