Welcome to Nepal

"My greatest challenge and reward was putting a smile on the faces of the children that I worked with. After, I went rafting down one of the world's best rivers and climbed to the base camp of Everest! I'll cherish my memories forever."

The landscape of Nepal is the most spectacular in the world. The world's highest mountain ranges plunge into lush valleys teeming with exotic wildlife and throughout, remote monasteries and villages adorn the landscape. Here, you'll find over 800 species of birds, bears, monkeys, and even royal Bengal tigers. The human population is no less fascinating and comprises a mix of Hindu and Buddhist cultures, where ancient traditions and nomadic lifestyles bring colour to modern life. This is not surprising, as this region is home to both Lord Buddha and the Dalai Lama.

Know your History

Kirat

Archaeological evidence in the Kathmandu Valley indicates that people have lived in the Himalayan region for at least 9,000 years, and it's believed that the Kirat ethnicity people were the first to settle in Nepal. "Kirat", or "Kirati", means both "people with a lion nature" and "people from the mountain". Present-day descendants include the Rai, Limbu, and Sunuwar peoples of Nepal, and the Kirat are said to have ruled Nepal for around 2,500 years.

The rise of Buddhism

Around 1000 B.C., Nepal was ruled by a series of small kingdoms and confederations of clans. From the Shakya confederation, under the rule of the 7th Kirata king Jitedasti, a prince by the name of Siddharta Gautama renounced his royalty to lead an ascetic life. Living between 563 and 483 B.C., the prince later became known as the Buddha ("the enlightened one").

Newars

By 250 B.C., Nepal was under the influence of the Mauryan Empire from northern India. It wasn't until the 4th Century A.D., as a vassal state of the Gupta Empire, that the Newars (an ancient Tibeto-Burman language group who speak Newari) are thought to have begin living in the Kathmandu Valley. By the 5th Century, the area was governed by the Licchavis; the account of Chinese Buddhist pilgrim monk Xuanzang paints a detailed picture of Nepal around 645 A.D.

The Licchavi Dynasty went into decline in the late 8th Century, paving the way for Newari rule in 879, though the extent of their control is still uncertain. The Newari Dynasty cultivated a Hindu-Buddhist culture, and in the 11th Century, many Buddhists fled to Nepal from India and a group of Hindu Rajput warriors known as the Mallas set up the principality of Ghurkha just west of the Kathmandu Valley. Although a Newar Dynasty, the Mallas had exclusive control over the Valley from the 14th to 18th Century. It was during this period that southern Nepal came under the Chalukaya Empire of southern India, and the kings began to move towards Hinduism instead of the predominant Buddhism.

For the next 200 years, the kings consolidated their power and much of Nepal was under unified rule. However, in 1482, the region was carved into three kingdoms; Kathmandu, Patan and
Bhaktapur. Centuries of petty rivalry left the country divided until the mid-18th Century when a Gurkha king named Prithvi Narayan Shah set out to unify the kingdoms.

**Greater Nepal & the Gurkhas**

Shah set out on his mission in 1765, having pleaded arms from India and buying the neutrality of the Indian borders. The Kathmandu Valley was united three years later in 1768 after several bloody battles and sieges. The Valley itself never saw battle – it was taken without effort during Indra Jatra, a Newari festival. The unification of the kingdoms signalled the beginnings of modern Nepal.

The Gurkhas began to stretch the borders of Nepal; in 1788, the Nepalese overran Sikkim, and sent raids into Tibet, and Kangra in northern India became part of Greater Nepal. Ghurkha armies seized territories far beyond the present-day Nepal; but their invasion of Tibet, over which China claimed sovereignty, was defeated in 1792 by Chinese forces. An ensuing peace treaty forced Nepal to pay China an annual tribute, which continued until 1910. In 1809, Ranjit Singh of the Sikh state in the Punjab intervened, driving the Nepalese army east of the Sutlej River. Nepal also lost part of its territory to British India but retained its independence. At its largest, Greater Nepal stretched from the Tista River in the east to Kangara, across the Sutlej River in the west and into the Terai Plains in the south, as well as further north of the Himalayas.

Tensions between Nepal and the British East India Company escalated over the annexation of several minor states bordering Nepal, and resulted in the Anglo-Nepalese War from 1815 to 1816. It was at this time that the Gurkhas earned their reputations as fierce and ruthless soldiers – the British had underestimated the Nepalese army and were badly defeated until they committed more military resources that they had not expected to need. The war ended with the Treaty of Sugauli, which meant that Nepal ceded portions of Sikkim and Terai as well as the right to recruit soldiers.

**Rana**

A period of instability followed as factionalism divided the royal family. In 1846, the reigning queen plotted to overthrow Jung Bahadur Rana, a rising military leader. The discovery of the plot led to the Kot Massacre, when classes between military personnel and administrators loyal to the queen led to the execution of several hundred princes and chieftains. Jung Bahadur Rana emerged victorious, founding the Rana lineage. The king was made a titular figure, and the post of prime minister was given more power and became a hereditary role.

The Ranas were steadfastly pro-British, assisting them during the Sopey Rebellion in India in 1857, as well as both World Wars. In thanks for their assistance, the British gave parts of the Terai region back to Nepal, and in 1923 the UK and Nepal formally signed an agreement of friendship, confirmed Nepal's independence.

In the late 1940s, pro-democracy movements began to emerge and political parties started to criticise the Rana autocracy. The Chinese asserted their control in Tibet in the 1950s, moving India to pre-empt the perceived military threat from their northern neighbour by trying to assert more influence over Nepal. India sponsored King Tribhuvan (who ruled from 1911–1955) as Nepal's new ruler in 1951, as well as a new government comprising of predominantly members of the Nepali Congress Party, thus spelling the end of Rana hegemony in Nepal.

1959 – 1995

Nepal, once the world's only Hindu monarchy, and controlled by a hereditary prime minister-ship, held the nation's first election in 1959. Power wrangling between the king and government under
King Mahendra (ruled 1955–1972) meant that in 1960, Mahendra dismissed the cabinet, dissolved parliament, and banned political parties. A 1962 constitution created a non-party panchayat (council) system of government. After a referendum in 1980 approved a modified version of the panchayat system, direct parliamentary elections were held in 1981. It wasn’t until 1989 when the Jan Andolan (People’s Movement) forced King Birendra (ruled 1972–2001) to accept constitutional reforms and establish a multiparty parliament. Disputes with India led to India’s closing of most border crossings from March 1989 to July 1990, and the resultant economic crisis fuelled demands for political reform.

After months of violence, King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev dissolved parliament. The opposition formed an interim government in April 1990, and a new constitution creating a constitutional monarchy and a bicameral legislature became effective on 9th November 1990. Multiparty legislative elections held in May 1991 were won by the centrist Nepali Congress party; the Communists (Maoists) became the leading opposition party. Mid-term elections in November 1994, which were called after the government, lost a parliamentary vote, resulted in a hung parliament and the communists, who emerged as the single largest party, formed a minority government.

**Maoists**

In 1996, frustrated by ceaseless political squabbling, the Maoists took up arms in opposition to the government. Nepal’s Maoists wanted a complete overhaul of the country’s political and social system based on Marxist principles, including calling for an end to Nepal’s constitutional monarchy. This led to the Nepal Civil War, claiming more than 12,000 people.

On 1st June 2001, a massacre in the royal palace killed King Birendra, Queen Aiswarya, Crown Prince Dipendra and seven other members of the royal family. Speculations amongst Nepalese citizens ranged from accusing Dipendra of patricide and committing suicide after when his parents refused to accept his choice of wife, to pointing fingers at several parties, including the Maoists.

Birendra’s brother Gyanendra inherited the throne, and on 1st February 2005, he dismissed the government and assumed full executive powers in an attempt to squash the violent Maoist movement. The Maoists were firmly entrenched in the countryside, whilst the military occupied the larger towns and cities. The stalemate was broken in September 2005 when the Maoists declared a three-month ceasefire in order to negotiate.

In response to the 2006 democracy movement, King Gyanendra agreed to relinquish sovereign power to the people, and the dissolved House of Representatives was reinstated on 24th April 2006. By 18th May, the House of Representatives had used its sovereign authority to curtail the power of the king, declaring Nepal a secular state and ending its official status as a Hindu Kingdom. In December 2007, an amendment of the constitution and confirmation of the bill in May 2008, declared Nepal a federal republic and abolished the monarchy.

**Coalition governments**

The Maoists won the largest number of seats in the Constituent Assembly election in April 2008, and formed a coalition government. Although there were outbreaks of violence during the pre-electoral campaign, the elections themselves were peaceful. On 28th May 2008, the newly elected Assembly met, and declared that Nepal had become a secular and inclusive democratic republic, and announced a three-day public holiday from 28th to 30th May. The King was given 15 days to vacate the Narayanhiti Royal Palace so that it may be opened as a public museum.

Political tensions and power-sharing battles continued, until the Maoist-led government was toppled in May 2009 and a new coalition government was formed, excluding the Maoist party. Madhav Kumar Nepal of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) was made the new prime
Money Talks

Once an isolated, agrarian society, Nepal joined the modern era in 1951, with no schools, hospitals, roads, telecommunications, electric power, industry or civil service. Since then, the country has made progress towards sustainable economic growth and is committed to a programme of economic liberalisation and development (through a series of five-year plans). In 2002, the currency was made convertible and 17 state enterprises were privatised. More than half the development budget comes from foreign aid accounts.

Since 1975, emphasis has been on improved government administration and rural development efforts as well as the development of transportation and communication facilities, agriculture and industry. Social services and infrastructure has progressed – a countrywide primary education system is under development and the Tribhuvan University already has several campuses.

Nepal's principal economic activity is still agriculture – employing around 80% of the population and providing 37% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product). However, only around 20% of land is cultivable – the main area is the lowland Terai region that supports food-deficient hill areas – with the majority of the country mountainous and a further 33% forested. The fertile Terai region, that provides an agricultural surplus that can be distributed around Nepal, has only recently been made habitable by the eradication and continued preventative measures against malaria.

Exports

Roughly 70% of merchandise exports come from the carpet and garment industries that are growing in Nepal. Linked to India through the mountains by Kathmandu, and improved telephone and domestic air services means that the processes of importing and exporting is becoming increasingly easy and popular countrywide.

Money

ATM machines are widespread in Nepal and withdrawals may have a small surplus charge although this is likely to be similar to traveller's cheque commission rates. Credit and debit cards (MasterCard and Visa) are accepted for cash withdrawal at most banks but rarely for general payments. However, a credit card will come in useful in the event of an emergency. The national currency is the Nepalese rupee – pegged in 1993 to the Indian rupee but only made convertible worldwide in 2002.

Get Culture Savvy

Nepal has some 103 different ethnic groups and multiple religions and languages.

Music & Dance

Its music is similarly varied, with pop, religious, classical, and folk music being popular. Musical genres from Tibet and Hindustan have greatly influenced Nepalese music. Generally, women, even of the musician castes, do not play music except for specific situations, such as at the traditional all-female wedding parties.
The ancient Newar people are well-known for masked dances which tell stories of the gods and heroes. The music is percussion-based, sometimes with flutes or shawm accompanying the intense, nasal vocals.

Food

Nepalis do not eat beef. There are several reasons for this, one being that the Hindus worship the cow, which is also the national animal of Nepal. Buffalo meat is a good substitute, but is only eaten by a certain section of the population.

A typical meal in Nepal is dal-bhat-tarkari. Dal is a spicy lentil soup, served on bhat, which is boiled rice, and served with tarkari (curried vegetables), achar (pickles) or chutni (a spicy condiment). The Newar community has its own unique cuisine, using mustard oil to cook, and spices such as cumin, coriander, black peppers, sesame seeds, turmeric, garlic, ginger, methi (fenugreek), bay leaves, cloves, cinnamon, pepper, chillies and mustard seeds. The best time to sample real Nepalese food is during festivals, when the locals pull out all the stops to show off their best dishes.

Pasni: The pasni (rice-feeding) ceremony is an important occasion for a child. In the presence of family and priests, the seven month old child is dressed in finery and fed rice presented on a coin by all members of the family. He is shown several objects on a tray: a heap of earth, paddy (unhusked rice), bricks, toys, rings, a pen and ink-pot, and a book. It is said his parents can tell the child’s future profession from the object he first picks up.

Purity & Impurity

An interesting concept among Nepalis is the division of pure and impure. Jutho, referring to food or material that contains another’s saliva, is considered impure by Nepalis. Nepalis consider cow dung to be pure for cleaning purposes. During menstruation women are considered impure and hence, are kept in seclusion until their fourth day purification bath.

Flag

Nepal’s flag is the only non-quadrilateral flag in the world, and only one of two non-rectangular flags (the other being Ohio’s, in the US). The red of the flag is said to signify victory in battle or courage as well as symbolising aggression, is it also the same red as the rhododendron – the national flower of Nepal – whilst the blue border shows peace. Whilst the sun on the flag is said to represent the aggressiveness of their warriors, it is the curved moon that signifies the peaceful and calm nature of the Nepalese.

Holidays

National Unity Day January
Martyrs’ Day January
Vasant Panchami February
Rashtriya Prajatantra Divas (National Democracy Day) February
Nepalese Women’s Day, and Shivaratri (in honour of Lord Shiva) March
Ghode Jatra (Festival of Horses) March
Chaite Dashain March
Ram Nawami (Birthday of Lord Ram) March
Navabarsha (New Year’s Day) March/April
Buddha Jayanti (Birthday of Lord Buddha) April
Rakshya Bandhan (Janai Purnima) August
Teej (Festival of Women) August
Dasain (Durga Puja Festival) October
Deepawali (Festival of Lights) November
Indra Jatra (Festival of Rain God) November
Constitution Day November

The Nepali calendar is slightly different than the Gregorian calendar – the year starts in April, or Baishakh, and is 56.7 years ahead. For example; the Gregorian year 2000 began 17th Poush 2056, and ended 16th Poush 2057.

Learn the Lingo

A massive 92 different languages are spoken in Nepal (a 93rd category was "unidentified"). The major languages of Nepal (percent spoken as mother tongue) are Nepali (49%), Maithili (12%), Bhojpuri (8%), Tharu (6%), Tamang (5%), Newari/Nepal Bhasa (4%), Magar (3%), Awadhi (2%), Bantawa (2%), Limbu (1%), and Bajjika (1%). The remaining 81 languages are each spoken as mother tongue by less than 1% of the population.

Nepali, written in Devanagari script, is the official, national language and serves as lingua franca among Nepalis of different ethno-linguistic groups. In the southern Terai Region, Hindi is also spoken.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>NEPALI</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>NEPALI</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greetings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Numbers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hello/Goodbye</td>
<td>Namaste*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>ek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good night</td>
<td>Shubha raatri</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>dui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you? (casual)</td>
<td>Ke chha?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>tin</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am fine (casual)</td>
<td>Tthik chha</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>chaar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And you? (casual)</td>
<td>Timi laai?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>pach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you? (formal)</td>
<td>Sanchai hunu hunchha?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>chha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am fine (formal)</td>
<td>Sanchai chhu</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>saat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And you? (formal)</td>
<td>Tapaii~ laai?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>aath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See you again</td>
<td>Pheri bhetau~ laa</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>nau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See you later</td>
<td>Pachhi bhetau~ laa</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>das</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good morning</td>
<td>subha prabhat</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>bis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good afternoon</td>
<td>namaskar</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>pachaase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good evening</td>
<td>subha sandhya</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>ey saye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleased to meet you</td>
<td>tapaaailaai bhettera khushii laagyo</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>ek hazar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 million</td>
<td>dus lakh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>About Yourself</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Useful Phrases</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your name?</td>
<td>tapaaiko/timro naam ke ho?</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Raamro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My name is...</td>
<td>mero naam ... ho</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>Dherai raamro</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**All-purpose Hindu greeting, often translated as "I salute the god within you". Its literal Sanskrit meaning is "your homage" and in common usage simply means "hello" or "goodbye."**

### Lay of the Land

Nepal is sandwiched between the vast Tibetan Himalayas to the north, India to the south, and the Indian Himalayas to the east and west. Nepal's diverse natural environments hold an incredible range of wildlife, with over 800 species of birds, bears, monkeys, and even Royal Bengal tigers. For such a small country, Nepal boasts a great physical diversity. From the Tarai Plain in the south (the northern rim of the Gangetic Plain) at 300 m above sea level, to Mount Everest (known by its Nepali name, Sagarmatha) at 8,800 m in the north. The three regions – Mountain Region, Hill Region and Tarai Region – run parallel to one another east to west, and have influenced governmental policies, agriculture and cultural inflections alike.

Huge ecological variations have occurred across Nepal thanks to the geographical changes. From the lowland Tarai Plain, successive hill and mountain ranges (including the Himalayas) end in the spectacular Tibetan Plateau beyond the Inner Himalayas. Nepal's land is punctured with valleys.

### What's the Weather like?

Nepal's weather is pleasant and follows predictable weather patterns. Most rainfall falls between June and September, leaving the remainder of the year warm and dry. Of course, weather in the Himalayas is highly dependent on altitude. In the mountain regions, weather drops to freezing in winter and sees a substantial amount of snowfall. In the summer, mountain weather fluctuates between 10°C and 20°C. In the lowlands, temperatures are much warmer and range between 28°C and a sweltering 40°C. The Kathmandu Valley, at an altitude of 1,310 m, has a mild climate, ranging between 2°C and 27°C.

### Biodiversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Ho</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where are you from?</td>
<td>tapaaiki ghara kaaham ho?</td>
<td>Naraamro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm from...</td>
<td>mero ghara ... ho</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Hoina</td>
<td></td>
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*Speaking the Language*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Ho</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank you</td>
<td>Dhanya baad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't understand</td>
<td>Maile buzhiba</td>
<td>I am sorry</td>
<td>Maaph garnus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please say it slowly</td>
<td>Bistaarai bhannus</td>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td>Thaahaa chhaina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please say that again</td>
<td>Pheri bhannus</td>
<td>I like it</td>
<td>Malaai man paryo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you say... in Nepali?</td>
<td>tapain le nepalima ... lai kasari bhannu hunchha?</td>
<td>I don't like it</td>
<td>Malaai man parena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much is this?</td>
<td>yo kati ho</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse me/Sorry</td>
<td>maapha ganus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All-purpose Hindu greeting, often translated as "I salute the god within you". Its literal Sanskrit meaning is "your homage" and in common usage simply means "hello" or "goodbye."
Nepal has a truly impressive biodiversity, furthered by the conservation efforts of the population. The country is numbered among the very few where increasing populations of keystone species can be seen thanks to the establishment of a remarkable network of protected areas. From just 8% in the 1980s, over 18% of Nepal's surface area is now under protected area jurisdiction, with a protected land area one of the highest in Asia. The recently introduced “Buffer Zone” concept has meant that these conservation regimes can only go from strength to strength.

Nepal only covers around 0.1% of the world's total land mass, yet accounts for over 2% of flowering plants, 8% of the world's bird species and more than 4% of mammal species. This biological and cultural hotspot is also home to 10 UNESCO World Heritage Sites – two being the Royal Chitwan and Sagarmatha national parks.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) have identified 37 species of animals in Nepal on their red list; including the Red Panda, Hog Deer, Grey Wolf, Himalayan Thar, Smooth Coated Otter, Rhesus Macaque Monkey, Clouded Leopard, Gangetic Dolphin, Dhond Roofed Turtle, Imperial Eagle, Bengal Florican and the Pallas's Fish Eagle.

Good Books

Guidebooks


Language


Fiction


Teaching Guides

- Lessons from Nothing: Activities for Language Teaching with Limited Time and Resources