



Climb Up So Kids Can Grow Up **BIGU, NEPAL**



Open Team dates: March 14 (depart USA) – March 28, 2018 (depart Nepal)

Team Weaver (Open Team) dates: March 23 (depart USA) – April 6, 2018 (depart Nepal)

Program cost: \$ 3,500

What could be more unique and memorable than spending a week living at a Tibetan Buddhist Nunnery in a serene mountain village in the Himalayas of Nepal?! If you join our team to Bigu, Nepal, you'll have the amazing opportunity to experience it for yourself – and assisting children living with AIDS in Africa at the same time!

Who You Are Supporting

This volunteer opportunity is a part of the annual major fundraising initiative in support of the **American Foundation for Children with AIDS** called *"Climb Up So Kids Can Grow Up"*. AFCA provides critical support to children and their caregivers who are infected and affected HIV+. In collaboration with their in-country partners, they have served tens of thousands of families in underserved and marginalized communities in several Eastern Africa countries. Their areas of impact include: medical support, sustainable livelihoods, nutrition, educational support and emergency relief. You can read more about AFCA at www.afcaids.org.

A large portion of your fee is a direct donation to AFCA. But as this is also part of AFCA's most important annual fundraising campaign, we hope you will try to fundraise above the stated fees. We have seen firsthand the incredible impact that this organization has had on the lives of so many marginalized children and families. Every dollar counts to this small, efficient organization. Your support will help them continue their very important work!

NOTE: A portion of your fees also goes to support the nunnery as they recovery from two devastating earthquakes in 2015.

About the Nunnery

Our team will stay and work at the **Tashi Chime Gatsal Nunnery** in the remote village of Bigu. Bigu is a small, peaceful Sherpa village located at 8200 feet in elevation, looking down onto a beautiful valley that offers awe-inspiring scenery. There is only one road leading into the village, which is often unusable. Most of the time, the only traffic you'll see is people on foot and the occasional cart! The Nunnery is home to over 70 nuns, many of them children whose families cannot afford to care for them.



On April 25, 2015 a massive 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal. The country was hit with a second 7.3 magnitude quake just 17 days later. According to the government of Nepal, more than 8,800 people were killed, over 600,000 homes were destroyed and around 290,000 were damaged.

The region where Bigu is located was the epicenter of the second earthquake. This area suffered incredible amounts of damage, wiping out complete villages. Because Bigu is so remote and not on any of the major trekking routes in Nepal, this community, comprised of nearly 30,000 inhabitants in five distinct villages, has received little in the way of government aid or assistance. At the Nunnery, nearly every building - the nuns housing, kitchen, temple, bathrooms - were destroyed or made uninhabitable. As the spiritual center for this entire region and home to so many women and children, this community is in dire need of help with rebuilding efforts.



Getting to Bigu - Expect the Unexpected

While the remoteness of the nunnery is what makes it so special, it can also create challenges that will test your **patience, stamina and adaptability**. But if these potential challenges don't concern you – if for you they just add to the adventure and the stories you will have to tell - then you are already a great candidate for this adventure! Read on!

Because the road and trail conditions are so unpredictable – especially since the earthquakes - it may not be until weeks or days before we arrive that many of these logistics can be finalized. Until then, there will be many unknowns – how far the jeeps can take us, what route we will hike in on, how difficult the hiking trail conditions might be, whether we will need to stay in tents or not. The weather can also be unpredictable causing planned routes to have to change last minute, and it's not uncommon for the jeeps to break down. Either can extend the uncomfortable jeep ride or alter the hike.

There are two potential routes in to Bigu. Both include long jeep rides, much of which is very slowly going over very bumpy mountain roads (5 to 8 hours) and long, challenging hikes over one or two days. On the trail, we will likely need to spend the first night in tents (fully supported by local helpers). If any of the eco-lodges have been rebuilt, we will stay there instead (perhaps marginally more comfortable).

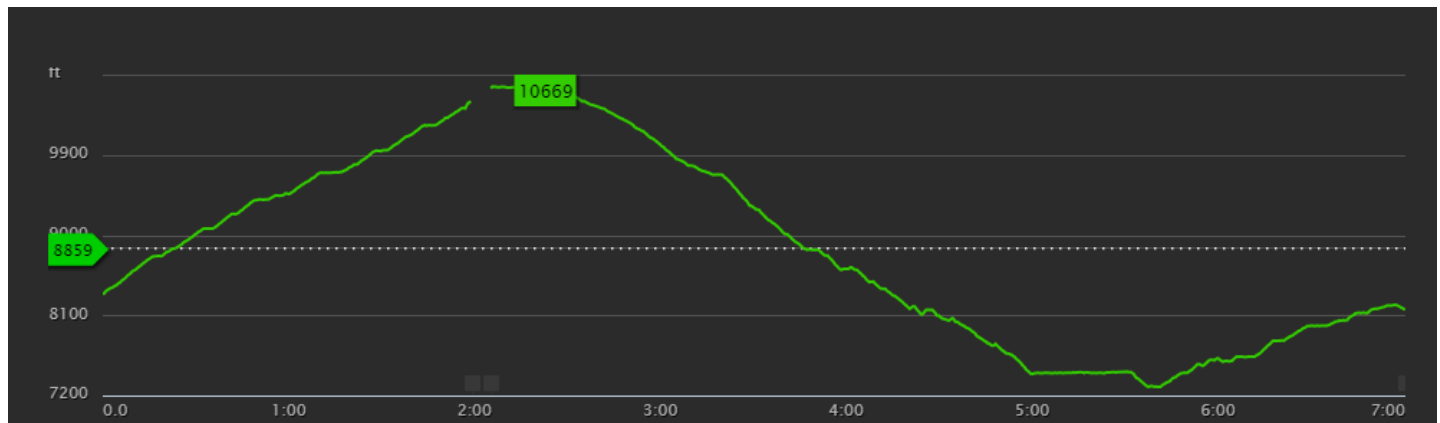


No matter which route we take, the hike to Bigu is challenging and strenuous. Both routes amount to over 4000 feet of elevation gain. ***Don't let the physical challenge discourage you from considering this opportunity.*** You do not need to be a super-athlete to complete the trek but you do need to do some training in advance and be prepared for a long, challenging day. We will be able to divide into two groups if needed – one that takes the more direct route (“shortcuts”) and one that takes the less-steep, meandering “road” when possible (this can add an hour or two to the hike). Believe us – and the many who have done this already - the reward for your efforts will be repaid immeasurably by the views along the way and the experiences you’ll have once you get there!



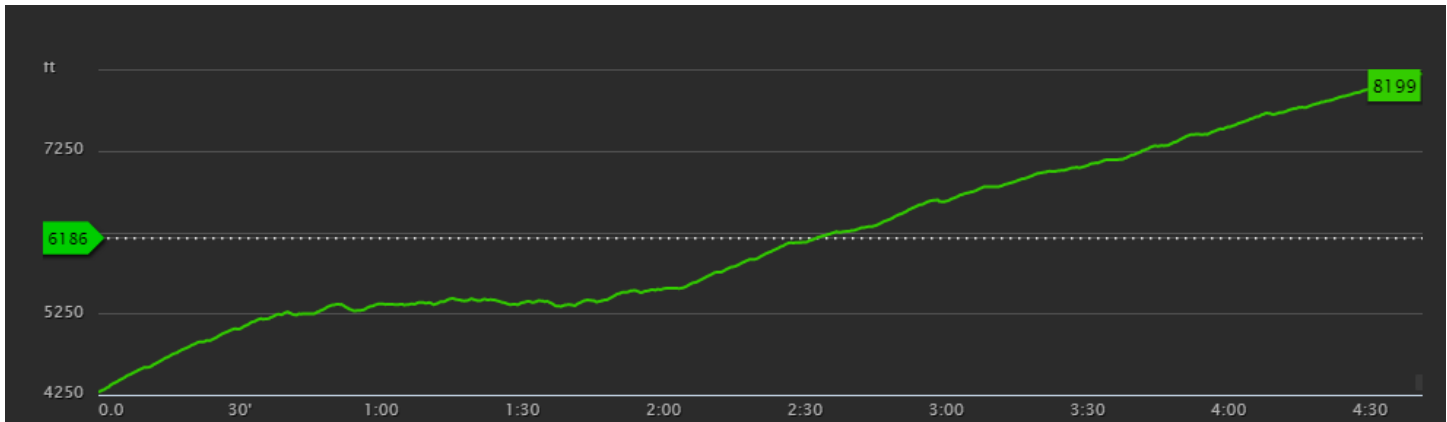
DOLANGSA ROUTE: If we take this route, we will begin the hike at an elevation of about 8200 feet, hike up over a pass at about 11,000 feet, back down to the river (7200 feet) before making the final uphill trek into Bigu (at 8200 feet). The more direct route will take about 6-7 hours; the meandering “road” route will take about 8-9 hours.

Here is a profile of the Dolangsa hike route:



SOROUNG KHOLA ROUTE: This route begins at a small village by a river at an elevation of about 4250 feet. From there, it's pretty much straight up to Bigu with some plateauing for a bit of relief. This route is shorter but can be more challenging because of the directness of the route.

Here is the profile for the Soroung Khola route:



Getting our stuff there

All you will need to hike with is a daypack to carry items you'll need during the hike (water, trail food, clothes for layering). All of your other stuff will be taken up to Bigu for you – either by porters or by jeep. Your belongings will need to go in a backpack or duffel (you can easily pick up inexpensive waterproof duffel bags in Kathmandu), and will be limited to 25 lbs per person. We will provide you with a complete list of what you need later.

Being Prepared

Check with your Doctor

Because of the challenging and strenuous nature of this trip, we **strongly recommend** that you discuss with your doctor the conditions you will face on this adventure, including:

- **High altitude:** One route to Bigu will take us to an altitude 11,000. In Bigu, we will be staying at just over 8,000 feet. Your doctor may recommend that you have medications to help with altitude sickness.
- **Potential for dehydration:** The exertion of the hike and our work in Bigu, along with being at high altitude, can also cause dehydration if you aren't careful. You will need to be sure to drink plenty of water at all times – not just the tea that will constantly be offered - and take rehydration salts/tablets along with you.
- **The physical challenges of the hike:** It will be a long, often strenuous, often hot hike.

Training for the Hike

To be able to actually enjoy the hike in and out of Bigu, you will need to invest some time to physically prepare for it. Your training regimen should include cardiovascular endurance (via aerobic training), leg strength (through strength conditioning), endurance training (because the hike is long), and hike-specific training (via mountain hiking or at least long walks with a day pack).

Cardiovascular Conditioning

Suggested activities include running, walking on an inclined treadmill, doing stairs (in your office building, at a local school stadium), trail running, working on an elliptical machine, walking up and down hills, or participating in step aerobics classes, etc.

Strength Training

Strength training primarily for your legs will give you the functional, trekking-specific strength that will help you the most on the ups and downs of the trail. We suggest focusing on exercises such as squats, lunges and step-ups. If you use the machines at a gym, focus on leg extensions and hamstring curls. Try to progressively increase the amount of weight used, repetitions completed and number of sets.

Hike –Specific Conditioning

Nothing is better preparation for the trek into Bigu than hike-specific training. The more time you can spend outdoors, trekking up and down hills with a day pack the better.

Accommodations

For the overnight stay on the way to Bigu as well as the overnight on the way out, we will likely be in tents because the accommodations we once stayed in have all been destroyed. We will be taking a support team to do our cooking and to help us set up camp. Sleeping bags will be provided BUT if you have your own sub-zero sleeping bag and a Thermarest or similar pad, we would recommend that you bring them, as the gear in Nepal is not as good as you might bring.

Once we reach Bigu - - the good news is that one of the buildings that survived the earthquake is the Guest House. The Guest House can sleep up to 10 people in shared rooms. If the team becomes larger than 10, some may need to sleep in tents just outside the Guest House.

NOTICE: Water has become somewhat of an issue in Bigu, as the earthquake rerouted the underground water sources. So we will all be practicing water conservation – ie. Bucket baths only every other day.

What We'll Do

The team will be helping to do whatever we can to aid in the rebuilding of the nunnery. It will be hard work and challenging living conditions. However, the scenery, the resilience of the local people, the spirit and energy of the nuns and the work we will do should provide more than enough inspiration!

If the roads are open for supplies to be trucked up to Bigu, we will be able to work alongside local laborers to help with construction. We may also be clearing debris, sorting through and salvaging construction material from the original structures, helping clear new construction sites and other similar tasks. There will also be gardening to be done and helping in the kitchen is always an option. We will also likely have the opportunity to teach classes such as conversational English, sciences and math, basic bookkeeping, life skills or first aid, for those might prefer something less physical. If you have a special skill or training, let us know – we'll put it to use! There will be no lack of things to do to keep you as busy as you want.

This is a very self-directed volunteer experience, so you can decide each day which tasks you would like to participate in. And when we're not working or you'd like to take a break from work, there will be plenty of opportunities to interact with the nuns, go hiking, meditate and immerse yourself in the culture and daily life of the village.



Trip Schedule:

For most of us, it takes a couple of days to get to Kathmandu, due to long flights and time differences. The trip will take 16 days in all, including travel days from USA. The schedule includes:

- Day 1 & 2 – Travel to Kathmandu
- Day 3 – Arrive in Kathmandu
- Day 4 – Preparations for our trip to Bigu
- Day 5 & 6 – Travel / hike to Bigu
- Day 7 to 12 – Our time in Bigu
- Day 13 & 14 - Travel back to Kathmandu, final team dinner
- Day 15 – Depart for home or personal R&R

For those with time either before or after our time in Bigu, a world of wonders and adventure awaits you in Nepal! We can help connect you to tour/trekking guides who we know well and trust completely if you'd like to do some trekking or exploring in other parts of this beautiful country.

Trip Cost: \$3500

Your fees cover the majority of your expenses while in-country. Included are the following:

- Donation to AFCA as well as Tashi Chime Gatsal Nunnery
- All meals and accommodations in Kathmandu and Bigu during trip dates
- In-country transportation, to and from the airport as well as to and from Bigu
- Tents, sleeping bags and sleeping pads
- Some team leader costs

The trip fees **do not include** airfare from your home to the host country; accommodations outside of the official trip dates; medical / emergency evacuation insurance; trip cancellation insurance; visa fees; vaccinations.

The reality

This trip is not for everyone. Along with the challenges of getting to and being in Bigu, just travelling in Nepal can be risky. Roads are narrow and typically in poor condition, and driving around the country can frankly be a bit scary. Nepal is prone to earthquakes; no one knows when the next one might happen. Earthquakes and monsoon rains can make hillsides unstable; rock and landslides are not uncommon.

We are not trying to scare anyone away. In our opinion, anything can happen to anyone anywhere. But we want to be sure you know what you are signing up for. To us – and to all of those who have travelled with us to the nunnery in the past – the experiences you will have spending time with the nuns in this pristine, breathtaking place, the pride you will feel on making it through the hike – **absolutely makes it all so worth it!**

We hope you'll join us in BIGU!!

