

NEPAL



Nepal is a landlocked country in Southern Asia, between the Tibet autonomous region of China and India. It contains eight of the world's 10 highest peaks, including Mount Everest - the world's tallest - on the border with Tibet, and Lumbini, the birth place of Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. Nepal recently was declared a republic and has abolished the monarchy.

Draped along the greatest heights of the Himalaya, Nepal is where the ice-cold of the mountains meets the steamy heat of the Indian plains. It's a land of yaks and yetis, stupas and Sherpas and some of the best trekking on earth. The Himalaya's most sophisticated urban cultures took shape here, in the three great kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley - Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur - home to world-class artistic and architectural heritage.

Nepal is not just a bungee-jumping, apple-pie eating Shangri-la. It's also one of the poorest countries on earth. However, many visitors, drawn to Nepal by the promise of adventure, leave equally enchanted by the friendliness and openness of the Nepali people.

From the natural rhythm you ease into on a trek to the rhythm of a tabla drum at one of Kathmandu's palace restaurants, Nepal is an amazingly diverse country that offers something for everyone. One journey through this land is rarely enough. The first thing many people do after a visit is start planning the next one.



Kathmandu and to the west **Pokhara** occupy large valleys in the hills. The Kathmandu Valley was urbanized long before the first Europeans reached the scene and has historic neighborhoods, temple complexes, pagodas, Buddhist stupas, palaces and bazaars. Its natives are predominantly Newar farmers, traders, craftsmen and civil servants. Newar culture is an interesting synthesis of Hindu and Buddhist elements.

Kathmandu is the largest city and capital of Nepal and the namesake of the Kathmandu Valley. Once thought to be the fabled and inaccessible Shangri-La, Kathmandu is now a hub for independent travelers as well as a growing vacation spot catering to all budgets. As a result of considerable urban growth in recent decades, it is now part of one continuous urban area together with Patan to the south.



Boudhanath (also known as Boudha, pronounced 'Bo-da') is located 7 km East/Northeast of Kathmandu & home to one of the largest Buddhist *stupas* in the world, built during the 5th century AD.

For centuries, Boudhanath has been an important place of pilgrimage and meditation for Tibetan Buddhists & local Nepalis. It is located on what was a major trade route between Nepal & Tibet. Many traveling merchants used it as a resting place. It is also a popular tourist site. In 1979, Boudha became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Great Stupa of Boudhanath is the focal point of the district. There are at least 29 Tibetan Gompas (Monasteries & Nunneries) around Boudhanath. The culture is very much Himalayan with a strong presence of Tibetans & Sherpas, as can be evidenced by the number of restaurants selling *momos*, *thukpa* & other Tibetan favorites. Many maroon clad Tibetan Buddhist monks & nuns can be seen walking around Boudha, especially at the Stupa. As a daily ritual, many people walk three or more times around the stupa while repeating the mantra 'Om Mani Padme Hum' either quietly or aloud. During the days of & surrounding the full moons, the air is often thick with incense & mantras sung by monks, & the number of people visiting the Stupa increases significantly, along with the intensity of their mantras & prayers. Boudha is a fascinating & very spiritual area. Most of the restaurants & shops are closed by 8 pm.



Swayambhu- A large stupa, highly revered in Nepal, and one of the most sacred Buddhist sites in the country. It offers great views over the city, and no lack of monkeys. It's a 20-30 minute walk from Thamel, or take a taxi or rickshaw. Pay Rs 200 (July 2010) to enter at the front steps or slip in free on the ramp on the south side. As with the Boudha Stupa, there's no shortage of Buddhist and Tibetan-inspired trinkets for sale. There are also drinks for sale at the top, and at least one small restaurant selling momos. For those that have their own transport or have difficulty climbing stairs there is a parking lot at the back entrance that significantly reduces the amount of stairs that need to be climbed to gain access to the main compound.



Pokhara is the third largest city in Nepal. It is the starting point for most of the treks in the Annapurna area. It is considered by many to be the most beautiful place in the whole wide world.

Pokhara has fewer urban points of interest but outstanding views of the nearby Annapurna Himalaya. Pokhara's Newar population is confined to bazaars. Elsewhere upper caste Hindus dominate, whose ancestors probably were Khas peoples from far western Nepal. Both valleys offer excellent opportunities to experience Nepal without strenuous trekking. Narrower valleys along streams and rivers are important rice-growing centers in the hills.



Muktinath is a sacred place both for Hindus and Buddhists located in Muktinath Valley at an altitude of 3,710 meters at the foot of the Thorong La mountain pass (part of the Himalayas), Mustang district, Nepal. The site is close to the village of Ranipauwa, which sometimes mistakenly is called Muktinath as well.

The Buddhists call the sacred temple Chumig Gyatsa, which in Tibetan means 'Hundred Waters'. For Tibetan Buddhists, Muktinath-Chumig Gyatsa is a very important place of Dakinis, goddesses known as Sky Dancers and one of the 24 Tantric places. They understand the murti to be a manifestation of Avalokitesvara.

Getting there

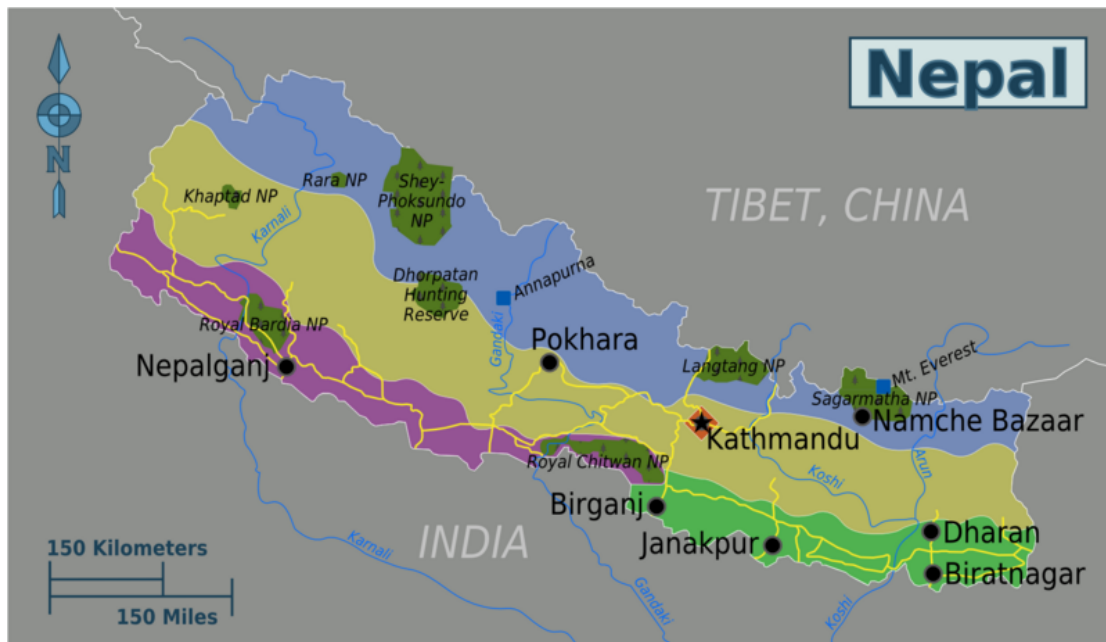
[Flight Itineraries]

Entering the country

Nepal is a traveler-friendly country and arrival is straightforward. All entry points to Nepal offer visas on arrival and money exchange.

By plane

Kathmandu's **Tribhuvan International Airport** (IATA: **KTM**), is the largest, and only international airport in Nepal. Most flights to Kathmandu arrive via Delhi, gulf countries (UAE & Qatar), or Bangkok, and of the remaining only a few originate from outside Asia. International airlines serving Kathmandu:



To and from airport

Many hotel and guest houses offer complimentary pick up and delivery from the airport. Taxis are also available. As always, negotiate the price beforehand with the driver. A taxi ride to Thamel or Boudha should not exceed 300 NPR. Otherwise, order a taxi at the pre-paid booth inside the airport, which costs 600 NPR (May 2011). A pre-paid from the taxi stand outside the domestic terminal costs NPR450 to Thamel (April 2011). Both these fees are more than the meter rate, but saves the hassle of long negotiations. When booking a prepaid taxi dont give the receipt to the driver until you are at your destination and you are satisfied, this is the drivers payment. If the driver asks for more money dont give it. There is no culture of tipping taxi drivers. Try not to exchange money at the airport. Money changers at the airport not only charge service charge but also offer a lower rate than is offered in Thamel or elsewhere in town. Don't pay for a taxi at the taxi desk or at any of the drivers immediately outside the airport terminal, they're all a rip-off. They'll ask for 500nrs at least, especially if they see you're a newcomer. Simply ignore them and take your bags out and past them to the edge of the parking lot where many other drivers await. Haggling with them can get you a taxi to Thamel for around 300nrs.

Visa

Tourist Visa is available on arrival for citizens of most countries at the designated land borders (see below) and at a cost of currently:

US\$ 25 for 15 days US\$ 40 for 30 days US\$ 100 for 90 days

Money

There are banks in Kathmandu, Pokhara and in several other major cities that will allow you to retrieve cash from ATM or credit cards. You may be charged a service fee, depending on your bank. There are quite a number of ATMs now in those cities that are open round the clock. Although Indian currency is valid in Nepal (at an official exchange rate of 1.60 Nepalese rupees to 1 Indian rupee), the Rs. 500 and Rs. 1000 currency notes are not acceptable. Carrying 500- and 1000-Indian rupee notes is a punishable offence in Nepal. Be sure to keep all currency exchange and ATM receipts as they are required at the airport bank to convert back to your original currency. If you don't have them, they will refuse to convert your currency but they will suggest going to the Duty Free shop upstairs, even though it isn't a licensed money changer. Traveller's checks may be useful outside of the major cities.

Medical assistance and health recommendations

Please note that you are solely responsible for your well-being for the whole duration of your travel with the KHPC Team. Please get health insurance for Nepal before you come. In case of an emergency there are doctors, dentists and hospitals, where one can go. Bring basic medicines and everything you have to use frequently. Stomach problems, flu, cough, fever and inflammations of the throat are very common. When in Nepal, please never drink tap water but either cooked water or originally bottled mineral water. You may choose to brush your teeth with cooked water also. It might be better not to eat fresh salads or drink fresh-pressed juice or drinks with ice cubes in. Do not eat fruits and vegetable without peeling or cooking it. Remember the proverb: Peel it, cook it or leave it!



Food

There is an old colonial adage that says 'If you can cook it, boil it or peel it you can eat it...otherwise forget it'. Vegetables and fruit should be washed with purified or bottled water or peeled where possible. Beware of ice cream that is sold in the street or anywhere it might have melted and refrozen; if there's any doubt (eg a power cut in the last day or two) steer well clear. Undercooked meat should be avoided.

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If a place looks clean and well run and the vendor also looks clean and healthy, then the food is probably safe. In general, places that are packed with travellers or locals will be fine, while empty restaurants are questionable.

Weather and what to take

The Med Camp will take place in February/March. February to April, the tail end of the dry season, is the second-best time to visit. The weather gets warmer, although the temperature in Kathmandu often drops as low as 0°C (32°F) at night, with extreme cold at high elevations. Visibility (to see the mountains) is not as good as earlier in the dry season, but Nepal's wonderful rhododendrons and other flowers are in Technicolor bloom.

Bring layers of clothing to wear. Make sure that you bring an adequate amount of prescription medicines, necessary over the counter medications such as ibuprofen or artificial tears and/or an antibiotic cream for cuts, as well as nutrient supplements. Have your doctor recommend a basic travel medical kit for you. This might include an antibiotic for, a general antibiotic, cough medication and a syringe. You should make sure that your vaccinations are up-to-date, especially for Hepatitis. You should bring sun screen lotion, moisturizer, and lip balm and a good quality hand sanitizer, Pepto-Bismol tablets, sun hat, and oral rehydration sachets. You will be able to buy purified water for drinking, cleaning your teeth etc. A thermos bottle and a heating coil (with the proper adaptor) can be very handy, especially if you bring packets of instant soup or coffee or tea bags. The bottle and coil allow you to refresh in your hotel room. Sleeping bags are recommended for those choosing a budget or middle price hotel, or a guest house.

On the other hand you can still buy basic things everywhere in Nepal, especially in Kathmandu or Pokara. There are small grocery shops, pharmacies and souvenir shops. With some time and effort you

can mostly get the things you want and need.



Getting around

Getting around Nepal can be a challenging business. The impossible terrain and extreme weather conditions, plus a high level of disorganisation, mean that trips rarely go exactly according to plan. On the other hand, Nepali ingenuity will usually get you to your destination in the end. Although travel can be frustrating, it also creates memorable moments by the score. Good humor, patience and snacks are essential prerequisites.

The whole gamut of transport options is available in Nepal, from hot-air balloons to elephants (it is most common to hire a taxi or Jeep or go by bus). Walking is still the most important, and the most reliable, method of getting from A to B and for moving cargo; more is carried by people in Nepal than by every other form of transport combined.

One of the major considerations when using any form of public transport is to avoid traveling during festival times, especially major ones such as Dasain and Tihar (Diwali). Buses and planes are booked solid, and forget flying if you haven't booked well in advance.

Local customs

Greet people with a warm **Namaste** (or "Namaskar" formal version - to an older or high-status person) with palms together, fingers up. It is used in place of hello or goodbye. Don't say it more than once per person, per day. The least watered down definition of the word: 'The divine in me salutes the divine in you.'

Show marked respect to elders.

Say Thank you: Dhanyabaad (DHAN-naii-bat)

Feet are considered dirty. Don't point the bottoms of your feet (or your bum!) at people, or at religious icons. In this vein, be sure not to step over a person who may be seated or lying on the ground. Be sensitive to when it is proper to remove your hat or shoes.

The **left hand** is considered unclean because it is used to wash after defecating. Many Nepal Hotel & Guest House toilets have bidet attachments (like a kitchen sink sprayer) for this purpose in lieu of toilet paper. It is considered insulting to touch anyone with the left hand.

Circumambulate temples, chortens, stupas, mani walls, etc. **clockwise**. (ie, with your right side closest to the object or respect)

When **haggling** over prices, smile, laugh, and be friendly. Be prepared to allow a reasonable profit.

Don't be a miser or insult fine craftsmanship, it's much better to lament that you are too poor to afford such princely quality.

Many **Hindu temples** do not allow non-Hindus inside certain parts of the temple complex. Be aware & respectful of this fact, as these are places of worship, not tourist attractions.

Being a non-Hindu makes you moderately low **caste**, but not an untouchable. Avoid touching containers of water; let someone pour it into your drinking container. Likewise avoid touching food that others will be eating. Make sure you are invited before entering someone's house. You may only be welcome on the outer porch, or in the yard. Shoes are routinely left on the front porch or in a specific area near the front door.

Wash hands before and after eating. Touch food only with the **right hand**.

Talk

The great biological and cultural diversity of present-day Nepal is matched by its linguistic diversity. Nepal boasts a variety of living languages many of which are remnants of the traditional Asiatic

cultural amalgamation in the region. impressively large number for a country with a small land mass like Nepal. Nepal has more distinct and individual languages in one country than the whole of the European community.

The official language of Nepal is **Nepali**. It's related to Hindi, Punjabi, and other Indo-Aryan languages, and is normally written with the **Devanagari** script (as is Hindi). While most Nepalis speak at least some Nepali, a large percentage of the population has as their mother tongue another language, such as **Tharu** around Chitwan, **Newari** in the Kathmandu Valley, and **Sherpa** in the Everest area.

Although Nepal was never a British colony, proximity to India has made English somewhat widespread among educated Nepalis. Nevertheless learning even a few words of Nepali is fun and useful, especially outside of the tourist district and while trekking. As Asian languages go, Nepali has to be one of the easiest to learn, and the traveler making the effort isn't likely to make worse blunders than many natives with a different first language.

Stay safe

Sometimes, there are strikes ("bandas") and demonstrations to contend with. Some businesses close, but many allowances are usually made for tourists, who are widely respected. Ask about strikes at your hotel or read the English Nepali newspapers.

The Maoist insurgency ended in 2006 after they signed comprehensive peace agreement with the government. The former rebels are now leading the government. Their activists have not harassed the tourists. The trekking routes and other tourist destinations are safe for travel [23]. If your country has an embassy or consulate in Nepal, let them know your whereabouts & plans, and at least listen seriously to any cautionary advice they offer.

Nepal's cities are safer than most. Even pickpockets are rare. Still, don't flash cash or make ostentatious displays of wealth, out of respect for the non materialistic reality of the people. Be cautious with the public transportation. Roads are narrow, steep, winding & frequently crowded. Domestic flights with a private company are safer than the roads. Flying risks are greatest before & during the monsoon season when the mountains are usually clouded over.

Electricity

Plugs in Nepal are similar to European plugs, but it can be useful to buy an adapter for your electrical devices.

Time zone

Nepal is in Southern Asia, between China and India.

Standard Time is 5.45 hours ahead Greenwich Mean Time (GMT+5.45). This means it is 3.45 hours ahead of Europe.

The International Dialing Code for Nepal is +977.

Info about KHCP in Nepal

Inform yourself about KHCP activities in Nepal and at other places and projects.

<http://www.karmapa-healthcare.org/>

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Shree Karma Raja Maha Vihar, Sharmarapas school at Swayambhu in Kathmandu / Nepal

Dhagpo Sheydrub Ling - Sherab Gyaltzen Rinpoches school in Kathmandu/Nepal

Karma Ngedhon Osal Choekhor Ling - Sherab Gyaltzen Rinpoches nunnery in Kathmandu/Nepal

Tharpa Choeling - Shangpa Rinpoches Nunnery in Muktinath, Mustang/Nepal

Kirtipur Monastery - Kagyu Institute of Buddhist Studies by Shangpa Rinpoche

For more information about Nepal visit:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/nepal>

<http://wikitravel.org/en/Nepal>