

Destination Guide - Nepal



Your Adventure. Our Expertise.

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Geography

Nepal can be found at the heart of Asia. As a landlocked country it shares three of its borders with India and the fourth with Tibet. Its land mass totals approximately 147,180 square kilometres and stretches only 200 kilometres from north to south. Nepal can be divided into three main geographical regions, the mountainous north, the valleys and foothills of the 'middle region' and the Tarai (teh-rye) a region of lowland jungle in the south.

Nepal contains eight of the world's ten highest mountains, including Mount Everest (*Sagarmatha* in Nepalese) standing at 8,848m. Mountains make up over sixty percent of the land mass of Nepal and this brings certain challenges such as providing healthcare, education and infrastructure for the remote communities who inhabit these areas. Approximately a third of the Himalaya lie within the borders of Nepal and the land is inhabited up to an altitude of about 2,700m.

A large percentage of Nepal's people live in the middle hills. However the name 'hills' could be considered an understatement as the height of this region starts at around 1,500m! To adapt to living on the sides of such steep hills the villagers have built terraces on which they can farm and grow crops. The Pokhara Valley is a perfect example of this way of living.

Kathmandu is the capital of Nepal and its largest city – home to almost a million people. Sitting in the Kathmandu Valley (which is only slightly smaller than Singapore) the city has grown very quickly over the last few decades but it still has delightful old quarters full of narrow alleys and numerous temples. Kathmandu is named after the temple 'Kasthamandap' an ancient building which can still be found in Durbar Square. The city is full of statues, monuments, museums and art. It is a lively and bustling city to explore and the perfect place to experience the diversity of Nepal.

History

The history of Nepal is shrouded in myths and lore. It is a place of ancient cultures and religions and, because of its geography, Nepal has often found itself isolated from the rest of the world.

Very little has been written about Nepal's early history and the few documented accounts seem to blur the lines between truth and legend. In the 8th century BC the first known rulers of the Kathmandu Valley arrived from modern day Mongolia and for the centuries that followed Kathmandu remained a center of power and culture.

Over the years the Nepalese borders grew and shrunk; before 1796 'Nepal' simply referred to a small Kingdom in the base of the Kathmandu Valley. However under the rule of Prithvi Narayan Shah, the ruler of an Eastern territory known as Gorkha, a series of kingdoms were to be united in to modern day Nepal with Kathmandu as its capital.

The years that followed were filled with conquest and expansion. Through this expansion the Nepalese came into contact with the British Empire. There was a bitter two year battle between the British and the Nepalese over the southern Terai territory which, ultimately, the Nepalese lost. However, the British were so impressed with their opponent that they began to recruit the Nepalese into the British Army – this elite regiment is still renowned today and is known as the Royal Gurkha Regiment. Despite its defeat Nepal was never colonised, however the conflict had a lasting effect most notably with the closing of its borders until 1951. In 1951 King Tribhuvan took the throne of Nepal and established a new government but democracy did not happen overnight, elections were first held in 1959 and since then there have been periods of democracy interspersed with absolute rule by the monarchy. On 28th May 2008 Nepal became a republic with both a President and Prime Minister but five years later a new constitution is still to be agreed upon in Parliament.



Culture

Nepal is a culturally diverse country; over a hundred languages are spoken, and there are up to sixty different ethnic and caste groups.

Hinduism and Buddhism coexist here and religion is a way of life. As the state religion Hindu concepts of caste and status directly influences every aspect of life from work to marriage to education. While the cities of Nepal thrive and have an air of hustle and bustle, over eighty percent of the Nepalese population lives off the land and the terraced villages built into the hill side are familiar sights. In these communities the majority of people live according to traditional rules and customs. Family is very important, even to modern Nepali's, joint and extended families will often live in the same house and in rural areas whole communities can be made up of just one family. The average age for marriage is 19 for girls and matchmakers and astrologers are often consulted before a match is finalized.

Within Nepal's 30 million people there is a huge variety of ethnic groups, from Lhopa to Limbu, Tamangs to Thakalis. In simple terms the people of Nepal fall into one of three cultural zones which are dictated by geography – mountains, middle hills and Terai. In the mountains of the Himalaya are the Tibetan peoples. Their names are made up of the region they come from with 'pa' on the end, for example Sherpas (easterners) or Lopas (southerners). The Newari people are the dominant ethnic group in the Kathmandu Valley; they have one of the world's most difficult languages which is different to Tibetan, Nepali or Hindi. Until the 1950's the Terai region was dominated by the Tharus people, whose natural immunity to malaria meant they could live in this region safe from the disease.

Cultural Considerations

One of the key things that you will need to consider during your trip to Nepal is how you will dress. Kathmandu is a melting pot of many cultures which means that the usual Nepalese rules on clothing which are not always fully adhered to. However, in rural areas there are very strong traditions of dress and it is important to dress modestly, especially for girls and women. You must ensure that you cover your shoulders and legs; suitable clothes for trekking could be a wide brimmed sun hat, T-shirt with short sleeves (not cut offs), together with long shorts (knee level), and boots. We would suggest trekking trousers that zip off at the knee, so you can cover up when entering villages or if the sun is too hot. Boys should always wear a top (and long trousers if possible).

You could cause considerable offence by wearing much less clothing than this, e.g. a strappy top, or short shorts, or even a crop top. Please be sensitive.

It is also not considered appropriate for there to be displays of affection, such as kissing or holding hands, between members of the opposite sex in public. In Nepal the forehead is considered the most important part of the body and so you should never touch someone else's head. There are also a number of taboos surrounding food. Once something has touched your lips it is 'contaminated' for everyone else, you should keep this in mind when drinking from communal water supplies, do not eat off anyone else's plate or offer anyone food that you have taken a bite from. You should only eat, greet, give or receive with your right hand (you will soon learn why!). Major Hindu temples are not open to those outside of the faith. If you are allowed into a temple you should remove your shoes and should not take photographs. Please remember to always ask permission first before you take a picture of someone.



Language

The national language of Nepal is Nepali. It is closely related to other Sanskrit based languages. However, nearly half of all Nepali's speak another language, such as Sherpa or Tibetan. Nepali is written in Devanaargi but the Roman alphabet is used for tourist signs (so don't worry). There are a few letters that in Nepali produce different sounds to their English counterparts and it is useful to try and get the basics of pronunciation:

- A as in *alone*
- O as in *poke*
- AA as in *start*
- R a cross between R and D
- B a cross between B and V
- S sounds like Sh
- E as in *café*
- U as in *roo*
- I as in *police*
- W a cross between W and V
- J as in *juice*
- Z sounds like dj or dz

Numbers

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ek	Dui	Tin	Chaar	Paanch	Chaa	Saat	Aath	Nau	Das

Numbering using the Devanaargi script

०	१	२	३	४	५	६	७	८	९	१०
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

General Conversation

Hello	Namaste
Goodbye	Namaste
Thank you	Dhanyabaad
See you again	Pheri betaunla
How are you?	Sanchai hunuhunchha
My name is...	Mero naam...ho
What is your name	Tapaaiko naam ke ho?
I'm sorry	Maph garnus
I don't understand	Maile bhujina
Please help me	Malaai (bhok) laagyo
What is this called?	Nepali maa ke bhanchha?
What time is it?	Kati bajyo?
I like...very much	Malaai dherai manparchha
Pardon?	Hajur
Children	Bachha
Boy	Keta
Girl	Keti
Don't worry	Chinta nagarnus
Yes/No (it is/isn't)	Ho/Hoina
Yes/No (there is/isn't)	Chha/Chanina
Please	Dinuhos
Right	Daayaa
Left	Baayaa



Climate

Nepal’s weather can be (pretty roughly) divided in two – the wet season and the dry season. The wet season starts around June and goes through to September with the dry season running from October to May. However it must be remembered that Nepal is a geographically diverse country and it is difficult to generalise about its climate. Altitude plays a massive part in weather conditions. The monsoon season is welcomed in Nepal and the countryside comes alive with full streams and green shoots.

	Kathmandu(1,330m)		Pokhara (850m)		Chitwan (250m)	
	max	min	max	min	max	min °C
Jan	19	2	20	8	24	7
Feb	20	4	21	8	26	8
Mar	25	8	27	11	33	12
Apr	30	11	33	12	35	18
May	30	16	30	19	35	20
Jun	30	20	30	20	35	23
Jul	29	21	30	21	33	24
Aug	29	20	30	21	33	24
Sep	27	19	29	20	32	22
Oct	23	15	27	18	31	18
Nov	23	4	23	11	29	12
Dec	20	2	20	8	24	8

Food and Drink

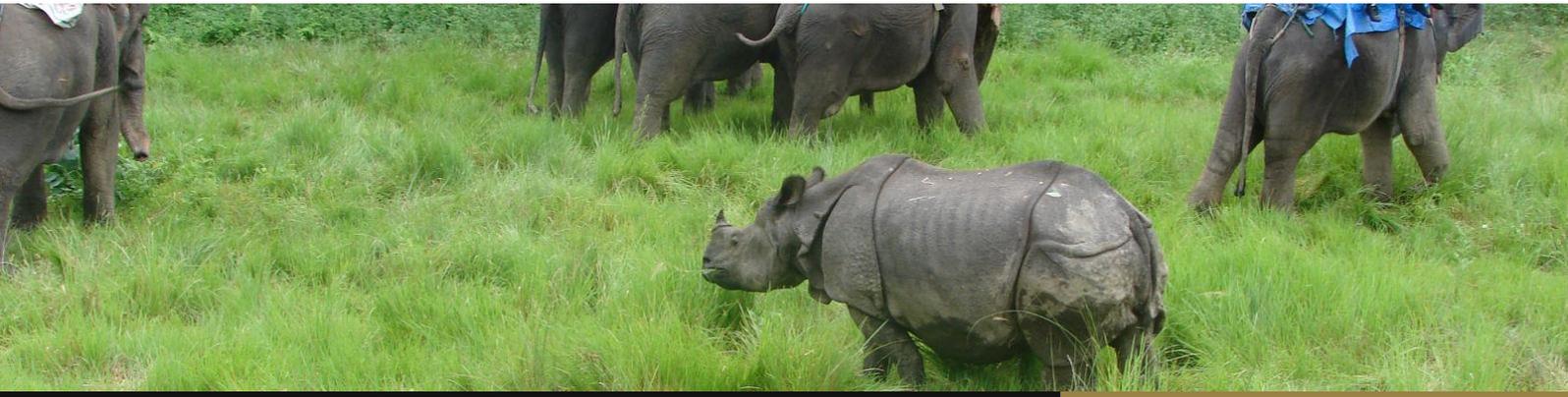
Nepalese food is famous for its high nutrition levels and fantastic taste, traditional food is typically very healthy and low in fat. Nepalese cuisine is based on basic and locally grown ingredients and is flavoured with lots of different spices. Food varies from region to region but relies on the same staple ingredients such as rice, vegetables and lentils.

Daal bhaat is eaten frequently throughout Nepal; it consists of a kind of lentil soup usually served with rice, vegetables and pickles. Sometimes it will also be accompanied by a chapatti (unleavened bread) or papad (crispy lentil cakes). The most common vegetables are potatoes or chayote. To eat dhal bhaat in the traditional way you pour the lentil soup onto the rice, mix it into balls using your fingers and eat it with some pickle.

Most Nepalese people eat a non-meat diet so vegetarians are extremely well catered for. Chicken and pork are usually reserved for a special or celebratory meal. Many Nepalis will eat rice and vegetables twice a day as time for cooking is limited and different ingredients are scarce.

The most important thing to remember in Nepal is not to drink the tap water. Bottled water is readily available or you can purify your own. Boiled water and tea are generally safe to drink but you will struggle to find ‘builders tea’ – often you will be faced with a tea bag dropped into a glass of sweet, hot milk. You could take your tea the Tibetan way with butter and salt (rather than milk and sugar), or brave Indian lassi, a curd mixed with sugar!

The traditional way of eating in Nepal is squatting on the floor on straw mats called “sukul”. It’s considered taboo to eat from other peoples’ plates but asking for seconds is a compliment to your host!



Useful things to know...

- The area of Nepal is 147,181 sq km
- The population of Nepal 30,430,267 (2013 approximation)
- The capital of Nepal is Kathmandu
- Time in Nepal is 5 hours and 45 minutes ahead of GMT (they do not currently have daylight saving)
- Electricity supply in Nepal is 220v/50Hz, you will need an adaptor for British plugs. It is best to invest in a worldwide adaptor as sockets vary from region to region
- The unit of currency in Nepal is the rupee (NPR), the rupee is divided into 100 paisa and almost all money is paper. It is illegal to change money anywhere that is not registered to do so.
- There are 158.60 NPR to £1 GBP (August 2013)
- Visas for Nepal are needed by British Nationals, information can be found on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website at www.fco.gov.uk further details will also be provided in your pre-departure literature and will be shown on your school web page closer to your departure date.



Our Commitment to Travelling Responsibly

We understand our responsibility to look after and protect the places that we travel to. Our passion for exploring the world means we want our destinations to be there for future generations to discover and enjoy, just as we have done.

We tread lightly...

We try to limit group sizes, smaller groups tend to have less of a negative impact.

We use in-country partners to ensure that we put money back into the communities we visit.

We do not employ agents who just take a 'cut'. All of our partners know the areas we travel to and employ local guides.

We try to only use existing trails and where possible discourage our participants from straying off these.

We ensure all participants take their rubbish with them and dispose of it correctly.

We try not to use bottled water; where we can we purify water from local water sources not only cutting down on the rubbish we produce but encouraging participants to develop positive attitudes to conserving water.

We buy the majority of our food in country; we try not to take food from the UK. By doing this we support local economies and immerse our participants in the countries way of life.

We try to use existing camping areas therefore having as little impact on our surroundings as possible.

We use Trangias to cook on rather than open fires so that we do not scorch the ground.

We lead by example...

We encourage all of our participants to learn a little of the local language and dialect.

We inform all of our participants about cultural considerations and encourage them to research a country's culture and history before they travel.

We choose sustainable and worthwhile Community Projects. We use our in-country partners to highlight projects which will benefit whole communities for years to come.

We don't forget the little things...

We cut down on waste paper by producing electronic copies of all our information which can be found on your school web page

We print all our documents double sided to halve the amount of paper we use

We invest in good quality equipment that lasts more than a season. Unlike other companies we do not endorse a 'single use' culture instead encourage a sustainable and responsible approach to travel.

