

Every morning, Mani Lama goes about numerous rounds of kora around the Buddha Stupa and he's never without a camera. Except for times when he is out of the Valley, he keeps up with this routine like clockwork. Although some of the readers might not know him by name, many have most likely come across his photographs from his famous postcard series to his picture book, *Nepal: The Himalayan Kingdom*. Stunningly beautiful as they are, the fact that he doesn't hold any formal degree apart from a short-course in the craft makes his work all the more enchanting. He has spent more than 30 years documenting the culture, people and landscape of Nepal for development organisations such as the United Nations and its many affiliates such as Terre des Hommes, Save the Children, German Aid. Despite being hailed as one of the most prolific of photographers in the country, he sometimes can't believe his luck at having stumbled into photography, never mind surviving and thriving in his over three-decade-long career.

THE SHEER NUMBER OF PHOTOS YOU MUST HAVE SNAPPED IN BAUDHA MUST BE ENORMOUS. HOW DO YOU KEEP YOUR EYES AND MIND SHARP TO CAPTURE UNIQUE IMAGES?

I have seen this place evolve from nothing more than a dozen of straw huts and empty fields to being this large municipality of houses, cafés and tourists that it has now become. I am not really looking for anything unique. It's just a loving documentation of a place I like to call home. Just as we share this particular moment in time, my job as a photographer is to show future generations what these times felt like.

HOW DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN PHOTOGRAPHY?

My father was a dealer of 'Thangka' paintings. Sometimes when a traveller couldn't pay for a work of art entirely in cash they compensated him in kind. So whenever he got a camera from a tourist he gave it to me. My affinity with photography had begun quite early.

An interesting fact to note about Lama's early exploits, long before he pursued photography full-time, is the fact that he had actually discovered a new genus of ticks, the kind of parasites who survive by feeding on the blood of mammals. In Nepali, we know them as 'Kirna'.



IMAGES BEYOND TIME AND SPACE

Acclaimed photographer, **Mani Lama**, finds himself on the other side of the lens as he sits down with **Shaurya Kshatri** to talk about life within and beyond the images

HOW DID YOUR CAREER SHIFT FROM DISCOVERING A NEW GENE TO PURSUING AGRICULTURE BEFORE FINALLY LANDING INTO PHOTOGRAPHY?

In 1968-69, I was involved with this American project involved in parasite collection. Since Mustang was closed to foreigners back then, I had to travel to Lo Manthang to collect samples. I was just doing my job brushing off little ticks, mites, lice and fleas from a small rat-like mammal Pika. Little did I know, that I had discovered a new genus of ticks, which they even named after me — Anomalaya Lama Tick. After my 'accidental' success, with the help of some strong recommendations from my American colleagues, I got into the Merced College to study Agriculture. There, however, I had to take Humanities to meet the required credits, which



Sunrise on the Ganga seen from the ghats of Varanasi (December 2018). Photo: Mani Lama

even had a photography course. That short-course further ignited my interest in photography, which my father had kindled earlier in my childhood.

MORE THAN A TECHNICAL PHOTOGRAPHER, YOU HAVE A RATHER ORGANIC APPROACH WHEN IT COMES

TO SHOOTING. IN YOUR WORK, DO YOU USUALLY FIND YOURSELF PLANNING THE FRAME OR SIMPLY RESPONDING TO IT?

My process is intuitive. Henri Cartier-Bresson, one of the most influential photographers, only used one or two lenses and worked mostly in available light. These

days, I don't even use DSLR, my OnePlus phone seems to do the trick. Sometimes, the simplicity of this approach creates a timeless quality.

Since you started with films and reels, how did digitisation impact your process? Although, I have wholeheartedly embraced the modern technology I do look back on those days at the darkroom with a hint of nostalgia, processing, printing and developing photos, which the instant feedback from the screen on the back of a digital camera have made almost obsolete. Like many, I was drawn to the wonders of the DSLR and learnt from the younger generations.

DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE GOTTEN BETTER WITH AGE AS A PHOTOGRAPHER?

People ask me as to what my best shot is. If I think I have already taken one, I might as well call it a day.

On retirement: "I will not stop taking photographs unless I am in my deathbed drawing on my last breath. My final shot will probably be a selfie as I approach life's last day"

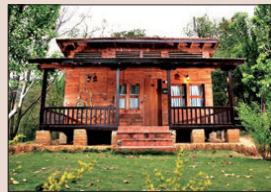
ADVICE FOR UPCOMING PHOTOGRAPHERS...

To focus overly on the technical approach detracts from the power of the image in its own right. Just keep your eyes open and your cameras at bay.



WHAT'S HOT

For a cosy getaway nearby



Just 22 kilometres away from Kathmandu, Chaimmalle Resort is surrounded by the copious amount of trees and exotic birds. It is settled in a serene and peaceful environment, where one can unwind and rejuvenate far away from the hustle and bustle of the hectic City life. The Resort delivers a pristine natural environment with unmatched quality services, comfortable rooms, excellent and hygienic food. There are also a number of different options in terms of room types, best available packages, and affordable prices to cater to the need of our valuable guests.
Contact: 014268121

Check-in

102-year-old passenger on board

Turkish Airlines proudly welcomed the oldest passenger onboard from Kathmandu via Istanbul to Boston. Ang Phurba Sherpini, accompanied by her son and daughter in law, celebrated her 102nd year onboard the aircraft. Upon arrival at Istanbul, the elderly passenger was greeted by Turkish Airlines personnel and assisted by TGS Ground Handling teams. Carrying millions of passengers to 306 destinations in 124 countries of the world every year, Turkish Airlines hosted the oldest passenger in its 85-year-long history.



Sky Bound

Unconventionally beautiful

I am not a huge fan of sight-seeing — flocking towards the same packed destinations, which doesn't even feel like a real reflection of a place to where it belongs. This was exactly why I didn't choose to spend my time in Gangtok by getting into one of those taxis for a 'full-day' guided tour. Rather I headed out of the bustling, over crowded Capital towards Lachung in order to experience the real Sikkim.

Located at a distance of around 120 km from Gangtok, Lachung is a beautiful town in Sikkim. Known for its snow-covered peaks, sparkling waterfalls and gurgling streams, the town makes for a perfect destination in Sikkim to have a relaxing stay amidst picturesque beauty. It's much more laid-back than Gangtok and a highly underrated destination. One of the must-see places there, as I was told was the Lachung Gompa, and it must be quite beautiful and all, but I instead decided to head to go trek to the Zero Point. Zero Point is called and remains covered in snow for most part of the year. However, it's important to note that you need to take the inner line permit from the Army authorities before visiting Zero Point. The majestic natural beauty of the place welcomes thousands of visitors each year. It is a perfect place for those who want to immerse in the stillness of nature. —HNS

Gem of North-East India

Two travellers approach the mystical land of Sikkim in their own unique approaches



The Flipside

on the popular sites because the many vehicles parked at the taxi stand offer full-day trips. As we didn't have much time to explore on our own, we got in one of them and visited the significant stops of Gangtok like the sacred Hanuman Tok, the scenic view point at Tashi, the culturally rich Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and the elegant Ganesh Tok. The evenings, we spent at the MG Road, where one can walk freely, shop and choose any cuisine from a number of restaurants and cafes that stretch throughout the entirety of the MG Road. Although there are a lot of other things to do in Gangtok, we did manage to make the most out of our tight schedule. —HNS

A hurried trip

I was in Jhapa to celebrate the New Year when suddenly out of impulse I decided to head out towards Sikkim to put an end to our already eventful trip. I along with two of my cousins took a jeep ride from Kakarbhitta all the way to Gangtok.

As soon as we reached Gangtok, we went for a little detour to the old Rumtek Monastery, going down a long avenue of prayer flags fluttering raggedly in the breeze. The walled Gompa complex contains religious buildings, schools and a few small lodges-hotels, snack shops and souvenir stalls for travellers.

Even if you are new in Gangtok, you don't have to worry about missing out