

CULTURE SHOCK & THE CHALLENGES OF FILMING IN INDIA & NEPAL: A FIELD REPORT FROM GUNA TEAM MEMBER FJ LETO

I thought making a documentary in Berkeley was complicated, energy consuming, and challenging ... then I tried filming one in India and Nepal.

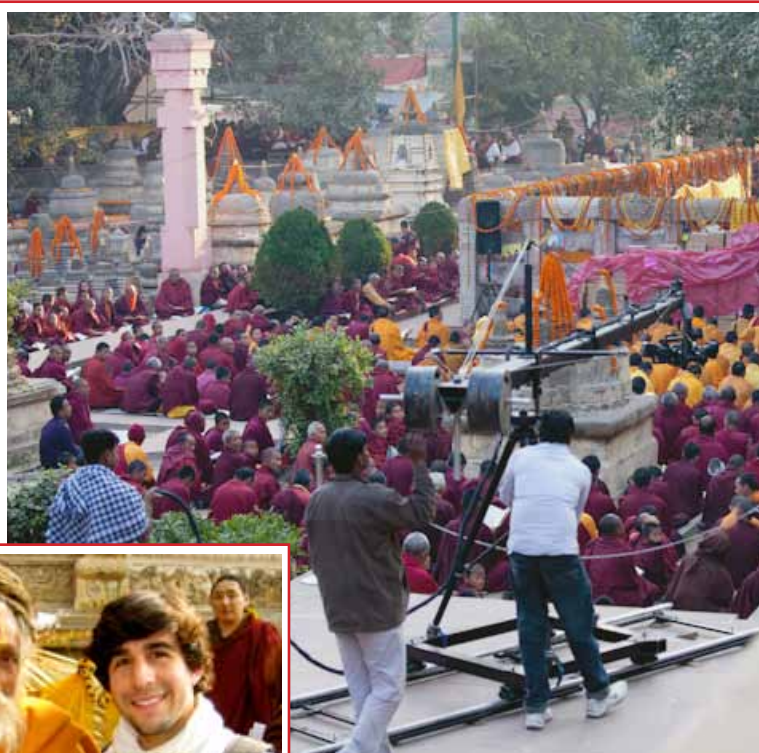
The Guna team, along with cinematographer Allen Moore, has just returned from our second filming excursion in Asia. We captured stunning footage, met wonderful people, and learned a whole lot about making a professional documentary. I personally learned so much on this trip about film and myself it is essentially inexpressible. Anyway, the following is my attempt.

Firstly, I learned about time. In some cultures the term "on time" does not exist; in fact, in India and Nepal the very idea of time is questionable. This perspective is wonderful, the practical reality - not so much. However, Guna managed to shoot every offering, ceremony, and event that we set out to film. We spent one week in India and the following week in Nepal, filming

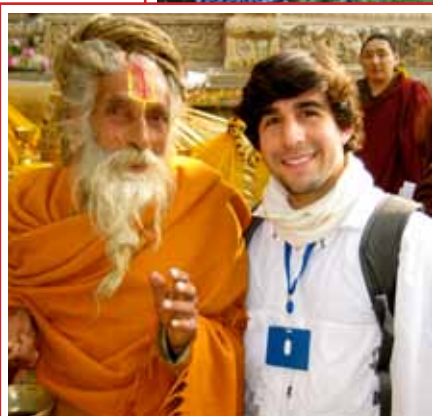
in almost ten locations and capturing over 30 hours of footage. This was no easy feat considering that, from our concept of time, we had a very tight schedule.

Secondly, I learned about communication. I do not speak Hindi - or Bhutanese, Thai, Chinese, Tibetan, or Nepalese, let alone any of the other languages that were being thrown back and forth beyond my meager unilingual attempt to communicate in English.

However, we managed to ship in a 40-foot jib and four-person team from Delhi and plop it



A 40-FOOT JIB, SITUATED ON THE WEST PLATFORM OF THE TEMPLE COMPLEX, WAS USED TO CAPTURE SOARING SHOTS OF THE GATHERED ASSEMBLY FROM ABOVE



"FIRSTLY, I LEARNED . . . THE TERM 'ON TIME' DOES NOT EXIST; IN FACT, IN INDIA AND NEPAL THE VERY IDEA OF TIME IS QUESTIONABLE." FJ (RIGHT)

down right in the middle of the World Peace Ceremony without hurting anyone or getting arrested. This not only taught me a thing or two about tact, respect, and patience, it also helped us capture our best footage yet.

Once we accepted that communication breakdown is merely a Led Zeppelin song, we shot eleven full interviews in multiple languages, were guided through ancient sites by two renowned scholars who provided invaluable knowledge and still found a few ways to have some fun.

Lastly, and most importantly, I learned how to adapt. Culture shock, time zones, foreign

foods, and intense workloads are a potent concoction; once brewed, it can throw almost anyone out of balance. However, Guna and friends not only all survived, we excelled. Guna readapted our shooting schedule when

we realized the captivating story of Tsering Gellek's restoration of Swayambhu was right in front of our eyes (aka camera lenses). As we interviewed Swayambhu restoration workers and officials, a deeply inspiring story of dedication, devotion and hardship began to surface. It soon became apparent that Tsering's story of triumph needed to be made into its own film.

This film is currently in preproduction alongside the historical TNMC documentary. The whole Guna studio is now adapting to our dual documentary focus. The emergence of this new project was almost as exciting as watching a Swayambhu monkey steal a

granola bar out of Barry's hand.

The trip really brought the Guna team together and showed us what we are capable of achieving. Confronting all the variables that come with working abroad forced me to trust my instincts. The team's flexibility, audacity, and most of all, our intuition navigated us through the endeavor with success. Again, to try to express these lessons in words is nearly impossible, but in sum this was a truly transformative experience both for the film and my life. ~FJ Leto

We hope you enjoyed this issue of our newsletter. In addition to filming, we are also raising funds to complete the next phase of our projects. Please visit gunafoundation.org to learn more and to support us! Thank you.