

I am a Geographer ...

Stephanie Woollard

Founder and CEO of “Seven Women” and “Hands on Development, Tours to Nepal”

I studied Geography at secondary school and, as a result, have always been curious about how societies function and what makes them unique. People and cultures fascinate me and I found the many topics and discussions in Geography classes interesting and relevant. After secondary school I went on to study International Development at La Trobe University and completed a Masters (Peace and Conflict Resolution) at Uppsala University in Sweden.

I started Seven Women when I was 22 years old, after visiting Nepal and where I had met seven disabled women making soaps and candles in a small tin shed. In Nepal, disabilities carry a strong social stigma and it is believed that they bring bad fortune. The women were consequently able to sell only a fraction of what they produced at market and were living in dire poverty.

I was disturbed by the injustice and isolation these women were facing, and spent my last \$200 of travel money to pay two trainers to help up-skill the women and sell their products abroad. Since then I have devoted the past decade to changing the lives of disabled and marginalised women in Nepal. My organisation has trained and employed over 1000 disadvantaged women and has helped more than 5000 women in remote villages in Nepal offering shelter, medical assistance and education.

I created my tour company, Hands On Development, in 2006 to share the beauty of the landscape and Nepalese people I had been lucky enough to experience. This includes the spectacular Himalayan mountain range treks to Everest and Annapurna.

My passion for travelling the world and discovering other cultures began when studying Geography at secondary school. When I had the chance to travel to Nepal and see this beautiful country and people, I wanted to share it with others. The geography of Nepal offers some amazing life experiences, but the tours run by Hands On Development are also about educating participants, such as school students, about the larger geography of our world, peoples and cultures. The tours teach students about global issues that spread across many geographies, such as human trafficking, environmental degradation and green technologies.

