

Inside Nepal's forgotten medieval kingdom



A Nepalese shepherd watching his herd in the Korala border area near the Nepal-China Border in Upper Mustang.



This file photograph shows a Nepalese woman and her horse walking past a small temple in Ghemi Village in Upper Mustang.



A general view of animals near a stupa (chorten) at Ghemi village in Lo Manthang in Upper Mustang.

In Nepal's isolated, high-altitude desert of Upper Mustang, a new road to China is bringing economic transformation to the former Buddhist kingdom, once a centre for trans-Himalayan commerce. The remote region is ringed with vast canyons and red mountains that, legends say, are stained with the blood of a demon killed by the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. Yet the recently completed unpaved highway that connects Upper Mustang with China is also bringing unprecedented cultural change to a region that was closed off to foreign visitors until 1992.

In the medieval walled capital of Lo Manthang, young men have swapped Tibetan robes for blue jeans and local cafes broadcast live coverage of Euro 2016 matches to rapt viewers. Nevertheless, while modern life holds considerable allure for many, the push to preserve traditional culture is no less important to the local Loba community. Buddhists who speak a variant of the Tibetan language, they have lived in Upper Mustang for centuries.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the ongoing effort to restore sacred murals and monuments, supported by foreign and Nepali non-profit organizations, including the Lo Gyalpo Jigme Foundation, which is headed by the former king of Upper Mustang. Although the region's rich heritage escaped the ravages of the Cultural Revolution that hit neighboring China, its monuments fell prey to environmental damage.

Wind and rain eroded mud walls and caused wooden rooftop beams to decay, while smoke from ceremonial butter lamps darkened indoor frescos. Over the last decade, restorers have been working hard to shore up structures, clean murals and retouch damaged paintings in line with Buddhist beliefs. Buddhists believe it is better to pray to undamaged images of the Buddha, and see it as their duty to repair and retouch them when necessary. The painstaking process involves grinding gemstones like lapis lazuli and malachite into a fine powder, which is then mixed with water and animal glue to create luminous pigments fit for gods. After last year's massive earthquake killed nearly 9,000 in Nepal and severely damaged monasteries in Lo Manthang, restorers now face an even bigger challenge. Like many here, they too are locked in a race to preserve Upper Mustang's unique cultural legacy for future generations. — AFP



A view of the walled city monastery and stupa of Lo Manthang in Upper Mustang.



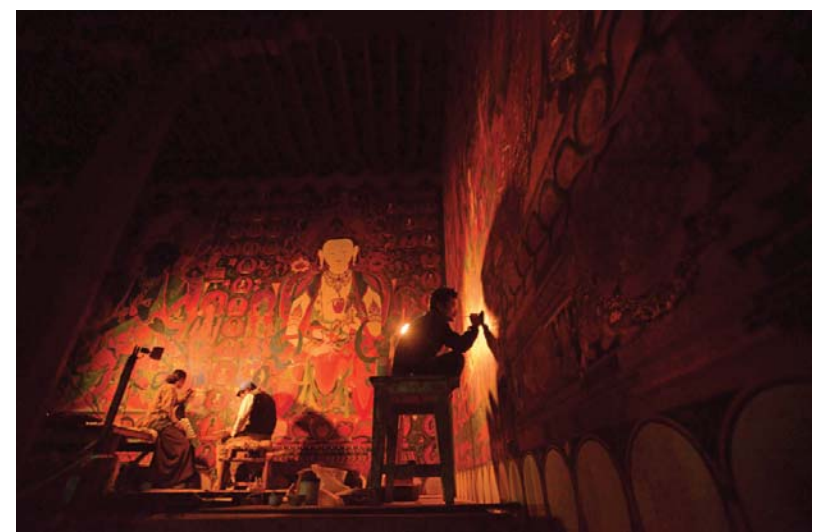
A Buddhist monk walking past children in Ghemi Village in Upper Mustang, north-west of Kathmandu.



Vehicles driving along a dirt road to Lo Manthang in Upper Mustang.



A Nepalese herder with several horses leading mules through the mountains in Upper Mustang, north-west of Kathmandu.



File photograph shows Nepalese artists as they restore sacred murals in a monastery in Lo Manthang in Upper Mustang.

Kerry Washington: 'Two pregnancies have been very different'

"Scandal" creator Shonda Rhimes didn't know that star Kerry Washington had another baby on the way when a less-is-more plan was put in place for season six of the political thriller. The ABC series will have just 16 episodes next season. And fans will have to wait until January to see how the show's many cliffhangers play out. Rhimes "knows

what the story is," Washington said recently when she sat down with The Associated Press. "She knows about how many episodes she needs left to get there. And that was her decision."

It was only a couple weeks after Rhimes' announcement about the new "Scandal" game plan that Washington told her boss that she and her husband, former NFL star and current film actor and producer, Nnamdi Asomugha, were expecting again. They have a two-year-old daughter, Isabelle Amarachi Asomugha.

The mum mom

Washington, 39, smiles and jokingly denies she's carrying a second child. She pats her baby bump, laughs and says she'd merely eaten too much for lunch. So, how is having a second child different from having the first? "Every day is different," she says. "And, for me, definitely these two pregnancies have been very different." When asked how each pregnancy has been unique, she veers away from the subject. Kerry Washington is not one to talk publicly about her personal life.

The color purple

For the last three years, Washington has been an ambassador for the Allstate Foundation Purple Purse campaign, which raises money to benefit nearly 200 domestic-violence nonprofits worldwide. What's

new for 2016 is that fashion industry heavy-hitters - including Tory Burch and Christian Louboutin - are joining Washington, with each designing limited-edition purple purses to be auctioned off for the cause. The auctions are set to take place in October. They will be followed by a retail bag sometime this fall, and there will be a monthlong daily handbag giveaway to contributors to the Purple Purse Challenge. The 2015 campaign raised more than \$3 million, and a spokesperson for the Allstate Foundation says the charity is aiming to best that with the 2016 campaign.

Washington says purses also will be given to charities to use for their own fundraising. Purple is the color for domestic-violence awareness. The purse represents freedom from financial abuse, a tactic frequently used to trap victims in the relationships. Washington recalls a recent encounter an abuse victim, "A woman came up to me, in a room full of people (and said), 'I just want you to know, that when I left, I wore purple for an entire year,'" Washington says. "I knew what that meant and she knew what that meant. And it was the power of this metaphor: That she didn't need to give me details about her black eyes. She didn't have to give me details about her destroyed credit, or her empty bank account, or the mode of transportation that was taken from her. She could just say to me, 'I wore purple.'"

Her 'inner Olivia pope'

The Purple Purse campaign comes at a particularly busy time for Washington. In July, she returned to work on "Scandal," in which she plays Olivia Pope, a fictional fixer for Washington's elite. The actress also has been navigating Emmy season. She has two nominations for the TV movie "Confirmation," which centers on the Supreme Court confirmation hearing of Clarence Thomas (played by Wendell Pierce) and allegations he sexually harassed one of his employees, Anita Hill (played by Washington). Washington is nominated for her performance, as well as for serving as one of the movie's executive producers.

"I think the thing that most surprised me about producing is that it kind of brings out my own inner Olivia Pope, ironically," Washington says. "I love producing because it allows me to play other characters in other worlds in other situations. But that part of me, that part of Kerry that likes to be a fixer and a helper and solve problems, is really able to play. I'm not exactly wearing a white suit or a white hat or carrying Prada. I usually have on sneakers and jeans and a baseball cap. But I still have a little Olivia Pope with me when I'm producing." — AP



Actress Kerry Washington poses for a portrait at The Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel in Los Angeles. — AP