

# Packing Up Patan: The Weight of Memory

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*Note: this was written on October 14, 2025, while in Nepal on my gap year. We spent three weeks in a city called Patan, and I wrote this piece the night before we left.*

We're leaving Patan tomorrow morning. I've just finished dinner, and I'm packing my final items into my backpack and my extra-large duffel, which lay wide open on my bed.

I take with me my homestay sister's giggle, the Saturdays waking up with her in the doorway to my room, ready for a game of Ludo. I'd slip on my house shoes and chase after her, calling her the affectionate name my parents called me 14 years ago, when I was her age: *badmas*. Mischievous. I take with me the surge of independence I felt, riding the bus alone one Saturday morning to Durbar Marg to explore the Nepal Point archives, using my ever-improving Nepali to navigate ("*Rutna Park kahaa?*"). Following suit from the other passengers, I cranked open my window and watched known landmarks pass me by. Ascend, the rock-climbing gym. The Kathmandu roundabout. The bakery I bought barfi from for my homestay mom, who mentioned it was her favorite sweet. I take with me the mint-green kurta I wore on Dashain and the generosity of my aunt, who refused to take it back when I tried to return it to her, thinking she gave it to me to borrow. "*Tapailai,*" she said. For you.

I take with me my notebook, full of Nepali phrases, useful for haggling items down, finding directions home, clarifying a metal-working technique. I take with me the Sunday morning doing handstands at the Garden of Dreams, the walks to Labim mall, traversing the potholed city streets. I take a copy of the Nepali Times, picked up during a trip to Patan Bookshop. I read it voraciously that evening in my room, even annotating the Gen Z editorials, drawing question marks in the margins of dense paragraphs or underlining especially resonant sentences. I take with me 'chiya guffing,' gathering for tea in Swotha with different guest speakers.

I take my half-finished Buddha idol from my metal-working study project, packing it last, wrapped in cloth. My mentor gave me the instructions on how to complete it, along with a file, nail, and hammer. I take with me those afternoons in the studio, fingers and back aching, eyes trained on a single spot of the statue, memories that will surely come back to me as I continue the statue at home in the coming months.

My bag is heavy, so I leave things behind too. I don't pack my inhibition, the awkward, unsure feeling when I asked someone, in Nepali, if we could have six eggs at the supermarket. I leave behind the Messi poster I bought for my 10-year-old homestay brother Samyak, the most adamant Messi fan I know in a family of Ronaldo diehards. He tapes the poster above his bed that evening, the room where we spent hours playing FIFA. I leave behind a wooden comb for my homestay aunt, who braided my hair every day before I left for the program house, different designs each time, fishtail and hairband and Dutch.

Walking the now-familiar route from Durbar Square to the program house, I lug my duffel bag and backpack. Both are heavy, stuffed full, bursting with the weight of memory.