

*"May all the positive
aspirations of beings
Be fulfilled in an instant."*

King of Prayers, Verse 3

2024 | 5th Edition



The 2024 trekkers with Ani Ngawang Samten-la (centre), Director of Lawudo and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's sister, who has cared for Lawudo for over 60 years; Lawudo staff; our guiding team; and porters. Photo Amber Tamang.



Ven. Gendun with a local while waiting for a helicopter at Monjo. Photo Miriam Alston.

Lawudo Trek Lawudo Trek Report

An adventure and retreat with Venerable Tenzin Gendun
March 18 — April 1 2024

August 2025 | Words by Kristina Mah

Through Clouds and Blessings: Lawudo Trek 2024



We gathered at Kopan Nunnery (Khachoe Ghakyil Ling). Photo Kristina Mah.

On March 18, eleven pilgrims embarked on the Lawudo Trek led by Venerable Tenzin Gendun. This year, we met at Khachoe Ghakyil Ling Nunnery, or Ani Gumpa, at the bottom of the Kopan hill, a stone's throw from Kopan Monastery.

The trek started auspiciously. The day after we met at the nunnery, Ven. Gendun arranged for us to receive a blessing from His Eminence the 104th Gaden Tripa, Kyabje Jetsun Lobsang Tenzin Palsangpo, the highest authority of the Gelug tradition, at Kopan Monastery before departing for the mountains. Our encounter and blessing from Rinpoche charged our spirits, and we felt very fortunate to have had an audience with him during his visit to Nepal.

Our delight was also laced with some apprehension about the weather. The rain had started to come down hard in the city. We were told that there had been no rain since September 2023, six months before!

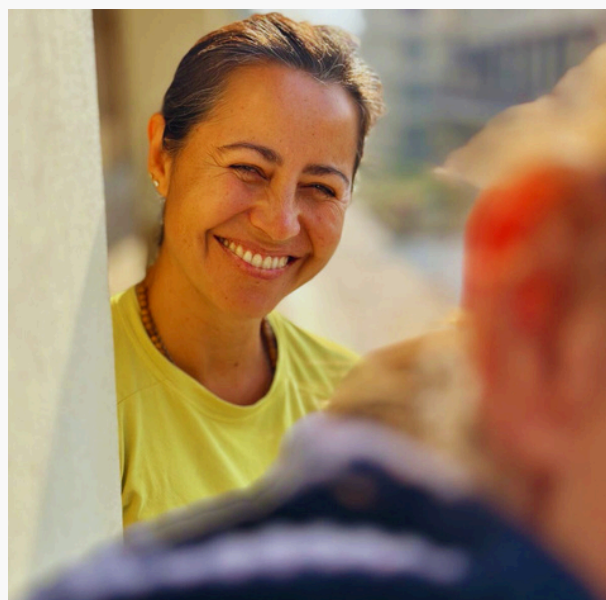
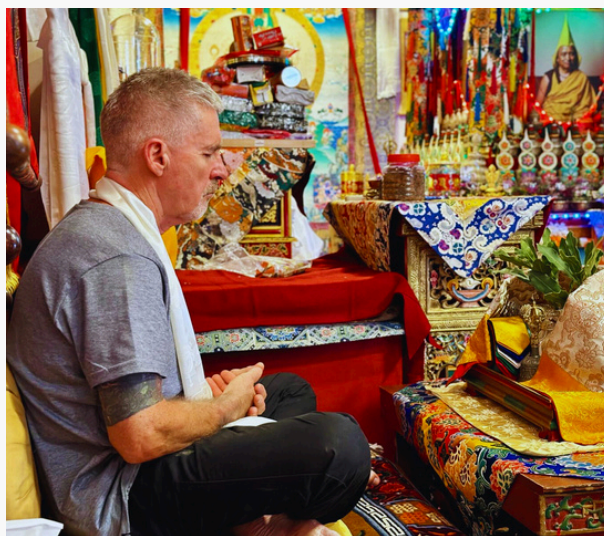


Ven. Gendun gave us teachings in the smaller Gumpa at the nunnery. He began by sharing the process his own experience of studying the Dharma. Photo Kristina Mah.



As much as we wished for the rain to clear, we also shared in the relief of Kathmandu locals who had been waiting for the downpour to clear the dust that had gathered in the valley over many months.

We went to the airport before sunrise as we have in previous years. After hours of hopeful waiting, we were turned back — the clouds were too low on both sides. Some of us used the delay to receive more blessings at the Heruka Chakrasamvara initiation happening at the nunnery that afternoon.



Left top: We visited His Eminence, Gaden Tri Rinpoche at Kopan Monastery and he gave us a blessing before flying to the mountains. Photo Miriam Alston.

Left bottom: We waited joyfully to see His Eminence the Gaden Tripa. Photo Kristina Mah.

Right top: We were allowed to do our own practice with Rinpoche's vajra body at Kopan. The energy in Rinpoche's room is palpable. Photo Kristina Mah.

Right bottom: Camilla was thrilled to have arrived at Kathmandu and be at Kopan Nunnery. Photo Miriam Alston.



Top: Feeling energised and content after an audience with His Eminence the 104th Genden Tripa.

Bottom Left: Ven. Gendun arranged a day trip for us to visit Kopan Monastery, a short walk up the Kopan hill from the nunnery. Photo Kristina Mah.

Bottom Right: Camilla (left) and Andrea waiting patiently for news about our flights at the airport. You could say the time at the airport offers perfect conditions to train a calm and content mind. Photo Kristina Mah.



Top Left: Ready to fly to the mountains. Andrea, Camilla and Ainura boarded the second helicopter to fly out. With perfect timing, the clouds felt like they closed in, hugging the helicopter from behind as it arrived at Lukla airport. Photo Kristina Mah.

Top Right: We regrouped before setting out from Lukla in the rain. A wet and uncomfortable start, but it felt fantastic to be in the mountains. Photo Kristina Mah.

Bottom Left: Lily (left) and Yaroslava on the way in Sargamatha National Park. There are countless prayer wheels and stupas along the path, making the atmosphere alive with embodiments of the Dharma. Photo Kristina Mah.

Amber and Lok, our guides from Three Jewels Adventures, could see the situation unfolding at the airport with the delay of so many flights. We all held on to hope that we could squeeze in through a clearing in the morning the following day.

We set out again to the airport determined to reach the mountains. The weather was not favourable for planes, but Amber had been working in the background and managed to organise helicopters for us. After much holding of our breath, we managed to catch helicopters and take off into the setting clouds. For the second helicopter to leave Kathmandu, it felt like the clouds were closing in behind our tail. Our skilled pilot flew us through. We were relieved to have found a way. After the commotion of the airport, stepping out onto the lawn behind the airstrip, it was the first time for us to take in the mountain air and look at the cloud-covered peaks with anticipation of the walk. It seemed like a miracle to have landed.



The day we had planned to arrive at Lawudo, some of us took advantage of the clear skies and walked to the Everest Viewpoint at Namche before breakfast. And they were not disappointed with incredible 360-degree views of all the highest peaks. These mountains make us feel very fragile, yet also give so much energy and a feeling of expansiveness.

The walk to Lawudo from namche is one of the most beautiful sections of the trail. A pine tree forest shades most of the path until tea time at Theshyo. We rest at a small tea house for tea, biscuits and Magee noodles to charge us for a steeper winding climb.



Top: Ven. Gendun relaxing and Anca sun saluting while waiting for helicopters to fly from Monjo to Namche. Photo Miriam Alston.

Bottom: Denis determined to continue in the rain on the way to Phakding. Photo Kristina Mah



Top: (Left to right) David, Samser, our guide, Andrea and Lily were thrilled to arrive at Namche. Photo Kristina Mah



Left: Yaroslava has been a student of Ven. Gendun at Nalanda for some years. Here she with Mt. Everest, Lhotse and Amadablam behind her. The views were perfect that morning. Photo Kristina Mah.

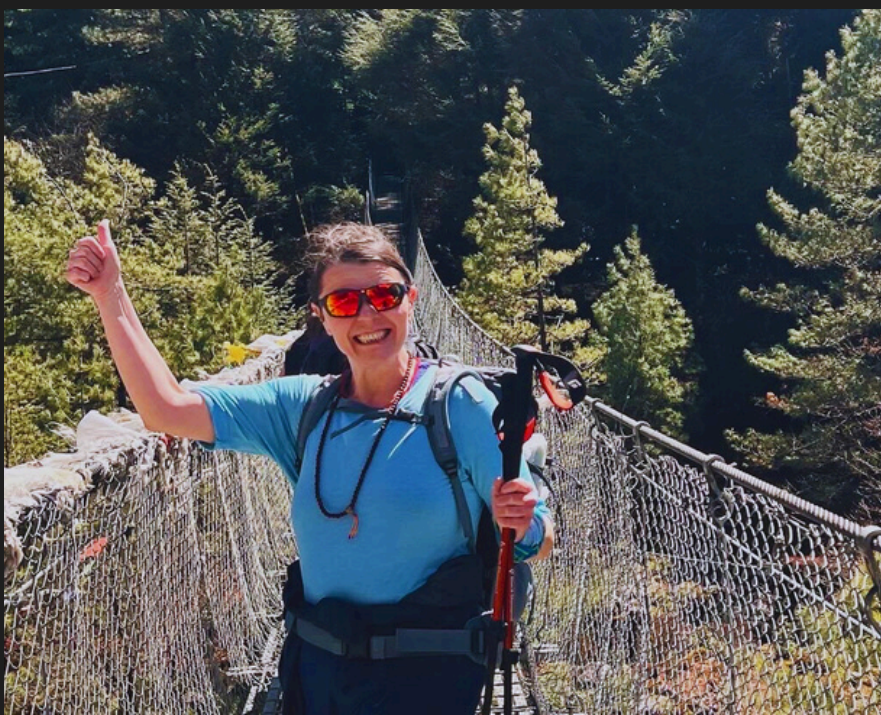


Right: David took in the breathtaking horizon from the top of Namche Bazaar. The sunrise had started to touch the tops of the peaks. Photo Kristina Mah.



At Theysho, Ven. Gendun has started to show signs of becoming unwell. Lok stayed with him. He would be beside Ven. Gendun for the next 72-hours.

Our group arrived at Lawudo a few hours after leaving Namche. Later in the afternoon we got news that Ven. Gendun had made it to Mende where he was resting. Ven. Tsültrim, a Swiss nun who had been living at Lawudo for the past two years, went down to check on him. After some time observing Ven. Gendun's condition, we decided that it would be safest for him to return to Namche where there was a clinic that could offer medical care. This is not an uncommon situation in the mountains, and locals and guides have to deal with this situation frequently. Mountain sickness does not discriminate with age or fitness level, and the signs are taken seriously. Our amazing guiding team knew what to do. Lok and Samser travelled with Ven. Gendun, walking in the dark, to get him safely down to Namche. Once at Namche, Ven. Gendun went into the care of the clinic.



Top: Denis said that he joined the trek to fulfil his wish to return to Lawudo before he dies to reconnect with Rinpoche's energy one more time in the Himalayas. He last visited Lawudo in 1985. Photo Miriam Alston.

Middle: Miriam happily navigating the path. The mani stones looked freshly painted in the rain. Photo Kristina Mah.

Bottom Left: Andrea delighted at the bridges and the beauty on the trail. Photo Kristina Mah.

Right: Ven. Gendun looking like an intrepid explorer on helipad after arriving at Namche. Photo Miriam Alston.



Top: (Left to right) Lily, Ainura and Yaroslava delighted in morning practice. Despite the cold air in the Gompa, they were cozy and content.



Middle: An overnight snowfall dusts the mountains and the buildings on the property with a white icing that looked stark and cinematic.

Bottom Left: Ven. Tsültrim led us in practices and prayers in the Lawudo Lama's cave. We made vast dedications especially for Rinpoche's swift return, and Ven. Gendun's return to good health. Photo Kristina Mah.

Bottom Right: Question time was precious and lively with Ven. Robina. Here is Anka (centre) asking her question. Photo Kristina Mah.





“This time just wasn’t the time for me to return to Lawudo”, Ven Gendun said. “I’ll definitely be back”, he added. After two days of treatment at the clinic, Ven. Gendun was flown back to Kathmandu where he continued to receive care until we were reunited on our return from the mountains.

Ven. Gendun continued to write to us from the city, and although he was sad to not be there with us, he sent us messages of encouragement to keep practicing. He rejoiced in our efforts. He reminded us to make extensive dedications while we were there, he told us to keep a happy mind and to rejoice at every painting, every *mani* stone and every *thangka*. He sent us *Big Love* and we felt it.



Top Left: Kristina offered Ani Samten-la electric light offerings on behalf of the group. One was placed on the altar in the cave, and one was placed in the Gompa. Photo Miriam Alston.

Bottom Left: We did daily practice in the cave, making vast dedications. Photo Kristina Mah.

Top Right: After a couple of days in the clinic at Namche, Ven. Gendun was well enough to board a helicopter bound for Kathmandu to continue his treatment and rest at a lower altitude. We were relieved that he was out of the woods. Photo Lok Tamang.

Bottom Right: Despite the cold and being offered to stay in the kitchen where there was a stove heater, people wanted to receive teachings in the Gompa. How auspicious! Photo Kristina Mah.



We wrote to Ven. Robina to let her know what had happened. She very kindly agreed to give us teachings on Zoom! Amazingly, Lawudo Gumpa installed Wifi in 2023 making this possible. Ven Tsültrim led us in practice and prayers throughout the day.

“I can’t seem to escape Lawudo!” Ven. Robina said, “Even when I’m not there, I’m still there!”

In the afternoons and evenings we practiced together in Rinpoche’s cave. We discussed the teachings and questions together in the dining room after meals. Ani Samten-la, Rinpoche’s sister, sat with us and told us stories from her life. She has been “the keeper of Lawudo” for 60 years. All of our trekkers were impacted by the “immeasurable kindness and love” that Anila embodies.



Despite our smaller group size compared to previous years, the trek resonated with potent energy and unwavering dedication towards the return of the reincarnation of Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Dennis, one of the principal builders at The Great Stupa of Universal Compassion in Bendigo, Australia, last visited Lawduo in 1985. He said he had returned to fulfil a wish to reconnect with Rinpoche's energy again. This sentiment was echoed by others in our group who wanted to return to pay their respect to Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

***Top:** Ven. Robina is greeted by Ani Samten-la on Zoom on the last day of our retreat. It was a joyful reunion. Ven. Robina promised to return! Photo Kristina Mah.*



***Bottom Left:** A small group walked to get a closer look of the Amoghpaasha Buddha painting that was commissioned by Ani Samten-la according to Rinpoche's vision for Lawudo. It was painted at 4100m in just two weeks. Ven. Tsültrim said the project was a miracle in itself. Photo Kristina Mah.*



***Bottom Right:** Anca connecting with the energy of Amoghapasha. Photo Kristina Mah.*



Top: Amber and Lok, our lead guides enjoying the sunshine and resting in the afternoon.
Photo Kristina Mah.



Middle: Due to word of more bad weather approaching, we made the decision to fly back to Kathmandu from Phakding. We didn't want to risk being stuck at Lukla for days! We acted quickly and made it home. We heard later that the weather did roll in with several flights being cancelled the next day.
Photo Kristina Mah.

Bottom: David was amazed at the strength and resilience of our porters. He praised their kindness. Here he is with (left to right) Lila, Pasang, Janak and Samser in front of Namaste Lodge in Phakding.
Photo Kristina Mah.



Trekking through the awe-inspiring Khumbu region in the Himalayas was not only enriching spiritually but also raised US\$5,500 for Lawudo. Half of this was offered directly to Ani Samten-la and Lawudo Gompa while we were there, and half was donated to the *Zangdok Palri*, Guru Rinpoche Pure Land project at Lawudo—part of Rinpoche’s vast and holy vision.

We were delighted to reunite with Ven. Gendun in Kathmandu. He was in good health and guided us through prayers, offerings, and practice. He led us in extensive dedications for the trek for the swift return of the unmistakable Lawudo Lama. We circumambulated Boudhanath Stupa and enjoyed a rooftop meal. The adventure of the trek was taken to another level this year. We moved through uncertainty together. It feels like the power of the sacred journey will be integrated and continue to resonate as we get back into “daily life”. There were so many blessings.

Middle: Ven. Gendun leads us in a final practice in a special room dedicated to Rinpoche around the kora of Boudha Stupa. Photo Kristina Mah.

Bottom: Miriam (left) and Denis arrived in Kathmandu first on their helicopter and were greeted by Ven. Gendun on arriving! Photo Ven. Tenzin Gendun

Top Left: All of us circumambulating the Boudha Stupa.

Top Right: After our final practice together, we shared a pizza lunch at the Roadhouse Diner rooftop with a view overlooking the Boudha Stupa. Here’s David waiting for his pizza. Photo Kristina Mah.



***Top:** Ani Samten-la
blessed malas for the
White Mahakala Study
Group in Romania.*

*Ven. Gendun is a
regular teacher there.
Photo Kristina Mah.*

***Middle:** Ven. Gendun,
Ani Samten-la and
another practitioner in
November 1996.*

***Bottom:** Denis taking
in the view at the edge
of the property into
the Thame valley.
Photo Kristina Mah.*



Plentiful and thoughtful offerings for Lama Zopa Rinpoche on the altar in the Lawudo dining room, April, 2024. Photo Kristina Mah.

Join us for the next Lawudo Trek in 2025
with Ven Katy Cole and Charok Lama

To read more and book your spot, visit: <http://www.lawudo-trek.org>