

--Nepal Travel Tips--

Banking Hours

Banks: 09:00 to 15:30, Monday to Friday
Post Offices: 09:00 to 17:00, Monday to Friday
Department Stores and Shops: 10:30 to 20:00, daily
Museums: 10:00 to 17:00, Tuesday to Saturday
Business Offices: 09:30 to 17:30, Sunday to Friday

Cautions

Nepal is relatively safe for tourists, though the political situation is always in flux. Spontaneous uprisings, riots, protests and brutal police crackdowns are frequent affairs, so be sure and avoid any public demonstrations or rallies. The Maoist rebels are another source of trouble, especially in the western mountains. They mainly target locals and not foreigners. However, trekkers in remote areas are occasionally stopped for cash. If this happens, it's always best to pay. Keeping a stash of money secretly sewn into your pack is a good idea when trekking into the hinterlands.

Kathmandu is a poor city, and as such has plenty of beggars and petty thieves. After dark is when most of the crime takes place, and tourists are often on the receiving end. Be careful when walking home at night around the Thamel district or when taking a taxi to a remote part of town. Pokhara has similar theft problems, but nothing like Kathmandu. Don't flash money or valuables around.

Nepal gets occasional earthquakes in the central regions and even in Kathmandu Valley. Extreme weather also creates hazardous conditions in the mountains, with landslides and floods a common occurrence during the rainy season and the spring runoff. Trekkers should exercise caution when travelling through the mountains during these times.

Police: +977 1 4261790

Electricity: 220V AC, 50Hz; all plugs are round European two-pin types.

Health

No specific vaccinations are needed to enter Nepal, but visitors should ensure they are vaccinated against hepatitis A and B, typhoid fever, rabies and Japanese encephalitis. Meningitis A/C shows up frequently during the winter months. If you are travelling through the Terai region, malaria is a concern during the monsoon season. Be careful to avoid getting bitten by mosquitoes at dawn and dusk. Wear long pants, socks and shoes and sleep under a mosquito net whenever possible.

The most common illness suffered by travellers to Nepal is a stomach ache due to consuming contaminated food or water. Never drink water or ice if you aren't sure it has been purified. Bottled water is available everywhere. Many visitors choose to avoid eating dairy products or unpeeled fruit. Meat is fine as long as it's been thoroughly cooked. Washing your hands often is another good precaution while travelling around Nepal.

Trekkers have a different set of health risks to be concerned about. Altitude sickness is a common ailment above 2,500 metres if you ascend too quickly. Headaches and nausea are the first indications of this malady. It's easily avoided getting altitude sickness by taking your time as you gain elevation to let your body adjust. Also, be sure to wear plenty of sunscreen, a hat and sunglasses when trekking at altitude. The sun in the Himalayas is extremely strong and. Drink plenty of water while trekking, even if it's cold and you don't feel thirsty.

For minor illnesses like a bad stomach, the local pharmacies are the best places to seek treatment. There is decent service at Pokhara's Western Regional Hospital and Manipal Hospital, Tansen's Mission Hospital, and Lagankhel's Patan Hospital. Healthcare standards are not up to international standards, and those with serious ailments should head home or to neighbouring India. Buying travel insurance for your visit to Nepal is highly suggested. Travel insurance will cover the costs of any medical care or expensive helicopter evacuations from the mountains. Kathmandu Medical Hospital: +977 1 4240805

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Language

Nepal's official language is Nepali, spoken by approximately 50% of the population. There are other languages spoken in smaller circles such as Bhojpuri and Maithili, but English is widely understood in the tourism industry.

Currency

Nepal's currency is the Nepalese rupee (NPR). One rupee equals 100 paisa. Notes come in denominations of Rs 1,000, 500, 100, 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1. Coins come in denominations of 50, 25 and 10 paisa.

Currency Exchange

Money can be exchanged at Kathmandu International Airport and at any of the myriad banks and money exchange kiosks in the capital. Although it is illegal to exchange foreign money with unauthorized individuals, there is a thriving black market for currency exchange, especially in the Thamel district of Kathmandu. Often these street-side traders offer the best rates, but can be an annoyance after you have completed the transaction. Hotels also change money, but at a lower rate than the banks. It's hard to change rupees back into foreign currency so only change as much as you need.

ATMs are accessible in the larger cities in Nepal. Kathmandu and Pokhara have the highest number of them in the tourist areas. Standard Chartered Bank has a 24-hour ATM in Thamel Chouk which accepts Cirrus, Visa and MasterCard. Keep in mind that the farther from civilization you go, the less likely you'll be able to exchange or withdraw money from an ATM, so carry plenty of cash when you go trekking.

No one accepts credit cards in the Annapurna villages. However, credit cards are widely accepted in Kathmandu Valley, though most shops tack on a five per cent service charge for each transaction.

Customs

Each visitor to Nepal can bring in 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars or a similar amount of tobacco products; 1 litre of alcohol; and a personal amount of perfume without any customs duty. Visitors should declare electronic goods such as cameras, video recorders and the like upon arrival in Nepal. It is illegal to export any item older than 100 years old, and all sacred paintings, metal statues or other antiquities need a certificate from the Department of Archaeology before they can be exported. The customs officers in Nepal are thorough, so don't assume you can sneak anything past them.

Etiquette

The Nepalese are generally very friendly and helpful people, and will readily make you feel welcome in their country. They don't shake hands when greeting, but rather say '*namaste*' and fold their hands in front of their chest. A quirky social custom in Nepal is to indicate 'no' by nodding the head, and indicate 'yes' by shaking the head sideways. This is opposite to Western norms, so be prepared for this confusing exchange of body language. Refusals are often cloaked in vague replies or even a 'yes' since to offer 'no' is considered extremely rude.

The dress code in Nepal is conservative, so try not to wear anything too revealing. Always take your shoes off before entering houses, temples or shrines, and be sure not to point your feet at someone or step over the feet of another person as this is considered rude. Pointing at a person or statue with your finger is also considered impolite. If you see anyone wearing all white, they are in mourning and should not be touched for any reason.

The left hand is just as polluted as the feet in Nepali society, so don't accept anything with your left hand. Use your right hand or both hands. Don't offer anyone food or drink that has already been tasted and don't stand in front of someone who is eating. Overt public displays of affection are frowned upon, especially near a temple or shrine. Always ask permission if you can enter a religious site, as sometimes foreigners are not allowed entry. Leather goods should never be taken inside a Hindu temple.

Children will inevitably approach you with outstretched hands asking for rupees. Simply ignore them and they will go away. The Nepalese are very proud, and don't generally condone begging. Photography is another sensitive issue in Nepal. This is one country where it's a good idea to ask permission before snapping a photo. It is generally okay outside of temples and during festivals, but never inside temples or at religious ceremonies. There is no single set of rules, so it is always best to ask first.

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Dining Etiquette

There are a few rules of etiquette to consider when it comes to dining in Nepal. The kitchen of a home is considered a sacred place, so treat this room and the cooking which comes out of it with the utmost respect. Shoes should be taken off before entering your host's home, and don't throw rubbish in an open fire, if there is one. The Nepalese use their left hands for personal hygiene, so never accept or offer any food or drink with the left hand. Using both hands to pass or receive items is a sign of respect.

Any food that has already been tasted, sipped or bitten into is considered polluted, even if you have only touched it with your fork or spoon. This is a good indication of how sacred the ritual of eating is in Nepali culture. Nepalese usually squat or sit on the floor to eat. It is considered rude to stand in front of someone who is eating, where your feet will be close to the food.

It is normal to socialize for a while before actually dining, with the meal being the final event. Always heartily praise the meal and the chef before you leave, as this will really thrill your host. Tipping is only expected in tourist restaurants and hotels, and ten per cent is sufficient.

Visa and Passports

Only Indian nationals can enter Nepal without a visa. Everyone else needs to buy a tourist visa, which can be obtained either in advance from a Nepal consulate or upon arrival. You will need one passport photo and the visa fee in cash, preferably in US dollars.

Single-entry visas are good for a stay of 60 days and cost US\$30. Multiple entry visas can be bought for US\$80. Visitors can extend their visa for a maximum of 150 days, with each 30-day extension costing US\$30. These extensions can be obtained at immigration offices in Kathmandu and Pokhara.

Most of Nepal's popular trekking areas require separate permits, which can be bought in Kathmandu or through trekking companies. If you get caught in a park without a permit, you will be heavily fined.

Tourist Information Offices

The government tourism office in Nepal offers limited information, and regular travel shops are often the best source of tourism information.

Nepal Tourism Board

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Kathmandu, Nepal

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Website: www.welcomenepal.com