

Is Quieting the Mind the Ultimate Escape? I Went to Nepal to Find Out

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From left: A view of Nepal's Dhulikhel Valley from a suite at Dwarika's Resort; a courtyard and pool at Dwarika's overlooking the Eastern Kathmandu Valley. Photo credit: CHRISTOPHER WISE

My wife, Tiffan, the punctual partner, urged me to pick up the pace. We had a 10 a.m. appointment at Thrangu Tashi Yangtse Monastery, in Namobuddha — purportedly the place that Buddha, in a previous incarnation, sacrificed himself to a starving mother tigress. Our bandannas on and backpacks loaded, we looked ready to trek the Himalayas, though the hike was just an easy two hours.

When Tiffan and I had booked this stay at [Dwarika's Resort](#), in Dhulikhel, a village in Nepal's eastern Kathmandu Valley, we'd eagerly awaited the [holistic offerings the property is known for](#). But this one, Meeting with a Monk, stood out on our itinerary, mostly because of its vagueness. Trudging along the chalky trail toward the monastery, we lowered our expectations. The path to enlightenment seemed awfully dusty.

Unbeknownst to us, the man we were to meet was no mere monk. Dwarika's had procured us an audience with the Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, of the Kagyu school of Buddhism — a spiritual leader on par with the Dalai Lama. The octogenarian waits for no one, and when we strolled up at 10:10, one of his disciples told us we were too late and would have to come back at 3 p.m. Tiffan glowered at me in an I-told-you-so way. We sat on opposite sides of a café to wait.

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I was still in the doghouse that afternoon when we were led into the Rinpoche's quarters. He sat on a pillowed throne, and we knelt before him as he placed white silk khata scarves around our necks. Eyes twinkling, he offered a blessing and red string bracelets of protection. Then he gestured at us and said, "Together"—a wish for our paired longevity. Any lingering tension dissipated. Tiffan and I held hands.



From left: The salt room at Dwarika's Resort; a guest room at the property. Photo credit: CHRISTOPHER WISE

Back at Dwarika's, we continued our meetings with various wise men. Roshan Baskota, a noted practitioner of ayurveda, determined our dosha categories. Based upon my type, he told me when to sleep (9:30 p.m. to 5:30 a.m.), when I should be creative (early afternoon), and what I should eat (pistachios, watercress, turmeric with milk). Later, in the resort's library, renowned astrologer Santosh Vashistha did our birth charts. He predicted I'd create a book destined to be a global hit. I sat there amused, skeptical. I'd written a memoir, but months later my agent had gotten only nibbles from publishers, no deals — and yet, a year after my visit to Dwarika's, a Jamaican publisher bought my book and made plans to distribute it to more than 20 countries. An international success of sorts, written in the stars.

In this age when every property seems to have a shaman or guru, there's something poignant about tapping into these experiences in the country of Buddha's birth and the region where Vedic and Hindu beliefs originated. Elsewhere, such practices are treated as spiritual commodities, stripped of

context and repackaged as spa services. In Nepal, they reflect the deeply held beliefs of the people, be they monks or government officials. Meeting with these masters opened my perspective and eliminated some of my city-slicker cynicism. It also left me exhausted, my brain swimming with new knowledge.

At the end of our stay, during a guided meditation class near the salt room, the teacher began singing in what sounded like two different voices at once. Before I knew it, I opened my eyes to find the rest of the class standing over me. Tiffan was nudging my shoulder to make sure I was awake. A whole hour had passed. "Congratulations," the teacher said, "on emptying your mind."