

*Country Guide for*  
**NEPAL**



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## 1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

**Location:** Indian sub-continent.

Nepal Tourism Board  
Bhrikuti Mandap, Kathmandu, Nepal  
**Tel:** (1) 256 909 or 256 229. Fax: (1) 256 910. E-mail: info@ntb.wlink.com.np  
**Web site:** <http://www.welcomenepal.com>

Royal Nepalese Embassy  
12a Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QU  
**Tel:** (020) 7229 1594 or 7229 5352. Fax: (020) 7792 9861.  
**E-mail:** rnelondon@compuserve.com  
**Opening hours:** 0900-1300 and 1400-1700 Monday to Friday; 1000-1200 (consular section).

British Embassy  
PO Box 106, Lainchaur, Kathmandu, Nepal  
**Tel:** (1) 410 583 or 414 588. Fax: (1) 411 789 or 416 723. E-mail: britemb@wlink.com.np  
**Web site:** <http://www.britain.gov.np>

Royal Nepalese Embassy  
2131 Leroy Place, NW, Washington, DC 20008  
**Tel:** (202) 667 4550. Fax: (202) 667 5534. E-mail: nepali@erols.com

Nepalese Consulate

## 2 GENERAL

820 Second Avenue, 17th Floor, New York, NY 10017  
**Tel:** (212) 370 3988/9. Fax: (212) 953 2038.  
**E-mail:** nepal@un.int  
**Other consulates in:** Boston, Chicago, Marina Del Rey, San Francisco and Sun Valley.

Embassy of the United States of America  
PO Box 295, Pani Pokhari, Kathmandu, Nepal  
**Tel:** (1) 411 179. Fax: (1) 419 963. E-mail: amemb@cons.col.com.np  
**Web site:** <http://www.south-asia.com>

Honorary Nepalese Consulate General  
PO Box 33, Royal Bank Plaza, South Tower, 32nd Floor, 200 Bay Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5J 2J9  
**Tel:** (416) 865 0200. Fax: (416) 865 0904.

**Note:** The Canadian High Commission in New Delhi deals with enquiries relating to Nepal (see India section).

**Country dialling code:** 977.

General

**Area:** 147,181 sq km (56,827 sq miles).

**Population:** 21,843,000 (1998).

**Population Density:** 148.5 per sq km.

**Capital:** Kathmandu. Population: 535,000 (1993).

**Geography:** Nepal is a landlocked kingdom sharing borders with Tibet to the north and northwest, and India to the west, south and east. The country can be divided into five zones: the Terai, the Siwaliks, the Mahabharat Lekh, the Midlands or Pahar and the Himalayas. The greater part of the country lies on the southern slope of the Himalayas, extending down from the highest peaks through hill country to the upper edge of the Ganges Plain. The hilly central area is crossed by the Lower Himalayas where there are eight of the highest peaks in the world, leading up to Mount Everest. Wildlife in Nepal includes tigers, leopards, gaur, elephants, buffalo, deer and rhinos.

**Government:** Constitutional monarchy. Head of State: King Birendra Bir Bikram Sháh Dev since 1972. Head of Government: Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala since 2000.

**Language:** The official language is Nepali. There are many other languages, including Maithili and Bhojpuri. English is spoken in business circles and people involved in the travel trade.

**Religion:** Mainly Hindu and Buddhist with a small Muslim minority.

**Time:** GMT + 5.45.

**Electricity:** 220 volts AC, 50Hz. There are frequent power cuts.

**Telephone:** IDD is available to all major cities. Country code: 977. Outgoing international code: 00. The Telecommunication Office, Tripureshwar, deals with telephone calls and cables. The International Telephone Office is open 0900-1400 Monday to Thursday and 0900-1330 Friday. Hotels and private communication centres provide long-distance telephone services (ISD, STD)

**Mobile telephone:** The Nepalese mobile network uses PDC (Personal Digital Cellular System) technology, which is not compatible with GSM or other mobile services.

**Fax:** Services are available in most hotels, travel agencies and communications centres. The Nepal Telecommunications Corporation booth at the airport has fax facilities.

**Telegram:** The Central Telegraph Office offers a 24-hour international telephone and telegram service seven days a week.

**Internet/E-mail:** ISPs include World Link (web site: <http://www.wlink.com.np>). There are cybercafés in Kathmandu, Patan and Pokhara. Internet services are also provided by hotels.

**Post:** Postal services are available in most centres. Make sure that letters are hand-cancelled at the post office (post boxes should not be used for important communications). The General Post Office in Kathmandu (near the Dharahara Tower) is open 1000-1700 Monday to Friday. Poste restante services are available from 1000-1600. Express post services are also available. Main hotels will also handle post.

**Press:** English-language dailies available in Nepal are The Kathmandu Post and The Rising Nepal. The International Herald Tribune, Time and Newsweek can all be found in Kathmandu.

Himal is a magazine published six times a year, devoted to issues throughout the South Asian region. At certain times of day there are radio and television news broadcasts in English.

**BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies:** From time to time these change.

**BBC:**

MHz 17.79 15.31 11.95 5.975

**Voice of America:**

MHz 17.74 15.43 9.770 6.160

### 3 PASSPORT

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
<b>British</b>	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Australian</b>	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Canadian</b>	Yes	Yes	No
<b>USA</b>	Yes	Yes	No
<b>OtherEU</b>	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Japanese</b>	Yes	Yes	No

**PASSPORTS:** Valid passport required by all except nationals of India holding proof of identity and arriving from India. (Acceptable proofs include Voter's Identity Card issued by the Election Commission of India or Photo Identity Card issued by the state or central government of India or Temporary Photo ID issued by the Indian Diplomatic Mission in Nepal.)

**VISAS:** Required by all except the following:

- (a) nationals of India;
- (b) transit passengers continuing their journey by the same or first connecting aircraft provided holding valid onward or return documentation and not leaving the airport.

**Types of visa and cost:** Tourist: \$30 (30-day single-entry); \$25 (single re-entry); \$40 (double re-entry); \$60 (multiple re-entry); \$50 (30-day for visitors arriving with a tourist visa intending to return within 150 days). Business: (multiple-entry): US\$100 (1 year); US\$250 (5 years). A recommendation from the Ministry of Industry is required. Payment for Business visas must be made in Nepalese currency.

**Note:** (a) All nationals may obtain tourist visas on arrival at the airport. Two passport-size photos are required. (b) Business can be conducted on a Tourist visa for up to 30 days.

**Validity:** Visas are valid for up to 6 months from date of issue. They may be extended in Nepal at the Department of Immigration, Kathmandu (tel: 494273 or 494337), or the Immigration Office, Pokhara. Maximum stay in Nepal is 150 days in any calendar year. The fee is US\$50 (payable in US currency). For full conditions on visa extension (including charges and conditions), contact the Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy).

**Application to:** Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy); see address section for details. Visas can also be obtained on arrival from the Immigration authorities at all entry points (with

fees payable in US Dollars) provided travellers are in possession of valid travel documents, two passport photographs and the relevant fee. Applications for Business visas must be made to the Department of Immigration (see above under Validity for address).

**Application requirements:** (a) 1 completed application form. (b) Valid passport. (c) 1 passport-size photo. (d) Fee. (e) For business visas, letter from company explaining purpose of visit accompanying application made direct to Department of Immigration in Nepal (as above).

**Working days required:** 1.

## 4 MONEY

**Currency:** Nepalese Rupee (NRs) = 100 paisa. Notes are in denominations of NRs1000, 500, 100, 50, 25, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1. Coins are in denominations of NRs 5, 2 and 1, and 50, 25, 10, and 5 paisa.

**Currency exchange:** It is illegal to exchange currency with persons other than authorised dealers in foreign exchange (banks, hotels and licensed money changers). Visitors should obtain Foreign Exchange Encashment Receipts when changing currency and keep them, as these will help in many transactions, including getting visa extensions and trekking permits.

**Note:** Visitors should bear in mind that foreign visitors other than Indian nationals are required to pay their airline tickets, trekking permits and hotel bills in foreign currency.

**Credit cards:** American Express is widely accepted, with MasterCard and Visa in tourist shops, hotels, restaurants and agencies. Check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

**Travellers cheques:** Accepted at banks and major hotels. If trekking, it is important to bear in mind that cash is necessary. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in US Dollars or Pounds Sterling.

**Currency restrictions:** Import of local and Indian currency is prohibited. Foreign currency is unlimited but must be declared. Export of local currency is prohibited. Only 15% of the amount exchanged into local currency will be reconverted into foreign currency on departure and all exchange receipts must be retained.

**Banking hours:** Banks in the Kathmandu valley are open 0900-1430 Monday to Friday. In other areas, opening hours are usually 1000-1430 Sunday to Thursday and 1000-1200 Friday. Licensed money changers are open 12 hours a day.

## 5 DUTY FREE

The following goods may be imported into Nepal without incurring customs duty: 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars; 1.15 litres of spirits or 12 cans of beer; a reasonable amount of perfume; 15 rolls of film.

**Notes:** (a) All baggage must be declared on arrival and departure. (b) Certain goods including cameras, videos and electronic goods may only be imported duty free if they are exported on

departure. They may not be left in Nepal. (c) It is illegal to export goods over 100 years old. (d) Export certificates need to be obtained from the Department of Archaeology for the export of any metal statues, sacred paintings and similar objects.

## 6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 11 2001 National Unity Day. Jan 27 Martyrs' Day. Feb 19 Rashtriya Prajatantra Divas (National Democracy Day). Feb 21 Shivaratri (in honour of Lord Shiva). Mar 8 Nepalese Women's Day. Mar 9 Holi Festival. Mar Ram Nawami (Birthday of Lord Ram). Mar 26 Navabarsha (New Year's Day). May 7 Buddha Jayanti (Birthday of Lord Buddha). Aug 4 Rakshya Bandhan (Janai Purnima). Aug 5 Gai Jatra. Aug 12 Krishna Asthami (Birthday of Lord Krishna). Aug 21 Teej (for women only). Aug Rishipanchami. Sep 1 Indra Jatra (Festival of Rain God). Oct 23-26 Dashain (Durga Puja Festival). Nov 9 Constitution Day. Nov 14 Deepawali (Festival of Lights). Dec 29 King Birendra's Birthday. Jan 11 2002 National Unity Day. Jan 29 Martyrs' Day. Feb 19 Rashtriya Prajatantra Divas (National Democracy Day). Mar 8 Nepalese Women's Day. Mar 13 Shivaratri (in honour of Lord Shiva). Mar 28 Holi Festival. Mar Ram Nawami (Birthday of Lord Ram). Apr 4 Navabarsha (New Year's Day). May 26 Buddha Jayanti (Birthday of Lord Buddha). Aug Rishipanchami. Aug 22 Rakshya Bandhan (Janai Purnima). Aug 23 Gai Jatra. Aug 31 Krishna Asthami (Birthday of Lord Krishna). Sep 8 Teej (for women only). Sep 20 Indra Jatra (Festival of Rain God). Oct 13-15 Dasain (Durga Puja Festival). Nov 4 Deepawali (Festival of Lights). Nov 8 Constitution Day. Dec 29 King Birendra's Birthday.

**Note:** Some of the above are Hindu festivals, which are declared according to local astronomical observations. It is not possible to predict dates of festivals occurring after March 2001. The dates above are supplied by the Nepal Tourism Board, are themselves approximations. Travellers should check locally nearer the time for precise dates.

## 7 HEALTH

	<i>Special Precautions</i>	<i>Certificate Required</i>
<b>Yellow Fever</b>	No	1
<b>Cholera</b>	Yes	2
<b>Typhoid and Polio</b>	Yes	-
<b>Malaria</b>	3	-
<b>Food and Drink</b>	4	-

**1:** A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required of travellers coming from infected areas.

**2:** Following WHO guidelines issued in 1973, a cholera vaccination certificate is not a condition of entry to Nepal. However, cholera is a serious risk in this country and precautions are essential. Up-to-date advice should be sought before deciding whether these precautions should include vaccination, as medical opinion is divided over its effectiveness. For more information see the Health appendix.

**3:** Malaria risk, mainly in the benign vivax form, exists throughout the year in rural areas of the Terai districts of Bara, Dhanukha, Kapilvastu, Mahotari, Parsa, Rautahat, Rupendehi, Sarlahi and

especially along the Indian border. The malignant falciparum form resistant to chloroquine has been reported.

**4:** All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilised. Milk is unpasteurised and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised, but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Avoid dairy products which are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled. Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information see the Health appendix. High altitude sickness is a hazard for trekkers, so it is important to be in good health before travelling. Advice can be obtained from the Himalayan Rescue Association near the Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. It is advisable, particularly when in rural areas, to carry a medical kit containing items such as rehydration mixture for the treatment of severe diarrhoea and 'dry spray' for cuts and bruises. Contact the Nepal Tourism Board for advice (see address section). Hepatitis A, B and E occur. Meningitis has been reported in some areas. There has been a sharp rise in visceral leishmaniasis, and trachoma is fairly common.

**Health care:** The most convenient hospital for visitor care is Patan Hospital in Lagankhel. Most hospitals have English-speaking staff and big hotels have doctors. Pharmacies in Kathmandu, mainly along New Road, offer a wide range of Western drugs at low prices. In Kathmandu you can get certain vaccinations free of charge at the Infectious Diseases Clinic. Full medical insurance is essential.

Travel - International

**AIR:** Nepal's national airline is Royal Nepal Airlines (RA). It operates flights to Bangkok, Bangalore, Calcutta, Delhi, Frankfurt/M, Hong Kong, Mumbai, Osaka, Paris, London, Shanghai and Singapore. Other airlines operating to Kathmandu include Aeroflot (Moscow), Biman Bangladesh Airlines (Dakha), China South West Airlines (Lhasa), Condor Airlines (Munich), Dragon Air (Hong Kong), Druk Air (Paro), Gulf Air (Abu Dhabi), Indian Airlines (Delhi, Calcutta, Varanasi), Lauda Air (Vienna), Necon Air (Patna, Varanasi), Pakistan International Airlines (Karachi), Qatar Airways (Doha), Singapore Airlines (Singapore), Thai International (Bangkok), Transavia (Amsterdam via Sharjah).

**Approximate flight time:** From Kathmandu to London is 10 hours 15 minutes.

**International airport:** Kathmandu (KTM) (Tribhuvan) is 6.5km (4 miles) east of the city (travel time - 20 minutes). Buses and taxis to the city are available. Airport facilities include bank/bureau de change, duty-free shop, refreshments and tourist information.

**Departure tax:** NRs1100 for international flights (NRs660 within the Indian sub-continent, eg Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). Children under two years are exempt.

**Note:** Foreign nationals must pay for airfares in foreign currency. Only Nepalese and Indian nationals are allowed to pay in rupees for air passage between Nepal and India.

**RAIL:** Two stretches of the Indian Railway Line run to the border with Nepal, where cycle-rickshaws are available for onward journeys.

**ROAD:** Kathmandu is connected with India and Tibet by new and picturesque highways through the fertile plains of the Terai. Bus services operate from all border points to Kathmandu. Visitors are permitted to drive their own cars provided they are in possession of an international carnet. For information on how to obtain an international carnet, visitors should contact their national Automobile Association. See also Travel - Internal section for required documentation.

**NOTE:** All visitors entering Nepal by land must use one of the following entry points: Kakarbhitta, Birgunj, Belhiya (Bhairahawa), Nepalgunj, Dhangadi, Mahendra Nagar (all on the Nepal-India border) and Kodari (on the Nepal-China border). If entering overland by car, an international carnet is required (enquire at Embassy for details).

Travel - Internal

**AIR:** There is a network of domestic flights linking major towns, radiating from Kathmandu. Many of these offer spectacular views across the mountains. Royal Nepal Airlines operates an extensive range of scheduled flights to around 21 destinations in the interior parts of Nepal. Other domestic airlines, of which there are more than 18, provide regular and charter services to popular destinations. Helicopters can be chartered for various purposes. Nepal's domestic air service is known to be punctual and reliable.

**Departure tax:** Nrs110.

**Note:** Air fares must be paid in foreign currency by foreign nationals. Only Nepalese and Indian nationals are allowed to pay in rupees.

**RAIL:** Nepal Janakpur-Jayanagar Railways (NJJR) operates a freight and passenger service in the eastern Terai.

**ROAD:** Traffic drives on the left. The interior parts of the country are linked with a number of motorable roads. The road system is of unpredictable quality. Bus: There are regular bus services to Kathmandu from all the border points. Tickets may be booked in advance. Buses for the different parts of the country are available at the Gongabu bus terminal, which is located near Balaju. Services are operated by the Transport Corporation of Nepal and by private operators. Deluxe tourist buses are available from Kathmandu to Pokhara and Chitwan. Most of them depart at 0700 from near Thamel in the city centre. Car hire: Cars can be hired from the Hertz representative, the Avis representative or Yeti Travels, all in Kathmandu. Chauffeur-driven cars can only be hired in the Kathmandu Valley. Documentation: An International Driving Permit is valid in Nepal for 15 days after which a local licence is required. The minimum driving age is 18. A temporary licence to drive is available from local authorities on presentation of a valid national driving licence.

**URBAN:** There are bus services in the populous areas around Kathmandu, which include the neighbouring cities of Patan and Bhaktapur. A trolleybus route provides frequent journeys over the 11km (7-mile) Kathmandu-Bhaktapur road. Private minibuses feed the trolleybus route from nearby villages. On buses and trolleybuses belonging to the Transport Corporation of Nepal, a 4-stage fare system applies, with colour-coded tickets issued by conductors. 'Microbuses' also operate. Taxi: Metered taxis are plentiful in Kathmandu; at night the meter reading plus 50% is standard. Private taxis are more expensive and fares should be agreed before departure. Tempos: These are metered 3-wheel scooters, which work out slightly cheaper than taxis. Rickshaws: These operate throughout the city. Fares should be negotiated in advance. Bicycles and motorcycles: These can be hired from bike-shops or hotels by the hour or day. Motorcyclists require a driving licence. Cyclists should make sure they have a working bell.

## 8 ACCOMMODATION

**HOTELS:** Kathmandu has an increasing number of international-class hotels which are particularly busy during spring and autumn, when it is advisable to book well in advance. Comfortable hotels can also be found in Pokhara, and the Royal Chitwan National Park in the Terai Jungle. A government tax is added to bills, which varies according to the star rating of the hotel. For more information, contact the General Secretary, Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN), Kamal Pokhari, Kathmandu (tel: (1) 412 705; fax: (1) 424 914).

**LODGES:** Besides the officially recognised hotels, there are a number of lodges or hostels. In Kathmandu these are located in the old part of the town, in the streets around the Durbar Square or in the Thamel district. Lodges are available outside the main towns, and provide suitable accommodation for mountaineers and trekkers. For a list of approved hostels and lodges, contact the Nepal Tourism Board in Kathmandu or one of their representatives abroad (see address section for details).

### Kathmandu

Nepal is known as the abode of the gods. For many years a secret, unknown country, it was, in the 1950s, faced with making a leap from the 11th century to modern times. Visited first by mountaineers and trekkers, it later became the haunt of hippies. In 1989 restrictions barring several areas to tourists were lifted.

Kathmandu, the capital and also the cultural, commercial and business hub of the Kingdom, is a magical place. In the centre is Durbar Square where there is a wonderful collection of temples and shrines, both Buddhist and Hindu. They are generally built in the pagoda style with a mass of intricate exterior carving. The old Royal Palace is in the square, as is the Statue of Hanuman the Monkey God, clad in a red cloak. Here also is the house of the living goddess - the Kumari. A few kilometres from Kathmandu is the hugely impressive Bodnath Stupa. It has become a centre of Tibetan exile culture and is a good place to buy Tibetan handicrafts and artefacts. Climbing upwards from the city one can reach the famous Buddhist stupa of Swayambhunath, popularly known as the Monkey Temple. There are a great many steps leading up to the temple, which is frequented by an even greater number of monkeys. The monkeys should be treated with some caution since their behaviour can be unpredictable. The monkey temple is noted for its large staring eyes. There are also a number of monasteries. Respect should be shown for local sensitivities when visiting religious sites or temples.

Just 5km (3 miles) west of the city, below the Nagarjun Forest, are the Balaju Water Gardens, with a reclining statue of Lord Vishnu and a 22-headed seadragon fountain. 19km (12 miles) south of Kathmandu, and accessible by taxi, are the Godavari Royal Botanical Gardens housing trees, shrubs and beautiful orchids in an idyllic setting.

### The Kathmandu Valley

Kathmandu was once one of three equal cities, the other two being Patan and Bhaktapur. Bhaktapur (also known as the 'temple city') is located some 12km (7.5 miles) from Kathmandu in the eastern part of the valley. The Kathmandu valley's rich cultural and natural heritage has prompted UNESCO to list seven World Heritage sites in the area. The National Art Gallery, located in the old Malla Palace, has unusual, colourful animal paintings on the second floor which are worth a look. Other museums in Bhaktapur are the National Woodworking Museum, showing fine examples of Newari woodcarving (for which the city is renowned), and the Brass and Bronze Museum, both in Dattatreya Square.

Patan is located at the southern end of the Kathmandu valley and is famous for its bronze and silverware. The city contains many ancient historic and artistic landmarks, including Patan Durbar Square (also the location for the interesting Patan Museum), Krishna Mandir, the Royal Bath, the Kumbheshwor Temple and the Golden Temple. Patan has the Jawalakhel Zoo, housing exotic South Asian animals.

There are shrines for every purpose in the valley, such as the Shrine of Ganesh the Elephant God, reputed to bring good luck. There are four Ganesh temples in the valley, each a masterpiece of Nepalese architecture - one in Kathmandu's Durbar Square, one in Chabahil, one in Chobar and one near Bhaktapur. Lumbini, being the birthplace of Lord Buddha, is one of the world's most important pilgrimage sites.

The nearby Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal's first national park, is a jungle overflowing with wildlife. There are many lodges here offering visitor accommodation, canoeing, white-water rafting and elephant rides. Nagarkot Village, situated on rice steppes in magnificent countryside, provides spectacular views of Mount Everest, mist permitting. The hill town of Gorkha is the ancestral home of the Shah Dynasty and residence of the original Gurkha soldiers. There is a lively bazaar and the Royal Trek to Pokhara begins here. The secluded town of Pokhara lies 200km (125 miles) west of Kathmandu in the centre of Nepal on Lake Phewa. No other place in the world commands such a view of the Himalayas. It is a starting point for mountaineers and trekkers, and was at one time the home of JRR Tolkien.

#### The Mountains & Parks

One of the principal reasons for visiting Nepal must be either to see or to climb the mountains, especially Mount Everest. Located in Sagarmatha National Park in the Khumbu region bordering Tibet, the mountain's appropriate Nepalese name is Sagarmatha (Head of the Sky). The Sherpas and Tibetans worship it as Chomolongma (Mother Goddess of the Earth). At an altitude of 8,848m (29,022ft), Everest is the world's highest peak and has been opened for commercial mountaineering for decades. It is part of the Great Himalayan Range, which stretches for some 800km/500 miles and which includes a further eight peaks above 8000m (26,240ft). The countryside offers an astonishingly varied topography as the snowy mountain peaks give way to intricately green terraced hills, scenic rivers and tropical jungles in the interior. For walkers and **trekkers, Nepal is a true paradise**: the picturesque hamlets and mountain villages are linked by hundreds of trails that have been used for centuries, with little change noticeable even today. The practicalities for trekking are now easy to arrange: numerous Nepalese trekking companies can provide everything from porters, cooks and tents to flight arrangements, and the authorities are quick to issue trekking permits where applicable (visitors should check in advance with the tourist board, as these are not compulsory everywhere). Numerous temples and Buddhist shrines can be also be discovered en route and visitors should make sure that, when visiting them, they stick to the proper religious protocol (see also Social Conventions in the Social Profile section). The Nepalese Government has set aside more than 35% of the total area of the country as natural sanctuaries. There are now nine National Parks and three wildlife reserves, located both in the mountainous zones as well as in the tropical plains. The Terai lowlands in the south form the richest habitat in the country. Five protected areas are located in the region and many species of wildlife, include the rare Royal Bengal tiger and leopard, can be observed.

## 9 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

**Trekking:** Trekking: The trekking season is generally from September to May, but the best periods are October to December and March to April. The countryside is mostly rugged and the trails are loose, but trekking is by far the best way to enjoy Nepal's spectacular landscape. Different types of trips with varying degrees of difficulty can be arranged. Some foreign travel

agencies can book trekking packages in advance in collaboration with the Nepalese trekking agencies. In Kathmandu, there are many local officially registered trekking agencies which can provide a fully organised trek, complete with porters, guide, cook, food tents, sleeping bags, mattresses, transport to and from the starting and finishing points, flight arrangements, permits and insurance. They also provide participants with a choice of itineraries.

**Trekking formalities:** Trekking formalities: As of July 1999, trekking permits are no longer required for the general trekking areas designated by the Department of Immigration (such as the Everest, the Annapurna, the Langtang and Rara). For all other areas, a permit is still required and can be obtained from the Department of Immigration located at New Baneshwar, Kathmandu (tel: (1) 494 273 or 494 337). Trekking to Dolpa, Kanchanjunga, Makalu and Upper Mustang can only be undertaken through a registered trekking agency. Entrance fees are levied for the national park areas and wildlife reserves; these range from NRs500 to NRs1000 per person per day. Entrance fees to the Annapurna and Manaslu Conservation Areas are NRs2000 per person per day. Children under 10 are exempt. Higher fees are payable for filming and helicopter landing permits. Further information can be obtained from the Nepal Tourism Board (see address section).

**Trekking advice:** Trekking advice: The Nepal Tourism Board gives the following advice to trekkers: use authorised guides and porters only; be careful with matches around wooded or grassy areas as forest fires can cause serious damage; be economical with all fuel, especially local firewood (campfires are not recommended); prioritise tour companies and lodges which do not use firewood; trekkers are strictly forbidden to cut any green forest reserve or kill any wild life; use washing and toilet facilities provided or, if none are available, make sure to be at least 30 metres away from any water source; use biodegradable items as much as possible; when visiting temples or Buddhist shrines, respect local religious customs (see Social Conventions in Social Profile section); take necessary precautions when suffering from altitude sickness (for details, see the Health section).

**Note:** Note: In the past, the authorities have discouraged women from trekking on their own. Some Nepalese trekking agencies, however, are now keen to provide a service for female trekkers who can also hire female guides and porters.

**Pony treks:** Pony treks: Ponies have been a means of transport for people and materials for centuries in Nepal and are today used extensively for trekking. Pony treks follow nearly the same routes as normal treks and are offered mostly in the western region around Pokhara, as well as in the hinterlands of Dolpo and Lo Manthang.

**Scenic flights:** Scenic flights: Most of the domestic airlines arrange flights in light aircraft over Mount Everest. Flights are also available from Pokhara and other locations west of the capital, flying over the spectacular Annapurna range.

**Mountaineering:** Mountaineering: To scale any of the mountain peaks in Nepal, climbing permits are required. They can be obtained from the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Mountaineering Section (tel: (1) 247 041; fax: (1) 227 281). Climbing permits for the trekking peaks can be obtained from the Nepal Mountaineering Association (tel: (1) 434 525; fax: (1) 434 578). Further information can also be obtained from the Nepal Tourism Board (see address section).

**River rafting:** River rafting: As of July 1999, rafting permits are no longer required for the general areas; however to raft the Himalyan rivers a permit must be obtained from the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (tel: (1) 247 041; fax: (1) 434 578).

**Golf:** Golf: The popularity of golf is on the increase in Nepal, which has a total of four golf courses, two of which are located in Kathmandu (the Til Ganga Golf Course and the Gokarna Golf Course). The other two are the Fulbari Resort Golf Course and the Himalayan Golf Course, both located in Pokhara. For further information, contact the Nepal Tourism Board (see address section).

**Adventure sports:** Adventure sports: The tourist potential of adventure sports has not escaped the Nepalese authorities, and the Tourism Board is now promoting a range of high-adrenalin activities that can be pursued in the country's spectacular landscapes. Ballooning and hang-gliding are among the newest additions, as Kathmandu has just opened its skies for commercial ballooning, which does provide the opportunity to get excellent aerial views of the city and its panoramic surroundings. Trips over Mount Everest are rare, but also possible. Hang-gliding, which uses an ultra-light one-person glider system, is popular in Pokhara and in the Langtang region. Bungee jumping and canyoning are also popular. Paragliding and power paragliding are available in Pokhara.

**The Nepal Yeti:** The existence of the famous Nepal yeti, a giant, gorilla-sized hairy snowman that eats yaks and sheep, remains strongly questionable. Only about a dozen people, including the father of Tenzing Norgé Sherpa (the first conqueror of Mount Everest), claim to have seen it. Popular myth recounts that those who did spot the creature got sick and died within a few days. For Yeti enthusiasts wishing to try their luck, the abominable snowman is said to make random appearances around the Khumbu region (in the foothills of Mount Everest).

## 10 SOCIAL PROFILE

**Food & Drink:** Despite its isolation and the variety of its local produce, Nepal has not developed a distinctive style of cooking. It is, more often than not, Dal Bhat - lentils and rice. An exception is Newar cuisine, which can be very elaborate and spicy. Rice is the staple food. Dishes include dal (lentil soup), spiced vegetables, chapatis and tsampa (eaten by the hill people), which is a raw grain, ground and mixed with milk, tea or water. Sweets and spicy snacks include jelabi, laddus and mukdals. Regional dishes include gurr, a Sherpa dish of raw potatoes, pounded with spices, then grilled like pancakes on a hot, flat stone. Tibetan cooking includes thukba (thick soup) and momos (fried or boiled, stuffed ravioli). Meat includes goat, pork, chicken or buffalo, but beef is forbidden. There are wide selections of restaurants in Kathmandu and Pokhara, although elsewhere the choice is limited. A 12% government tax is added to bills. Drink: The national drink is chiya (tea brewed with milk, sugar and spices; in the mountains it is salted with yak butter). Another popular mountain drink is chang (beer made from fermented barley, maize, rye or millet). Arak (potato alcohol) and raksi (wheat or rice spirit) are also drunk. Nepalese beer is available, as is good quality local rum, vodka and gin. Local whisky is not so palatable, but imported varieties are widely available.

**Nightlife:** Kathmandu has a few cinemas featuring mainly Indian films. For Western films, see the programmes of the European and American cultural centres. Most people are asleep by 2200. Nightlife is fairly limited; a few temples and restaurants offer entertainment and some tourist hotels stage Nepalese folk dances and musical shows. There are casinos with baccarat, chemin de fer and roulette, open 24 hours a day, every day, at some five-star hotels in Kathmandu.

**Shopping:** There are bargains for those careful to avoid fakes and the badly made souvenirs sold by unscrupulous traders. Popular buys include locally made clothes such as lopsided topis (caps), knitted mittens and socks, Tibetan dresses, woven shawls, Tibetan multicoloured jackets and men's diagonally fastened shirts; and pashmina (fine goat's-wool blankets), khukri (the

national knife), saranghi (a small, 4-stringed viola played with a horse-hair bow), Tibetan tea bowls, papier mâché dance masks, Buddhist statuettes and filigree ornaments, bamboo flutes and other folk objects. Shopping hours: 1000-2000 Sunday to Friday (some shops stay open on Saturday and holidays).

**Special Events:** Nepalese festivals fall into several categories. Most are performed in honour of the gods and goddesses, some mark the seasons or agricultural cycles, and others are simply family celebrations. The usual form of celebration is to take ritual baths in rivers or lakes, visit temples to offer worship, and feasting and ritual fasting. The festivals in Kathmandu Valley are the most rich and spectacular. For a list of special events and festivals in Nepal, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the Embassy (see address section).

**Social Conventions:** As a foreign visitor, one must be careful to respect local customs in order not to cause offence. The following are some local conventions it is advisable to adhere to: never step over the feet of a person, always walk round; never offer food and drink which is 'polluted', in other words, food that you have tasted or bitten; never offer or accept anything with the left hand, use the right or both hands. It is rude to point at a person or statue with a finger (or even with a foot). Shoes and footwear should be removed when entering houses or shrines. Kitchens and eating areas of houses should also not be entered with footwear, as the hearth of a home is sacred. Do not stand in front of a person who is eating as this means your feet will be next to his food; squat or sit by his side. Local Chorten are built to pacify local demons or dead persons and should be passed by in a clockwise direction, as should temples; the earth and universe revolve in this direction. Small flat stones with inscriptions and supplications next to the Chorten should not be removed as souvenirs; this is considered as sacrilege by the Nepalese. Avoid touching a Nepalese dressed all in white; his dress signifies a death in the family. Shaking hands is not a common form of greeting; the normal greeting is to press the palms together in a prayer-like gesture. A gift given to a host or hostess will probably be laid aside unopened; to open a parcel in the presence of a guest is considered uncivil. Casual wear is suitable except for the most formal meetings or social occasions. Bikinis, shorts, bare shoulders and backs may not be appreciated. Men only remove their shirts when bathing. Overt public displays of affection, especially near religious places, are inappropriate. Nepalese cities are generally safe, but take sensible precautions with personal possessions. Photography: Always ask permission first. In general it is allowed outside temples and at festivals, but not at religious ceremonies or inside temples; however, there is no hard and fast rule and the only way to be sure of not giving offence is to ask first and accept the answer. Tipping: Only usual in tourist hotels and restaurants. Taxi drivers need only be tipped when they have been particularly helpful. 10% is sufficient for all three services. Elsewhere tipping should be avoided.

## 11 BUSINESS PROFILE

**Economy:** Nepal is one of the world's least developed countries, with one of the lowest per capita GDP (around \$200 per annum). Although most of the land is uncultivable, 90% of the working population find employment in agriculture and forestry. Foodstuffs and live animals provide about 30% of Nepal's export earnings. The principal crops are maize, rice, barley, wheat, sugar cane, potatoes and fruit. The manufacturing sector is very small and concentrated in light industries such as construction materials, carpet making and food-processing. The country has a considerable hydro-electric potential which would save Nepal from having to import much of its energy requirements, but the sector is as yet highly underdeveloped. There is some mining of mica and small quantities of lignite, copper, coal and iron ore. The country runs a large trade deficit and relies on substantial amounts of foreign aid, especially food aid. India is the main trading partner, although following the 1989/90 dispute which led to the closure of the border

between the two countries, Nepal has actively pursued trade links elsewhere. Agreements have been signed with several other governments of which that with China is the most important. Nepal is a member of the Asian Development Bank and the Colombo Plan, both of which aim to promote regional economic co-operation. In 1997, Nepal, Bangladesh, India and Bhutan ended the first stages of establishing a new trade bloc, called the Growth Quadrangle. The same year, Nepal launched its ninth Five Year Plan, covering the years to 2002, and aimed at reducing unemployment and boosting the agricultural sector.

**Business:** Tropical-weight suits or shirt and tie are recommended. Best time to visit is October to May. Government office hours: Kathmandu Valley: 0900-1700 (winter) and 0900-1600 (summer) Monday to Friday. Other areas: 1000-1700 (winter) and 100-1600 (summer) Sunday to Friday. Private office hours: 0930-1700 Sunday to Friday.

**Commercial Information:** The following organisations can offer advice: Nepal Chamber of Commerce, PO Box 198, Kantipath, Kathmandu (tel: (1) 222 890; fax: (1) 229 998; e-mail: chamber@wlink.com.np; or Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, PO Box 269, Pachali Shahid Shukra, Milan Marg, Teku, Kathmandu (tel: (1) 262 218 or 262 061); fax: (1) 261 022; e-mail: fncci@mos.com.np; web site: <http://www.fncci.org>).

**Conferences/Conventions:** The following organisation can organise these events: Nepal Incentive and Convention Association, PO Box 4258, Kathmandu (tel: (1) 49491; fax: (1) 473 696; e-mail: nica@mice.mos.com.np).

## 12 CLIMATE

**Nepal's weather is generally predictable and pleasant. There are four climatic seasons:** March-May (spring), June-August (summer), September-November (autumn) and December-February (winter). The monsoon is approximately from the end of June to the middle of September. About 80% of the rain falls during that period, so the remainder of the year is dry. Spring and autumn are the most pleasant seasons; winter temperatures drop to freezing with a high level of snowfall in the mountains. Summer and late spring temperatures range from 28°C (83°F) in the hill regions to more than 40°C (104°F) in the Terai. In winter, average maximum and minimum temperatures in the Terai range from a brisk 7°C (45°F) to a mild 23°C (74°F). The central valleys experience a minimum temperature often falling below freezing point and a chilly 12°C (54°F) maximum. Much colder temperatures prevail at higher elevations. The Kathmandu Valley, at an altitude of 1310m (4297ft), has a mild climate, ranging from 19-27°C (67-81°F) in summer, and 2-20°C (36-68°F) in winter.

**Required clothing:** Lightweight and tropical clothes with umbrella are advised for June to August. Between October and March lightweight clothes are worn in Kathmandu, with a coat for evenings and warm clothing for the mountains.

## 13 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

**History:** For most of its known history, Nepal was ruled by an hereditary king but, from the middle of the 19th century, hereditary prime ministers of the Rana family controlled the country. In 1951 the Ranas were overthrown and the monarchy restored under King Tribhuvan. Four years later he was succeeded by his son, King Mahendra. In 1959 Mahendra established a parliamentary constitution, and the ensuing elections were won by the Nepali Congress (led by B

P Koirala) which had played a key role in the re-establishment of the monarchy. A year later, however, a royal coup led to the banning of all political parties and the establishment of a constitution based on the traditional village councils (the Panchayat system). Mahendra ruled until his death in 1972 when he was succeeded by his son Birendra, who is the current ruler. Following a referendum, in which the Panchayat regime was approved by a narrow majority, Birendra persevered with the system, assisted by censorship and repression where necessary. As serious opposition to the regime gathered strength through the 1980s, the King wavered in his response to the movement between more repressive measures and cosmetic administrative reforms designed to defuse the situation. In 1986, a member of the minority Newari community, Marich Man Singh Shrestha, became Prime Minister for the first time, holding the office until his dismissal and replacement by Lokendra Bahadur Chand in 1990. During 1990, growing public unrest brought the underlying political tension to the surface, and forced the King to make concessions on the introduction of representative government. Following negotiations between the Government and the newly legalised opposition parties, a draft constitution was promulgated in November 1990 which allowed for direct elections to a bicameral parliament. The first poll under the new system was held in May 1991: the Congress Party (linked to the Indian party of the same name) took 110 of the 205 seats in the new parliament to become the largest single party; the United Marxist-Leninist Party (UML) became the largest opposition grouping. Despite an overall majority, Congress was unable to lead a stable government and the next election was brought forward from its scheduled date in 1996 to take place in November 1994. The UML unexpectedly emerged as the largest party with 88 seats; Congress came second with 85. The UML formed a minority government, the first of six governments which held office over the next five years (including three in the twelve months leading up to the latest poll). The most recent election, staggered over two weeks in May 1999, returned Congress with 110 seats once again but given the faction-ridden nature of the party (a feature it shares with the UML) the new government is unlikely to prove any more stable than its various predecessors. The major domestic problems facing the new government are the state of the economy and the three-year-old insurgency conducted by a group of self-styled 'Maoist' guerillas. Recent foreign policy has been dominated by relations with India, which have improved since Nepal's larger neighbour imposed a trade embargo after the expiry of an old trade agreement. In February 1996, the two countries signed a treaty regarding the shared utilisation of the Mahakali River basin. Some tension remains over border disputes. Relations with Nepal's other large neighbour, China, have improved greatly during the early 1990s. Nepal has also had to face the problem of a large influx of refugees fleeing political strife in neighbouring Bhutan, which now approaches 100,000.

**Government:** Nepal is a constitutional monarchy. Although more power has been vested in the monarch than is customary under such a system, the main centre of legislative and executive power is bicameral parliament comprising the 205-seat Pratinidhi Sabha (House of the States), whose members are directly elected to serve a five-year term, and the 60-seat Rashtriya Sabha (House of States).