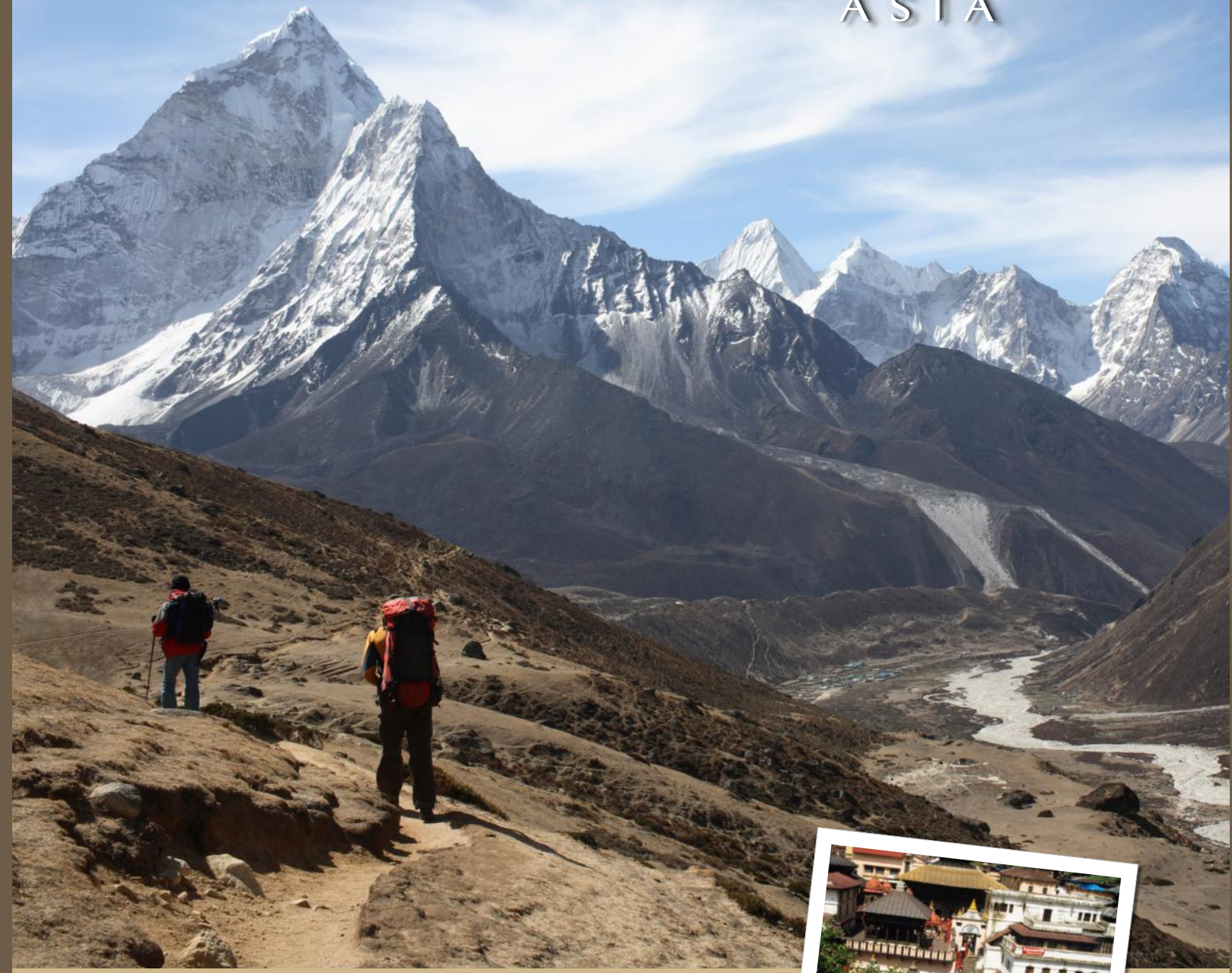


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DESTINATION

NEPAL

TRAVELER'S GUIDE



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POPULATION

Approximately 28,670,677 (2011), growing from just 9 million in 1950.

CLIMATE

Nepal has a typical monsoonal, two season year.

Dry Season: October - May

Wet Season: June - September

TIME

Nepal is five hours, 45 minutes ahead of GMT. 30 Minutes ahead of Indian Time.

VISAS

Visas are required for Nepal.

HISTORY

It appears that Kirata people were one of the first to settle in Nepal; they are said to have ruled Nepal for about 2,500 years. Nepal is first mentioned in the late Vedic text, Atharvaveda Parisista as a place exporting blankets, and in the post-Vedic Atharva Siras Upanisad. In Samudragupta's Allahabad inscription it is mentioned as a bordering country. The 'Skanda Purana' has a separate chapter known as 'Nepal Mahatmya', which "explains in more details about the beauty and power of Nepal." Nepal is also mentioned in Hindu texts such as the Narayana Puja.

Around 500 BCE, small kingdoms and confederations of clans arose in the southern regions of Nepal. From one of these, the Shakya polity, arose a prince named Siddharta Gautama (traditionally dated 563-483 BCE), who later renounced his status to lead an ascetic life and came to be known as the Buddha ("the enlightened one"). It is believed that the 7th Kirata king, Jitedasti, was on the throne in the Nepal valley at the time. By 250 BCE, the southern regions came under the influence of the Mauryan Empire of northern India, and Nepal later on became a nominal vassal state under the Gupta Empire in the fourth century CE. Beginning in the 3rd century CE, rulers called the Licchavis governed the Kathmandu Valley and surrounding central Nepal.

After centuries of petty rivalry between the three kingdoms, in the mid-18th century, Prithvi Narayan Shah, a Gorkha King, set out to unify the kingdoms. Seeking arms

and aid from India, and buying the neutrality of bordering Indian kingdoms, he embarked on his mission in 1765. After several bloody battles and sieges, he managed to unify the Kathmandu Valley and surrounding territory three years later in 1768.

However, an actual battle never took place to conquer the Kathmandu valley; it was taken over by Prithvi Narayan and his troops without any effort, during Indra Jatra, a festival of Newars, when all the valley's citizens were celebrating the festival. This event marked the birth of the modern nation of Nepal.

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) won the largest number of seats in the Constituent Assembly election held on 10 April 2008, and formed a coalition government which included most of the parties in the CA. Although acts of violence occurred during the pre-electoral period, election observers noted that the elections themselves were markedly peaceful and "well-carried out". The newly elected Assembly met in Kathmandu on 28 May 2008, and, after a polling of 564 constituent Assembly members, 560 voted to form a new government, with the monarchist Rastriya Prajatantra Party, which had four members in the assembly, registering a dissenting note. At that point, it was declared that Nepal had become a secular and inclusive democratic republic, with the government announcing a three-day public holiday from 28 to 30 May. The King was thereafter given 15 days to vacate the Narayanhiti Royal Palace, to re-open it as a public museum.



ENVIRONMENT

The dramatic differences in elevation found in Nepal result in a variety of biomes, from tropical savannas along the Indian border, to subtropical broadleaf and coniferous forests in the Hill Region, to temperate broadleaf and coniferous forests on the slopes of the Himalaya, to montane grasslands and shrublands and rock and ice at the highest elevations.

At the lowest elevations is the Terai-Duar savanna and grasslands ecoregion. These form a mosaic with the Himalayan subtropical broadleaf forests, which occur from 500 to 1,000 metres (1,600 to 3,300 ft) and include the Inner Terai Valleys. Himalayan subtropical pine forests occur between 1,000 and 2,000 metres (3,300 and 6,600 ft). Above these elevations, the biogeography of Nepal is generally divided from east to west by the Gandaki River. Ecoregions to the east tend to receive more precipitation and to be more species-rich. Those to the west are drier with fewer species.

From 1,500 to 3,000 metres (4,900 to 9,800 ft), are temperate broadleaf forests: the eastern and western Himalayan broadleaf forests. From 3,000 to 4,000 metres (9,800 to 13,000 ft) are the eastern and western Himalayan subalpine conifer forests. To 5,500 metres (18,000 ft) are the eastern and western Himalayan alpine shrub and meadows.

THE LAND

Nepal is of roughly trapezoidal shape, 800 kilometres (497 mi) long and 200 kilometres (124 mi) wide, with an area of 147,181 km² (56,827 sq mi).

Nepal is commonly divided into three physiographic areas: Mountain, Hill and Terai. These ecological belts run east-west and are vertically intersected by Nepal's major, north to south flowing river systems.

The southern lowland plains or Terai bordering India are part of the northern rim of the Indo-Gangetic plains. They were formed and are fed by three major Himalayan rivers: the Kosi, the Narayani, and the Karnali as well as smaller rivers rising below the permanent snowline. This region has a subtropical to tropical climate. The outermost range of foothills called Shivalik or Churia Range cresting at 700 to 1,000 metres (2,297 to 3,281 ft) marks the limit of the Gangetic Plain, however broad, low valleys called Inner Terai (Bhitri Tarai Uptyaka) lie north of these foothills in several places.



ECONOMY

Nepal's gross domestic product (GDP) for 2008 was estimated at over \$12 billion (adjusted to Nominal GDP), making it the 115th-largest economy in the world. Agriculture accounts for about 40% of Nepal's GDP, services comprise 41% and industry 22%. Agriculture employs 76% of the workforce, services 18% and manufacturing/craft-based industry 6%. Agricultural produce - mostly grown in the Terai region bordering India - includes tea, rice, corn, wheat, sugarcane, root crops, milk, and water buffalo meat. Industry mainly involves the processing of agricultural produce, including jute, sugarcane, tobacco, and grain.

Its workforce of about 10 million suffers from a severe shortage of skilled labour. About half of the population live below the international poverty line of \$1.25 a day. The spectacular landscape and diverse, exotic cultures of Nepal represent considerable potential for tourism, but growth in this hospitality industry has been stifled by recent political events.

The rate of unemployment and underemployment approaches half of the working-age population. Thus many Nepali citizens move to India in search of work; the Gulf countries and Malaysia being new sources of work. Nepal receives \$50 million a year through the Gurkha soldiers who serve in the Indian and British armies and are highly esteemed for their skill and bravery. The total remittance value is worth around \$1 billion, including money sent from the Persian Gulf and Malaysia, who combined employ around 700,000 Nepali citizens.



THE PEOPLE

Nepal is among the most diverse and complex of Asian countries, with a huge range of cultures united only by recent nationalism and the resulting common language. Traditionally Nepal was a collection of loosely federated kingdoms and tribes. Not until the mid-18th century was it unified into a country, and not until the 1950's has a national identity transcending ethnic differences been promoted.

The term 'Nepali' encompasses a tremendous range of people. Nobody is just a Nepali: ethnic group and caste play even more important roles in defining an individual. A Bhotiya yak herder, a Newar rice farmer and a Tharu tribesman in many ways has less in common with each other than a Frenchman, a German and an Italian.

The diverse human mosaic can be roughly sorted into two categories: lowland and highland, rice-eaters and barley-eaters - Hindu Indo-Aryans from the south, who predominated in the Terai and the lower hills, and the Buddhist Mongolian peoples from the Tibetan Plateau, who flourish in the high mountains. The ethnic tribes inhabiting the rugged hill zone in between are varying blends of these two basic themes, becoming more Tibetan and more Buddhist the higher you go.



CURRENCY

The monetary unit of Nepal is the Nepali rupee (R's) which is divided into 100 paisa (p)

CREDIT CARDS

Major credit cards are widely accepted at mid-range and better hotels, restaurants and fancy shops in the Kathmandu Valley and Pokhara. *Elsewhere credit cards are likely not accepted so you will need to carry enough cash to cover your costs.*

TIPPING

Service charges of 10% are added to bills in most leading hotels and restaurants. Where it is not included, a tip of 10-15% of the bill would be appropriate.

Airport porter/hotel bellboy:

\$1.00 - \$ 2.00 US per bag.

Your tour guide:

\$10.00 - \$ 12.00 US per person per day.

Driver/assistants:

\$ 6.00 - \$ 7.00 US per person per day.

CUSTOMS

Customs regulations allow, per adult, a maximum of 1.15 litres of alcohol, 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars or 100 grams of tobacco and a reasonable amount of perfume.

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HEALTH

No immunizations are required to enter Nepal, but many are recommended, including up-to-date tetanus and typhoid vaccinations, a polio update and a gamma globulin injection or Hepatitis A vaccine. Before traveling you need to consult with your health physician.

Gastrointestinal illness is a common result of Bhutan's abysmal sanitation and strikes nearly everyone sooner or later. The local version of Delhi Belly is simply a typical tourist's ailment.

Avoid untreated water (including ice cubes), raw vegetables and unpeeled fruit. Water needs to be filtered, then boiled to get the bugs out. To purify water, add five or six drops of Lugol's Solution (an iodine solution) per litre/quart of water, and let stand 20 minutes before drinking. Avoid food that has been left standing out and unboiled milk.

THEFT AND SAFETY

Common sense is all that is necessary: be discreet with money, and keep valuables, including passport and airline tickets, out of sight and in a safe place (larger hotels have safes). Minimize the money you carry with you, or carry it in a money-belt next to your body (inside clothing) and have change handy for minor purchases to avoid displaying the entire bank.

WHAT TO PACK

Dress is normally casual in Nepal. Most importantly, dress conservatively. Women should avoid sleeveless, tight or short garments. Bare legs above the knee are frowned upon for men and are verboten for women. When visiting monasteries, dzongs and other religious sites do not wear shorts or hats.

You will need to pack according to the season. At the beginning of the dry season the weather is balmy, neither too hot nor too cold. Towards the end of the dry season the weather can be very hot. During the wet season you will need to carry an umbrella.

Pack light, as suitcases usually swell with souvenirs and wardrobes can be easily expanded in Kathmandu. Clothing should be comfortable and easy to wash and dry. Most hotels offer laundry facilities and if you are trekking you can wash your clothes at the village water tap.

Pack lip balm, sunblock, sunglasses, hat, mosquito repellent, tissue and a good pair of walking shoes.

ELECTRICITY

- Voltage: 220-240 Volts (U.S./Canada are 110-120 Volts)
- Primary Socket Types: Indian, Europlug
- Multi-voltage appliances (laptops, etc.): Plug adapter
- 110-120V electronics: Plug adapter + step-down transformer
- Hair dryers, curling irons, etc.: Plug adapter + voltage converter





RELIGION

The overwhelming majority of the Nepalese population follows Hinduism. Shiva is regarded as the guardian deity of the country. Nepal is home to the famous Lord Shiva temple, the Pashupatinath Temple, where Hindus from all over the world come for pilgrimage. According to mythology, Sita Devi of the epic Ramayana, was born in the Mithila Kingdom of King Janaka Raja.

Near the Indian border, Lumbini is a Buddhist pilgrimage site and UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Kapilavastu district. Traditionally it is held to be the birthplace in about 563 B.C. of Siddhartha Gautama, a Kshatriya caste prince of the Sakya clan, who, as the Buddha Gautama, gave birth to the Buddhist tradition.

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LANGUAGE

The official language is Dzongkha and chokey (Tibetan script) is used for written expression. Ngalopkha (on which Dzongkha is based) is spoken in the west; Sharchopkha in the east and Nepali in the south. Bhotes speak various Tibetan dialects. The Nepalese speak various Nepalese dialects.

English is spoken in the larger cities and in hotels, shops and most restaurants.

CULTURE

Nepal has always been a dividing line between civilizations and cultures, and a crossroads for the flow of commerce and culture. Here the plains of the subcontinent climb up to the high plateau of Tibet, the languages and people of India give way to those of the China and the Hindu religion blends into Buddhism. Nepal, the land at the margin, is often a complex blend of the two influences and this variation is further complicated by the diversity of ethnic groups within the country.



ETIQUETTE

The Nepalese are very polite people. Handshaking is customary for both men and women upon introduction and smiling is definitely a national tradition. There are a few taboos - The use of the left hand to give and receive as well as crooking your finger to call someone are considered impolite. Improper dressing is probably the most significant and visible faux pas committed by visitors. Modesty applies to men as well as women, but women should be especially careful to cover the upper arms and legs and avoid tight or revealing clothing.

When entering homes, shoes are usually left at the door. The same applies to temples and monasteries, especially if the shoes are leather ones. Watch what others do. Children can become veritable pests in their desire to pose for photography, but it's polite to seek permission before photographing an adult: by smile and gesture, if not verbally.

Don't sit or stand on statues, chortens, chaityas, prayer walls or any vaguely religious object. Buddhism matters here and pervades every aspect of daily life. When visiting a temple always walk clockwise around Buddhist stupas, chortens or mani walls. Always remove your shoes before entering a Buddhist or Hindu temple or sanctuary. There are many rules, but they are constantly repeated, so you won't make any mistakes. If you do, the Bhutanese will forgive you if they see you are trying to be reverent.

It's the custom to give a white scarf of khata to a Buddhist abbot when you are introduced.

You may be subjected to a rapid barrage of questions on personal subjects. This is not considered rude, but if you feel it is you can change the subject, or start questioning the questioner.

Among Hindu castes, cooked food is a primary vehicle for ritual contamination. Any food or utensil that touches the lips is juto, ritually impure, and should not be given to anyone else. Empty glasses and dishes should be placed on the ground, away from cooked food.

Drinking chang or butter tea in a Sherpa home is a ritual in which a guest's glass is refilled (or at least topped up) at least three times in the course of the first few minutes. Pace yourself and allow the server to do his or her duty.

Body language can be confusing. Bobbing the head from side to side signals agreement, not 'no' and when a Nepali waves 'come' it looks as if he saying 'go'. Pointing with the finger is impolite; villagers use their chins to point.

Physical contact between the sexes, even hand-holding, is frowned upon in public, but it's perfectly all right for members of the same sex.

As in most of Asia, time is a malleable concept and promptness is a relative thing. If it does not happen today it may happen tomorrow. This charmingly, relaxed approach can be infuriating if you are waiting for something urgent.

It's good to donate a few rupees to genuine beggars, religion mendicants, wandering minstrels or the blind, crippled or ill. Beggars who harass are a different category, as are begging children. Many are quite well off, and play 'one rupee, one pen, on chocolate as a game.

Confrontation and aggression are avoided at all costs, and people will go to great lengths to save face and not push an issue or person to the wall. Polite persistence may calmly make it clear you're not interested in the object they're shoving in your face.

FOOD

The national dish is dal bhat, boiled rice topped with a sauce of lentils and served with curried vegetables (tarkari or subji), seasoned with a dab of spicy pickled vegetable (achar). This meal is eaten morning and evening with monotonous regularity by all who can afford it. Rice is expensive in the un-irrigated higher hills, where the staple is dhiro, a pasty boiled mush of millet or corn. Up in the mountains, cuisine turns Tibetan and tsampa holds sway. This roasted barley flour can be mixed with tea and eaten without further cooking, convenient in a fuel-scarce region. The Sherpas of Khumbu live on exceptionally tasty high-altitude potatoes. Trekkers here should sample rigi koor, crisp potato pancakes served with yak butter, chilies and deliciously creamy yak-milk yogurt.

The number one eating rule in Nepal is always use your right hand. The left hand, used for washing yourself after defecating, is never used to eat food and certainly should not be used to pass food (or anything at all).

Caste rules also play a part in Nepali eating habits. Some foods are strictly taboo in Nepal. Beef is strictly banned from the menu since the cow is a holy animal.

WATER SAFETY

Always drink bottled water or water that has been boiled. Never drink water from a tap. If you are unsure if the water has been treated you can always drink tea as the preparation for tea requires that the water is boiled.

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