

NEWSLEADER

ARTS & CULTURE

To the Top of the World

□ Slide show takes audience on photographic journey to India and Mt. Everest base camp in Nepal

By Wanda Chow
NewsLeader Staff

When William Jans started giving slide presentations of his travels, little did he expect one day 600 people would show up.

That's what happened when the Vancouver photographer gave such a show at the Vogue Theatre last August. And that's what he hopes will happen again when he repeats the presentation on Wednesday, March 10 at Burnaby's Michael J. Fox Theatre — capacity 615 seats.

After 10 years travelling in Asia — two month-long journeys every three years or so — and 15 years of photography experience — he now shoots professionally — he has managed to develop a show with a wide appeal.

"The connotation for slide presentations is kind of rec-room and grandpa," said Jans, 34. "This is nothing like that."

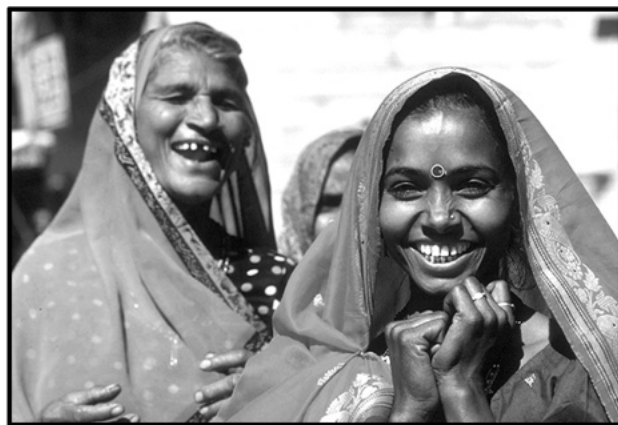
Accompanying his often-stunning photographs are anecdotes of his travels describing everything that makes for a whole journey. It's a combination that brings in people that plan to travel to those places, armchair travellers and just plain photography enthusiasts, he said.

Entitled *Top of the World*, the two-hour show depicts his backpacking trip a year ago through a part of India and up to base camp of Mt. Everest in the Himalayas.

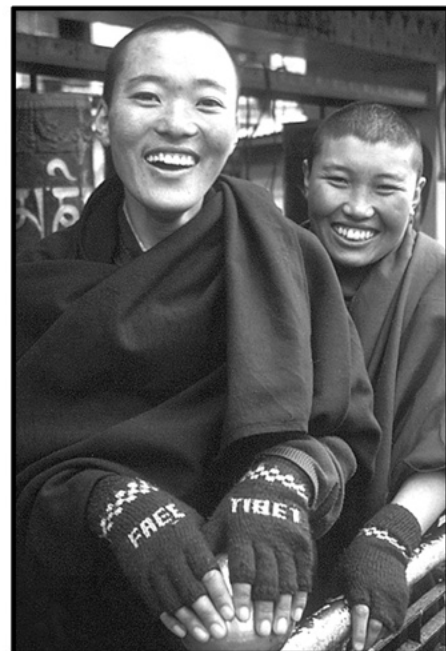
He always travels alone, knowing he'll meet many locals and fellow travellers along the way. And he always travels relatively light. While most backpackers will tote about 12 kilograms (26 pounds), his camera equipment adds another agonizing eight kilograms (17 pounds) to his back.

But he never complains for long. In the Himalayas, "a girl passes you carrying logs on her forehead. I think, 'Oh my god!' It puts us westerners in our place."

The most lasting impression



A collection of images by photographer William Jans during a trip last year to India and Mt. Everest base camp in Nepal, the subject of his upcoming slide presentation entitled, *Top of the World*: above, two Indian women share a laugh; top right, Tibetan woman, one wearing "Free Tibet" gloves; at right, Jans sleeping in a hut — complete with dirt floor and stone bed — at Gorak Shep, located at an altitude of 5,160 metres (16,925 feet).



of all his trips is the people he meets who he finds "so outgoing and friendly." Having picked up an ability to function in Hindi, Thai and Malay, learning on the fly, he also prides himself on his own approach towards the locals: as a photographer, he always asks for permission before snapping a shot. Through his show, he noted, he hopes to teach people how to travel a "little more delicately."

Despite asking first, he finds the people he's met in Asia "don't harm it up as much for the camera," leading to natural-looking photos.

The 26-day "walk" to Everest

base camp — at 19,212 feet — was also an eye-opener.

Everything up there has been carried in by hand, even turbine engines, he said, explaining that, despite planes and helicopters, it is still more cost-effective to hire local porters to carry things in. It's not unusual to see porters less than five feet tall carrying loads of 200 pounds for a 15-day trek.

As for cost, his accommodations during the 26-day trek in Nepal cost a total of \$10.56 Cdn. In comparison, his expenses on chocolate totalled \$51. The higher the altitude, the more one pays for consumer goods.

Other notable events during his trip include: bumping into his next door neighbours in a small desert town in Rajasthan, India. Neither of them had a clue that they were going to be in India at all; and getting knocked off the trail at 4,500 metres by a not-too-friendly yak.

"Knocked off is an understatement — the yak drove its horn into my crotch, lifted my 80 kilo body and 20 kilo pack up and tossed me off the path down a slope that dropped about 800 metres. Luckily my feet landed toes pointing down in a small shrub that kept me from going all the way down.

"Yes, it was as bad as it sounds. Yes, I still have all the same body parts I started with."

He also took second place in the Rajasthan turban-tying contest in Jaialmer, India. He won half of the 2,000 rupees prize, about \$77 Cdn., which can last for a long time in that country. "The cheque was great but the gaudy trophy and excellent certificate are much more precious."

Jans said he has "never ever sanitized my shows." Through pictures and stories he hopes to show people what life is really like in those faraway lands.

Through backpacking, "People can experience so

much more than being on a bus looking out a window."

Top of the World takes place on March 10 at Michael J. Fox Theatre, 7373 McPherson Ave., Burnaby. Doors are at 7 p.m. with showtime at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$12, both at the door and in advance until March 8 at: Eaton Centre Metrotown Info Booth (near LensCrafters), Metrotower Administration (Rogers Candel Tower, 2126 - 4710 Kingsway), Black Dog Video (3451 Cambie, Vancouver) and Videomatica (1855 W. 4th Ave., Vancouver). Or, call William Jans at 872-5050.