



Adventurous Nepal

Roundtrip with Himalaya trekking

Tourcode: **SNK**

Groeps grootte: **2-24**

Aantal dagen: **15**

Reisbeschrijving

Pagodas, Buddhist shrines, palaces and markets

Originally the capitals of separate principalities, they competed during the 16th to 19th centuries to build bigger and more beautiful temples – today you can reap the rewards of their monumental efforts to out-do each other! And you'll find you have the freedom to enjoy all of this because until day 3 you'll have the opportunity to **explore the valley** of Kathmandu on your own. Kathmandu itself, and nearby Patan, share a medieval atmosphere which you'll love. They're packed with pagodas, Buddhist shrines, palaces and markets. You may choose to **rent a bike** to visit Pashupatinath, which is constantly thronged by pilgrims. You may wish to simply chill out on one of the many terraces. Or you may opt to hit Kathmandu, where there are numerous restaurants and cinemas, and where you'll be able to party if that appeals to you. But it's all going to be your choice and just an opener to your individual adventure!

Trekking the mountains

On day 3 we take off for Pokhara, which lies in a sub-tropical valley. Its dazzling panorama offers a unique view of the mountains of the Himalayan massif which rise steeply for 7,000 meters. Pokhara has a relaxed atmosphere and nestles beside a **cool mountain lake** ideal for swimming and rowing. Here it's possible to take a one-day hike to Sarangkot, nestling amidst snowy Himalayan peaks. The beautiful area surrounding Pokhara is perfect for short or long walks, wandering through coniferous forests and small settlements. On day 4, by which time you'll be acclimatised to the rarefied air and getting into your stride, you'll embark on one of the highlights of the trip, **a trek through an ever-more-astonishing Himalayan tableau.**

The Annapurna range

On day 8 you reach the beautiful lakeside town of Pokhara, sat at the foot of the impressive Annapurna range. No doubt you'll want some rest after all that trekking, but **sunrise over the Annapurna mountains**, which sees the distinctive snowy 'fishtail' peak glow pink with the first morning light, is not to be missed. Pokhara is also a good place to shop and sample some delicious Nepalese and Tibetan food.

Chitwan National Park

Day 9 will see you heading for Chitwan National Park, famed for its diverse flora and fauna. The deciduous Sal forest, the open grass plains, the sub-tropical rain-forest, the rivers and lakes, are homes to four hundred species of birds and forty species of mammals. There are optional excursions to watch tigers, monkeys, crocs and rhinos from an **elephant howdah**, a jeep, on foot, or in a tree-trunk canoe. On the morning of day 11 we return to Kathmandu, from which, after pausing at bazaars, you'll be free to travel home on day 13.



Routekaart



Uitgebreide reisbeschrijving

Welkom

Welcome to Shoestring!

Shoestring is looking forward to welcoming you on one of our unforgettable journeys. Be well prepared, get informed about your destination and make sure you know which vaccinations or other medication you require. During the trip, be flexible and don't feel obliged to always stay with the group. Your guide will advise and assist you, but remember that he or she will have a lot on their mind to ensure that everything is running smoothly. We hope you have a fantastic time in this beautiful destination.

Before you travel

If your trip is unexpectedly cancelled, we will let you know at least three weeks prior to departure. Cancellations are very rare though, so go ahead and prepare yourself for your trip.

Moeilijkheidsgraad Informatie

The difficulty of our trips varies greatly. Added to this is the fact that travel difficulty is a very personal perception. To give an impression of the difficulty of a particular journey, we have developed a classification system.

Category A: Light travel, possible for anyone. Short travel distances, good hotels, slow travelling speed.



Category B: Feasible for anyone who prepares for the trip. Sometimes longer distances, good hotels or camping facilities, some adventure nights, average travelling speed.

Category C: Feasible for anyone who prepares well and is flexible, though some parts of the journey are difficult, distances may be long or require a day's walk, there may be some accommodation with rather basic facilities.

Category D: Reasonably difficult trip because of long travel distances, often primitive facilities or tents, long walks.

Category E: Difficult trip. The traveller knows him/herself and is well prepared, he or she realises that the journey can be demanding

The roundtrip Adventurous Nepal is Category C holiday. You can expect some long bus rides.

Generally we stay in comfortable hotels, except in Chitwan and during the trekking where accommodation is simpler.

Wat is inclusief

Accommodation in hotels and basic mountain lodges; transportation in (mini)buses only for transfers from hotel to hotel; permit Annapurna region; trekking; porters and experienced mountain guide during trekking; entrance fee for Bhaktapur (only for departure dates in July and August); English speaking tour leader.

Wat is exclusief

International flights; all meals; tips; visas; optional excursions; all other entrance fees; airport transfers; booking fee; travel insurance.

Let op

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Dag-tot-dag schema

	Vervoer	Route	Overnachting
1.		Kathmandu	Kathmandu
2.		Kathmandu	Kathmandu
3.		Kathmandu – Pokhara	Pokhara
4.		Pokhara - Birethanti - Trekking	Trekking
5.		Trekking	Trekking
6.		Trekking	Trekking
7.		Trekking	Trekking
8.		Trekking - Pokhara	Pokhara
9.		Pokhara – Chitwan/Sauraha	Chitwan/Sauraha
10.		Chitwan/Sauraha	Chitwan/Sauraha



11.		Chitwan/Sauraha – Kathmandu	Kathmandu	
12.		Kathmandu	Kathmandu	
13.		Kathmandu	End of tour	

Dag-tot-dag schema

Dag 1 - 2: Kathmandu

These days are scheduled as free days in Kathmandu. The Kathmandu Valley is the very heart of Nepal and combines beautiful nature with a multitude of temples, monasteries and other exquisitely decorated buildings. The three majestic cities of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, once the capital cities of numerous sovereigns, are situated in the middle of the fertile rice fields that are surrounded on all sides by mountains. In the cities' heyday between the 16th and 19th centuries, they all competed with one another to build temples bigger and more beautiful than the neighbours. This gave the inhabitants of the valley a real task to keep up with the whims of the demanding nobility. The citizens of the valley were known for their carving skills using bronze and other metalwork. People as far over the border as Tibet and even China were proud owners of Nepalese crafts. Through these and other trades, enough money flowed into the valley to finance yet more holy houses, resulting in hundreds of large and countless small temples being built. The situation was so extreme that the first western visitors to the region remarked that there were more temples than houses, and more religious statues than people! Although the number of motorised vehicles has risen considerably in recent years, daily life in Kathmandu continues almost as if the 20th century is still to come. Most streets and power lines stop at a distance of around five or six miles outside the busy city.

Kathmandu is an extremely interesting city whose temples and old buildings compete with the diverse native population for your attention. The native folk appear as if out of the Middle Ages, especially in the older part of the city. Some visitors spend a whole day sat on the stairs of the temples in the centrally located Durbar Square, taking in the spellbinding way of life of the people of Kathmandu. This square and the old neighbourhoods to the north and the south of it captivate your attention. A mile and a half to the west you will find the large and extremely beautiful stupa (traditional Buddhist monument) of Swayambunath. This site is very sacred to Buddhists, and it is definitely worth visiting. Due to the many apes that hang around the area, this stupa is also known as the 'Monkey Temple'. An even bigger stupa is situated a little further outside Kathmandu, in Bodnath. On the way to this area we will pass by Pashupatinath, the most sacred of Tibetan Hindu sites, where the Nepalese and also many Indians bathe in the Bagmati River. It is also a favourite spot for cremation of Hindu dead, and there are always dozens of sadus (Hindu priests) and half naked beggar monks with untamed hairstyles. Patan, the sister city of Kathmandu, almost grows on the side of Kathmandu. The old regions of this city house an even denser population of temples and monasteries than the capital itself.

Patan is quieter than Kathmandu and is a welcome relief after the hectic pace of the capital. Our agent can organise an optional rafting excursion if desired. A trip in a rubber boat down the wild river and through the immense mountains is a breathtaking experience, and no special training or technique is necessary. Rafting in Nepal is especially popular on the Trisuli, Sun Kosi and Kali Gandaki rivers. These rivers are perfect for beginners, as the river offers varied terrain and a suitable number of obstacles. No special measures need to be taken against the cold during the busiest months, as the air and the water are both quite warm. However, a raincoat may be useful in areas where



water is continually splashing. Swimwear is necessary. During the winter months, however, rafting can be unpleasantly cold.

Dag 3: Kathmandu – Pokhara

We shall leave Kathmandu today by bus and travel to Pokhara, a drive of around 125 miles. Pokhara is the only place in the world where mountains rise up to heights of over 4.5 miles. From the sub-tropical valley in which Pokhara is situated, the north side of the mountains rise straight up to the highest peaks in the world. Nothing, anywhere can compare to this landscape. In the middle of this spectacle of rock, ice and snow is the Macchapuchare, which is one of the smallest peaks in the region at 'just' 4.3 miles high, although its 'pushed-out' position makes it appear the highest. As the crow flies, it is 12.5 miles to the peak, seen as divine by the Nepalese (although its name 'Fish Tail' does not really reflect this!). The name of this prominent mountain only becomes clear when you walk for a day or two to the west. The mountain has two peaks, giving its side view a definite resemblance to a Macchapuchare (fish-tail). Despite its relative shortness, the mountain has never been climbed. It is one of the steepest mountains in the Himalayas and it has been compared to its smaller European brother, the Matterhorn. In the 1950s, a French expedition nearly managed to reach the top, but when in sight of victory, the sherpas became intensely fearful and turned back. Their fear of divine revenge should humans reach the summit was too great and since then, it has been forbidden to climb the mountain. Pokhara was once a hippie paradise. It is situated in a picturesque location on a mountain lake, where you can swim, row or enjoy the stunning panoramic view from one of the tea gardens. The area is also ideal for cycling and walking. In Pokhara, you will come across countless souvenir shops and restaurants. The small Barahi-Bhawani temple built on an island close to the waterside is definitely worth a visit. Barahi is an incarnation of the Hindu goddess Kali and animals are sacrificed during festivals as an offering to her. You may also wish to row across the lake to climb a hill. Half way up the hill you will find a small hut where there is usually something to eat. You can enjoy your food whilst gazing at the indescribably stunning view of Phewa Lake with the Himalayas in the background. Definitely a photo opportunity! There are also interesting Tibetan settlements with workshops, schools and health centres. They were originally set up as refugee camps for the Tibetans who were driven out of their country in 1959 by the Chinese. One of the most notable natural features in this region is the Seti River Gorge, which has been carved out by erosion to a depth of 150 feet. The gorge is just 15 feet wide in some places. The Mahendra Bridge in Pokhara-Basar offers a good view of the gorge. You may also wish to go for a morning walk to Sarangkot, where you get a spectacular view of the snowy peaks of the Himalayas. The panoramic mountains to the west and east of Macchapure are the peaks of the Annapurna mountains.

Dag 4 - 5: Pokhara - Birethanti - Trekking

Begin walking after the two hour drive to Birethanti. A wide trail leads through bamboo forests and pasture at Tikedungha. The next morning drop down to cross the Bhurungdi Khola before climbing the steep stone staircase to the Magar village of Ulleri which is said to have 3767 steps, the toughest section of the trek. Annapurna South and Hiunchuli gradually emerge from behind the foothills as you climb. Pasture and cultivated fields soon give way to deep forests of oak and rhododendron.

Dag 6 - 8: Trekking

An early, hour long climb up to Poon Hill (3190m) provides a spectacular, unobstructed view of the high Himalaya. The trail initially climbs through thick forest before emerging



to further resplendent views, eventually reaching the Gurung village of Ghandrung. Continuing via Dhampus to Phedi the trail crosses the Modi Khola and a number of its tributaries, commanding views marking most of the route. From Phedi it is an hour's drive to Pokhara.

Dag 9 - 10: Pokhara – Chitwan/Sauraha

We leave today for the Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal's first nature reserve. It was founded in 1973, encompasses an area of 360 square miles and is in the central region of the Terai. Chitwan's flora and fauna is amongst the most varied in Asia. The vegetation is dominated by willow trees, which cover around 70% of the park's area. The remaining 30% is a mosaic of forests, grassy highlands, lakes, marshes, rivers and streams. Aside from the estimated 300-350 Indian rhinos, the park is also home to many other large wildlife. Amongst the predators in the park are 60-70 tigers as well as leopards, fishing cats, jungle cats, jackals, foxes, civet cats, martens, otters, sloth bears, wild boar, various species of deer and ape such as the maroon-leaf monkeys and rhesus monkeys. There are 450 different species of birds native to this area. Water dwelling animals in the park include the marsh mugger crocodile, the Ganges gaviol (large long snouted crocodilian) and the rare Ganges river dolphin. To explore the area you can walk (accompanied by a park ranger), ride on the back of an elephant or take a trip on a dugout tree trunk canoe. We will stay here for two nights in bungalows set in attractive gardens. The bungalows are in Sauhara, on the edge of the reserve.

Dag 11 - 12: Chitwan/Sauraha – Kathmandu

Today we will take the long yet picturesque mountain route back to Kathmandu. You will then have the rest of the day to look around the city again and to comb the bazaars and shops for souvenirs. You may wish to go cycling, and the Kathmandu Valley is perfect to explore by bike. You can rent excellent mountain bikes in Kathmandu.

Dag 13: Kathmandu

It is the last day of your tour but rather than being about 'Goodbye' your thought should be 'Go further'!

Visit your personal 'my.shoestring' page on our website. 'my.shoestring' is the perfect way to make contact with other travellers before and after your trip. You can read and create journals from trips and upload your photos onto the photo gallery. Visit my shoestring today.

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Achtergrondinformatie

Celebrations and festivals

Whatever time of year you visit, you will almost certainly experience some festival or other. Underneath are the most notable. There is usually some type of celebration in the temples at full moon.

February: Shivaratri is the festival held in honour of Shiva. During full moon in the month of phalgun, festivals are held around the numerous Shiva temples.

February/March: Holi is a popular festival, especially amongst the lower castes. This is due mainly to the fact that all rules and norms are thrown out of the window and everything goes. During Holi, everybody splashes each other with water and powder paint. Make sure that you wear old clothes, as tourists are a popular target and the paint is not easy to get out! Holi marks the beginning of the spring.

April/May: Bisket, the Nepalese New Year festival, is celebrated. Statues of gods are towed through the towns on temple-wagons, and everyone takes the day off.

September/October: Durga Puja or Dasain is the largest festival in Nepal. It lasts for around 10 days and is celebrated everywhere. It marks the defeat of the buffalo demon Mahisha by the goddess Durga. There are kite-flying competitions, parades and processions in the Kathmandu Valley.

End of October/Beginning of November: Diwali or Tihar is celebrated, the Festival of Light. It is marked by the illumination of thousands of lights, fireworks, baking cakes and making sand patterns outside one's front door. This is to welcome the god Rama back from his long exile in the jungle.

Communications

Sorry, this information is not available at this moment. Please check back later.

Cultural differences and habits

The cultural differences between Europeans and Nepali are so vast that one could write a book about them. Below you will find an overview of the most important points to take into account when interacting with the local population.

Yes and no: Maybe the most confusing cultural difference between Nepali (and Indians) and Europeans is the usage of the words yes and no. To begin with, 'yes' is not indicated by nodding but by quickly moving the chin to and fro, which causes the head to 'wobble' (you should try it!). Secondly, whether spoken or 'wobbled', 'yes' has a much broader meaning. Besides 'yes', it can indicate 'eh', or 'understood', or even something like 'that's probably right', or 'I have heard you, but I'm not interested in what you are saying'. 'Yes' when uttered by a Nepali therefore doesn't give you a clue as to what they mean. 'No' is a word Nepali do not like to say too often, for example when asked if the bus to Pokhara stops here. When offered a piece of liquorice, nine out of ten Nepali will find the taste foul but the chances of them saying 'no' when asked if they like it are very slim.

Courtesy rules: Nepali traditionally greet with a namasté, with the palms of the hands pressed together and held upright in front of the face. The higher you hold your hands, the more respect you express. Alternatively, members of the same sex often shake hands. Address everyone with 'sir' or 'madam'. Do not raise your voice, even if something does not go the way you want it to. It is better to ask for someone higher in rank to come



and deal with a problem, as delegation of decisions is not a strong point in Nepali organisations. Presents are not unpacked immediately, but put aside. Showing eagerness is seen as a bad habit.

Gifts: Do not be surprised or offended if you are not immediately thanked upon presenting a gift. The gift will usually be put to one side, unopened. This is not a sign of ingratitude. In fact, in Nepal showing eagerness towards gifts is seen as a sign of greed and is not at all appreciated.

Dress: Adult men wearing shorts are seen as ridiculous by Nepali, and women wearing shorts are perceived as outrageous. The local population likes to dress formally for important events. Should you be invited to a wedding, ask about any dress precepts. Swimming naked or topless is prohibited. Also in a bikini, you look a fool. Nepali women bathe mostly in their sari. If you were to wear a bikini, it results in persistent stares from men. A bathing suit will make sunbathing a more relaxed experience.

Left and right: The right hand is used to eat, while the left hand is reserved for cleaning one's behind. Should you be eating a meal with Nepali using your hands, remember to only use your right hand. Nepali consider changing hands foul. Do not touch anyone with your left hand.

Appointments: We are from a highly hectic culture in which time equals money and appointments tend to be met punctually, or the day's schedule will be messed up. Nepali do not have this problem. Not that they will always be late: it is possible that they didn't have anything else to do and that they decide to arrive an hour early.

Privacy: Staring is not impolite and most Nepali do not have the sense of privacy as we know it. They will come nearer to you than Europeans, like to join you when reading your book and they will study it meticulously as soon as you put it down. They may enter the room without knocking and they may stay around when they are done. It is up to you to indicate your boundaries.

Men and women: In Nepal, men and women treat each other differently than westerners. You will hardly ever see a man and a woman walking with their arms around each other. Physical contact in public between men and women is being limited as much as possible. To show your affection in public is likewise viewed as highly inappropriate. In stations and some cinemas, there are even separate cash tills for women and in trains there are separate compartments. However, the rules for the contacts between the sexes are rather liberal. As a man it is better not to sit next to a woman and not to talk to her. This rule applies in particular to women in their fertile age. Female tourists are free to make contact with Nepali women. For western women, it is particularly important to take into account behavioural codes vis-à-vis Nepali men. As a western woman, it is better not to look Nepali men in the eye. Many men will think you are after something.

Visiting holy places: Holy places must be entered barefoot, with the exception of churches. Hindu temples you must enter without headdress. In some temples, and always in the garbha griha, the holiest place of a temple, you are not welcome. To visit a mosque, wear clothes that cover you up. Sometimes you are asked to cover your head. During a service, men are separated from the women. When walking around a Buddhist stupa, walk to the left, so clockwise. It is not appreciated when tourists make pictures in front of a Buddha statue. In Jain monuments it is not permitted to take leather objects inside (shoes, bags, belts etc). Sikh temples should be entered covered up and with



something to cover your head.

Begging: Begging is partly a socially accepted activity. Through giving alms, Hindus can improve their karma and well-to-do Muslims according to the Koran are required to give 4% of their income to the less well off. However, most inhabitants of Nepal will loudly show that they disapprove of the same practice. Beggars are called 'bone-idle'; 'those people that want to get their daily handful of rice without working for it'. Shoestring has the rule never to give money to children, if anything some fruit or something else to eat. (Preferably not sweets, there are hardly any dentists in these parts.) It is accepted to give to elderly people or invalids. The truth behind each beggar can be very different. One or two indeed has to beg for their food, but most are forced to pay for their place in a house with this activity. Besides, the number of drug and alcohol addicts is on the increase. It is wisest to give to a well-reputed charity. It is legitimate for beggars to sit near the exit door of temples and mosques and wait for baksheesh (alms). Both Hindus and Muslims have a system similar to our way of giving indulgences.

Prices and haggling: Find out the real price of something. Paying too much leads to inflation and paying too little harms the seller. In practice, the price of an item will always be set higher than what you are expected to pay for it. It is better to see it as a game, which can be fun to play. In the eyes of the local population, westerners are always on holiday and earn loads of money. This can give them the feeling of being underdeveloped and poor. Try to give them a more balanced picture by describing daily life in the west.

General

Be aware at all times that you are a guest in a country with different social customs than you are used to. Particularly during the festivals, it is important to adapt to the local standards, however strange you may find them.

Food and drinks

Eating habits in Nepal differ greatly from Europe and adjusting can prove tricky. People usually sit on the floor and eat with their right hand from a metal plate. Hands and face are washed before the meal. Eating breakfast or drinking tea or coffee before brushing your teeth is seen as dirty. Water is drunk during meals and should you order a coffee without further instructions, it will be brought to you after the meal. Talking comes before the meal; people rarely talk during it. If you are invited out to eat, chat amiably before the meal but leave after it. Women and children eat separately and only after the men have finished. Guests are often the only ones to eat, while the host concentrates on your service. This is a sign of politeness, but can make Europeans feel uncomfortable. Nepali eat three warm meals per day.

Many Nepali are vegetarians for religious or moral reasons. Even eggs are often avoided. **Breakfast:** Cornflakes, toast, jam, butter and eggs are the standard fare in hotels and restaurants.

Lunch and dinner: For residents of the Himalaya valleys and the Terai, dal is known as 'dal bhat tarkari'. Dal is porridge-like in texture, is made from lentils and is the most important source of protein for the Nepalese. Bhat is rice, and is used in quantities that westerners find unbelievable! Tarkari is the tastiest of the three and varies in nature. It is a cooked vegetable dish with masala, which is a combination of spices. Leafy vegetables, potatoes and cauliflower are often used. In Kathmandu and Pokhara, the range of



international food is large, varying from pizza with moussaka to rösti (a Swiss potato dish) with deep-fried chicken legs. In the popular hiking routes in the mountains, food like chow mein and spaghetti will also be on the menu.

Tap water: Tap water is not suitable for drinking. You will have to buy mineral water or use the drinking water produced in middle-class and expensive hotels and restaurants. This water is boiled or filtered with a bacteria filter. Mineral water is relatively expensive. For this reason, it sometimes happens that bottles are filled up with unreliable water. Always take care that bottles are properly sealed. Only in good restaurants are ice cubes made of clean water.

Fruit: One of the greatest attractions of Nepal is the nearly infinite offer of the most exotic fruits. They come in a variety of colours, shapes and sizes, but they outdo each other in taste. To explore this region is to surrender wholly to the strangely looking fruit piled up along the road or sold by women who make a living out of fruit selling on the beach or in the street. Some of the most delectable fruits are mango, rambutan, papaya, pineapple, royal coconut, sour sob, jackfruit, mangosteen, durian and the many types of banana.

Landscape

Nepal is a rectangular country that stretches over a distance of 530 miles from the north-west to the south-east and has a maximum breadth of 136 miles. It has an area of 57,000 square miles, which is slightly more than England. The country is bordered by Chinese-occupied Tibet to the north-east and on all other sides by India. Nepal is dominated by the largest mountain range in the world, the Himalayas. The border with Nepal is marked by the tallest chain of mountains in the Himalayas, with peaks such as Mount Everest ('Sagarmatha' in Nepalese, 5.5 miles high), Manasu (5 miles) and Lhotse (5.3 miles). The Mahabharat mountain range runs parallel to the Himalayas on the southern side of Nepal, and has smaller peaks, the largest being around 1.9 miles tall. Between these two mountain ranges lies the Pahar, a hilly region intersected by many rivers and several small valleys, including the Kathmandu valley which is the beating heart of the country. The youngest and smallest area of hills, known as Sivalik, is further along from the Mahabharat, and has peaks of around three quarters of a mile high. In between these two is lower ground, with thick areas of jungle that is increasingly being cut down to make way for rice fields. Beyond this area, Nepal extends into the Terai, part of the lowland plains of the River Ganges. A strip 12 to 25 miles wide is part of Nepal, yet extends into India. The three mountain ranges that run parallel to this area are intersected in several places by deep river gulfs. Current scientific thought is that the Himalayas came into existence around 30 million years ago, when the Indian landmass crashed into Eurasia as a result of unimaginably immense tectonic activity in the Earth's cooling crust. The Indian landmass began to slide under the Eurasian plate, and as a result the Himalayas were formed. Before this time, the land that now forms Nepal, lay under what was then the Mediterranean Sea. Ammonites found high in the mountains are sold for a few pounds to tourists. The immensely powerful force that created the Himalayas is still active today, and the mountains grow at a rate of around half an inch per year. Due to this activity, earthquakes regularly hit Nepal, and hot springs have been found along the fault line to the south of the mountain range. These springs are a very welcome attraction for both natives and weary hikers.

The range of nature in Nepal is huge as a result of many different climate zones being



situated very close to one another. These very varied climates are a result of the very varied altitudes of the land. There are large areas where ice and snow dominate the landscape, and animals such as the snow leopard flourish, while right next door there are jungles and grassy plains that can reach a temperature of 40 degrees Celsius in the summer. Rhinos and wild buffalo roam this terrain. In between these extremes you can find alpine meadow and pine and rhododendron forests that are home to wild goats. Just a fifth of the country is suitable for farming, and is usually used for growing rice. A large percentage of Nepal is practically inaccessible due to the huge mountains and can only be reached on foot or by light aircraft. The Northwest is particularly thinly populated and mostly untouched by human hand.

At one time Nepal was a collection of small feudal states, squeezed between Tibet and Mogul India. In 1324, a ruler from Rajput, who had escaped the Muslims, crushed these small states. His descendents would rule over Nepal until 1768, when the Ghurkhas conquered the country, a people of Tibetan-Mongolian origin. The Ghurkhas were known to be excellent warriors and attempted to occupy Tibet, but the Chinese who also occupied Nepal for a short time defeated them. In 1791, the Ghurkhas made a treaty with the British in India, but in 1814, there was a dispute about the borders, which led to a war between Great Britain and Nepal. During the involuntary armistice in 1816, Nepal was forced to give up a large part of its border regions to British-India.

In 1923, Nepal became officially independent. In order to safeguard this independence, which was not easy as Nepal was a small, isolated kingdom stuck between two superpowers; King Birendra tried not to disrupt relations between India and China. In 1990, the ban on political parties was terminated and not much later, a new constitution was established. At present Nepal is a constitutional monarchy with a multi-party system. King Birendra was murdered in 2001 by a family member and has now been succeeded by his brother. At the moment Nepal is no longer a monarchy.

Annapurna region: In the middle of Nepal, north of Pokhara, lays one of the Himalaya's most accessible and stunning parts. The mountain chains of the Manaslu, the Annapurna and the Dhaulagiri stretch from east to west. Dozens of densely populated valleys and a network of roads and pathways, connecting the villages, are nestled in among the eight thousand metres high peaks of these Himalayan giants. Though the Nepalese authorities are doing their best, up until now, only a couple of roads have been adapted to motorised traffic, thus leaving the character of the valleys, for the greater part, intact. The region is perfect for trekking. Since 1977, foreigners are admitted into the valleys surrounding the giant mountains and meanwhile, each year some 40.000 hikers visit the Annapurna area. The Nepalese meet the demand by building hotels, lodges and teahouses all over the route. Tourism can also cause negative effects, i.e. deforestation and pollution; in 1986 the Nepalese authorities established the region as a National Park and assigned supervision to the ACAP (Annapurna Conservation Area Project) at Pokhara. This organization attempts to confine the damage to the landscape by drawing up rules of conduct for tourists and residents. ACAP is also financed through the profits of the entrance fees for the region.

Population

Anyone who visits Nepal is always captivated by the Himalayas, but the Nepalese themselves are equally unforgettable. They are friendly, modest, extremely polite and cheerful, regardless of religion or roots. They dress for the most part in the traditional



costume of their particular ethnic group, some of which being the Newari, the Magar and the Bhotia. Nepal is ruled by the gods, not by its inhabitants. The heavenly forces rule alongside the king, who is seen as a reincarnation of the god Vishnu. The Nepalese hold numerous ceremonies to honour their gods, to celebrate victories over demonic forces, to bless the year's harvests and to prevent earthquakes. The Nepalese seem to have more of an eye on the gods than on the world around them.

Nepal has a population of around 29 million, 6% of which live in the Kathmandu Valley. One-fifth of the population live in the Terai region and the rest are scattered amongst the mountainous regions. In whatever place you visit, the air is always filled with children's voices. This gives Nepal a happy, optimistic vibe, although it is a sign of a catastrophically large population growth of around half a million people per year. This is not hindered by the rather low life expectancy of 54 and the high infant mortality rate (1 in 5 children die before the age of five). The population is estimated to be at least 40 million by the year 2020.

The fertile Kathmandu Valley was the source of the entire nation's food around ten years ago, although nowadays much is supplied by the Terai. While the valley must supply food for the rapidly growing number of mouths, the amount of available farmland is decreasing due to the increased amounts of housing. In the mountainous regions, the population growth is not very pronounced (1.8% per year) in comparison to the Terai (4%). This is due to the migration of mountain folk to this region, which has only recently been made suitable for agriculture. A growing number of Nepalese are migrating to neighbouring countries such as India, Bhutan and Bangladesh. This has led to much conflict and deportation of tens of thousands of Nepalese back to their homeland. Nepal's population has elements of the European and Mongolian races and can be traced back to a combination of Indian, Tibetan and Burmese roots. The majority of people are Hindu, and among them exists a hierarchical class (or caste) system. In the highland valleys of the Himalayas and on the Tibetan border there are many Buddhists, who constitute 10% of the population. Muslims are scattered here and there in the Terai. Besides the classification into different classes, people are also classified into ethnic groups, often with their own separate language. All in all, Nepalese society is rather complex and difficult for outsiders to grasp, especially as there are social rules about meetings between members of two different classes.

Religion

In Nepal, nothing is more confusing than the colourful array of gods, angels, demons, cultures and rituals. Nepal's religious doctrine consists of a mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism. Besides these two religions, there are a number of other influences, such as Animism, Shamanism, ancestor worship, the Tibetan Bon religion, Vajrayana and Tibetan Buddhism (Lamaism). One thing that distinguishes Nepal from most countries in the world is that there has been no real dominant religion. Instead, a growingly complicated mix of particular aspects of different religions has come into existence over the course of the centuries. The country is similar to India in this respect, although in that country, some religions, like Buddhism, have almost completely disappeared.

Hinduism: When you look into it, it would seem as if Hindus have not much in common with western religion. In a sense, that is true. There is no central hierarchy, no common confession of creed and no founding father which all Hindus believe in. Hindus express their religious feelings in all sorts of ways. For this reason, concepts such as 'ahimsa',



non-violence, and ideas about vegetarianism co-exist with rituals in which animals are slaughtered or self-punishment is practised. A belief in reincarnation co-exists with a belief in a heaven for ancestors, and highly formalised rituals occur as well as highly emotional ceremonies. In order to get a relatively complete impression of Hinduism, you would do best to ask individual Hindus about their ideas about the matter. You will find that almost all Indians have very distinct ideas about their own religious experiences and are usually eager to tell you about them. You will probably notice that there are many different personal views amongst them.

Hindus generally recognise the fact that life has four objectives. In the first place, the aim is to live up to one's religious and social obligations vis-à-vis the family and society. These obligations are summarised in the concept of dharma. Secondly, it is important to gain sufficient material possessions, so that alms can be given to beggars and itinerant holy men and the family can be sustained. This is known as artha. The third aim in life is experiencing sexuality or kaama, which should result in male offspring. The son is necessary to perform ancestral rituals. The last and highest goal is the liberalization from reincarnation, or moksha (a comparable and much more well-known concept in the West is the Buddhist Nirvana). Apart from living up to these obligations, the individual Hindu is free to think what he or she wants. He can choose his own spiritual master or guru. There is a lot of respect for gurus and elderly people. An equal amount of respect is also paid to the numerous living holy men. Many of these living holy men wander through India and they are called sadhus.

Most Hindus also believe in karma. This is the law that one deed prompts the other, and everything you come across in life is actually a result of previous deeds. By doing good deeds you can build up credits which you will reap the benefits from, either in this life or in a following one. Hindus spend a lot of time worshipping the gods living in the temples. These can be enormous temples, but also small home shrines in a corner of the room where the family god is worshipped. In the temple, the god lives like a king. Many Hindus believe that it is possible to actually meet their god in the temple.

The world of gods: A visit to a Hindu temple is an introduction to an extensive pantheon of gods. Most Hindus will tell you they believe in one god, even if it seems thousands exist. When you question them about this oddity, you will often be told that the manifest forms should be seen as the planes of a diamond. If a ray of light falls on the diamond, a different plane will light up every time, but it will still be the same diamond. In the following we will pay attention to a few important Hindu gods: Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu and Ganesha. We shall also touch upon some goddesses.

In the west, the Hindu trinity of Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva is often known. Brahma is hardly worshipped, however, as he is too abstract, does not take on a definite personality and has created hardly any exciting myths. In the whole of India, there is only one temple that is dedicated to Brahma, in Pushkar (Rajasthan). Brahma is the creator of the universe and he is portrayed having four heads. Sarasvati originally was described as Brahma's daughter, but in later times was described as his wife. She is seen as the goddess of the arts and is mostly portrayed with a stringed instrument in her hands.

Shiva is one of the most important gods in Hinduism. He is often portrayed as an ascetic. He is dressed in a tiger skin or an elephant skin, as a reference to two demons he has once slain. His body is greyish or white, because he rubs himself with the ashes from incinerated bodies. He wears his hair in long braided strands, the style many ascetics in India have their hair. He has three eyes – the third embellishes his forehead. From this third eye he can evoke a destructive fire, to destruct the universe when creation nears its end. In his figure and the attributes he carries, Shiva unites many opposites. Hindus



explain this is because he is a god encompassing the whole universe, from high to low, from clean to foul. Thus in his one ear he wears an earring customarily worn by village women from low castes, while in his other ear he has an earring with the shape of a mythical crocodile typically worn by Brahmins. In one of his hands he holds a drum, damaru, resembling an hourglass. With this drum he indicates the rhythm of creation. One of his other hands carries a blazing fire that he destroys the world with. On his head he wears flowers, including the highly toxic datura, a flower from which hallucinatory substances can be distilled. Around his neck he has venomous snakes, symbols of death. On his head he also has a moon's crescent, another symbol of death. His mount is the bull Nandi. Nandi almost always lies in front of Shiva temples. Shiva has always been the god of ascetics. Many of his followers are sādhus (holy men), wandering through India alone or in groups, their bodies rubbed with ashes, doing penance in bizarre ways. They can be recognised by the three horizontal lines they paint on their foreheads. Their attribute is the trident. Shiva's women are known by many names and figures. Parvati is Shiva's most well known partner – she became the symbol of the submissive, subservient woman. She had to sit and watch how Shiva went off with beauties in and out of season, but he would always come back to her. Parvati is the peaceful form of the concept of shakti (female energy), although she can also manifest herself in different, more ferocious forms: Durga, Chamunda or Kali. Durga is often worshipped as an independent goddess who has nothing to do with Shiva. She was created especially to save the gods of a terrible disaster, with her own weapons. As Kali ('the black') Parvati occurs in her most terrible shape. She is black, her tongue protrudes from her bloody mouth, and she is hung with chopped human heads and skulls, wandering over horrible final resting places. She is supposed to offer help where no other god still has any power. Remarkably, even the lowest castes are allowed to worship her, which makes her following very large. Uniquely, she is presented with blood sacrifices; during her festivals, numerous black male animals are sacrificed, varying from cats to buffaloes.

Vishnu is a god appearing in numerous appearances. He usually has a character milder and friendlier than Shiva, although even he has ecstatic aspects. Vishnu is usually pictured with a blue body colour and four arms, in which he holds a shell, a club, a lotus flower and a discus. He often wears a crown and a yellow robe. Around his neck he has a wreath of forest flowers and various pieces of jewellery, including a jewel that fulfils wishes. Vishnu has two mounts, the snake Shesha and the bird Garuda. The snake serves him as a resting place, while the bird carries him through the universe. Vishnu guards the world and in case something threatens to go amiss, he will act. He will appear on the earth as an incarnation. The Hindus know ten classic incarnations: fish, tortoise, swine, the man-lion Narasimha, dwarf, Rama with an axe, Rama with an arch, Krishna, Buddha and finally, Kalki. The last incarnation of Vishnu, Kalki, still has to appear. He will appear as a horseman on a white horse with a sword that 'flares as a comet'. With this sword he will destroy all demons that threaten the world. The most popular incarnations of Vishnu are Krishna and Rama with the arch, the hero of Ramayana. Krishna himself figures in many different stories and situations, and is especially popular in his appearance as a young cowherd. He has a number of affairs with the shepherdesses of the village where he lives. Later he becomes a great religious preacher and he lays down his message to humankind in the Bhagavad Gita, an important philosophical text which is a central text in the Mahabharata.

A particularly popular god is Ganesha. He can be instantly recognised between the hundreds of god figures of the Indian pantheon, as he has an elephant's head. Tens of different appearances exist of him. He is considered to be the spiritual son of Shiva, who



would not be the one who begot him, however. He was born from the bath oil of his mother Parvati as a handsome boy. He developed his elephant head later. When Shiva came home after a long absence, Parvati was just taking a bath. She had put her son Ganesha in front of the door, on guard. Ganesha had not seen Shiva and refused to let him in. Shiva flew into a rage and beheaded the guardsman. Only when he heard he had murdered his own son, he had to quickly find the head of any other being to replace it, and this happened to be an elephant. When the elephant's head was hewn off and fell onto the ground, one of the tusks broke off. It was placed in the sky in the shape of a moon's crescent. Ganesha is a god that takes away hindrances, when worshipped. If not worshipped, however, he can create hindrances. Ganesha does everything for the people that worship him and for that reason criminals and black magicians often worship him. Ganesha is worshipped in almost all Hindu temples. He resembles a rat.

Buddhism: The Buddha was born in Lumbini, in the Terai region of Nepal, in the 6th Century BC. In spite of his comfortable and luxurious life as a prince, he could not help but notice the suffering of the people around him. After a long period of meditation he achieved Enlightenment and started to proclaim a new way of life. Buddhism is actually a reformatory movement of Hinduism and the two religions have many elements in common. However, Buddha rejected a few important aspects of the prevailing doctrine. Two important matters that he found reprehensible were the Brahman rituals and the idolatry of the gods and caste system.

Following Hinduism, the Buddha claimed that everything that exists is in a perpetual cycle of creation and decay. In principle, nothing can escape this fate: not the gods, nor the universe, nor the people. However, Buddha himself did succeed in being released from the eternal wheel of reincarnation. His teachings show how to follow in his footsteps and reach nirvana; a condition of timeless rest and unity with everything. The four noble truths are of key importance: 1) All life means suffering. 2) This suffering is a consequence of our desires. 3) By removing these desires, man can end this suffering. 4) The removal of all desire is reached by following 'the right course'. The right course consists of the eightfold path, a system of thought and action that ensures that the karma of the one who treads the path improves. If you succeed in improving your karma by following the right path, you will reincarnate into a more pure form. At last you reach Bodhisattva, a state in which you long for nothing else but the fortune of all others. Subsequently you dissolve into nirvana, the state of enlightenment where you realise that everything that exists is an illusion, a mere mirage of the indivisible unity that rests within it.

Gradually, Mahayana Buddhism developed alongside this school of thought, later named Thereyara or Hinayana. This popular form of Buddhism re-introduced many rituals and the worship of many Buddhas and bodhisattvas (disciples of a Buddha). A new pantheon of gods quickly came into existence in the Mahayana school, and it began to resemble Hinduism in all but name, especially in the daily life of its disciples.

Weather and climate

Northern India has a hot, dry climate, with cold winter months and very high temperatures between May and June (day temperatures can reach above 40°C!). Apart from the monsoon season between July and September, there is little rainfall. Nepal has a similar climate, although the higher the altitude, the colder the weather. In the summer, large regions of Nepal see substantial rain and this can make the mountains



sometimes inaccessible. The summer months also bring lots of clouds, which can restrict the views. In the Kathmandu Valley, rainfall is not excessive. In the winter months of December and January however, the nights can get cold. There is also often mist in the mornings, but as soon as this clears the sun comes straight back out.

Best travelling time

Both the spring (February, March and April) and the autumn (middle of September until December) are optimal times to travel to northern India and Nepal. February and March are typical spring months and October and November see many exciting festivals. The summer months are extremely hot and humid, but the monsoons have a certain charm, with spectacular weather, fresh, green nature and happy people who enjoy monsoon season more than any other time of year.

Other background information

GIFT for AID

Shoestring supports the projects carried out by the charitable organisation GIFT for AID, which gives tourists in Nepal the chance to contribute towards a better standard of living for the local populations. In their information office in Kathmandu, practical, small-scale projects are mapped out and on display. These projects have been developed by local development organisations. You can visit the information office and financially support the project(s) that you find the most worthy. At the time of writing, three projects are presented, these being education for women about sanitation and new wells, installation of improved cookers which use less wood and give off less smoke, and the building of facilities to help Kathmandu's victims of leprosy. You can arrange a visit to see one of the projects in action at GIFT for AID's office in Kathmandu (closed on Saturdays). If you wish to know more, check the organisation's website at www.giftforaid.org.

Praktische informatie

Arrival information

On your first day in Nepal, take it easy. Take time to adapt. The change of climate, culture and food can be quite challenging. Particularly in the larger cities, traders can be quite intrusive. Stay calm, but indicate clearly when you are not interested in buying something. Let the country sink in and just enjoy yourself.

Customs & regulations

British passport holders, require visa for Nepal. Shoestring recommend that you contact the following websites for further information: <http://www.nepembassy.org.uk>

Electricity

Nepal has 220 volt, 50 hertz current. However, there are regular power cuts, so bringing a torch with you on the trip is advised. In our sleeping accommodation during the hiking trip in Nepal, there is no electricity. A continental plug adapter will be necessary, as two-pin plugs are used here.



Health

Southern Asia is a region where more diseases are rife than in Europe. The situation is comparable to that in our parts before the Second World War. All dangerous diseases that are common in Nepal almost exclusively affect the poor. Besides, with a timely treatment they can almost always be checked, for those that can afford it. If you pay sufficient attention to hygiene, insect repellents and skin care in South Asia, you will most probably stay healthy, apart maybe from some harmless intestinal problems.

Food and hygiene: Intestinal problems are much more common in Nepal than in Western Europe, and food can be a major source of contamination. Visitors to this country are advised to eat meat and chicken only in reputed restaurants and otherwise stick to vegetarian food. Eat in good restaurants or, if you do go to cheap eating places, look for the busiest ones. Here, the turn-around of the food is highest and hence the freshest. Fried vegetarian snacks can hardly go wrong, although the quality of the frying oil can go down after frequent use, and sit heavy on the stomach. In expensive restaurants, you should be able to trust all the food, including meat, ice creams and salads, but in case of doubt, put it aside. It is best not to eat salads in simple establishments, and the same applies to fruit salads and fruit juices. If you peel the fruit yourself, it is safe. Wash your hands often and check if cutlery and plates are washed properly. Keep your fingernails short.

Sun and heat: Sunburn is a frequent cause for health problems. Sunburn and heat strokes are easier caught than you may think. You should therefore avoid the sun during the hottest hours of the day, always wear a hat (or carry an umbrella) and good sunglasses when you are walking or cycling, and use the recommended factor of suntan lotion when sunbathing. At high temperatures, the body's need for water increases very rapidly, as does its need for salt. Make sure you drink enough. Take it easy during the hottest hours of the day. Treat small scratches, wounds and insect bites before they become infected.

Insects: Mosquitoes are most active just after sunset or just before sunrise. So take measures then, and during the entire night. Covering up the skin with clothing is an effective measure. Or use an insect repellent like DEET. You can ask for mosquito coils from your hotel desk or the restaurant where you eat. These green spirals can be burnt underneath your table or chair, deterring the mosquitoes. Electric coils are better suited to closed-off spaces. Lastly, you can consider bringing a mosquito net.

Animals: Don't stroke animals. Rabies and scabies occur widely in Nepal. Should you be bitten, call on a doctor immediately. In case of a bite by a monkey or a dog, you should be flown home immediately; and seek medical care straight away. Rabies that has not been treated in an early stage will be deadly without exception. Bites by snakes and scorpions are rare and as a rule are not deadly. However, do not walk in high grass and other vegetation with open shoes. Keep your travel bags closed, in particular at night, and do not put on your shoes in the morning before you have checked if they are uninhabited.

Diarrhoea: The most common complaints are intestinal disorders, in particular diarrhoea. Diarrhoea is a natural defence mechanism of the intestines to quickly dispose of anything damaging or irritating in the digestive tract. In most cases it is a completely innocuous phenomenon caused by a sudden change in diet, the heat or harmless bacteria, against



which your body will quickly gain resistance (traveller's diarrhoea). The main risk is dehydration. Dehydration occurs when the body continues to emit moisture and salts, while the intestines can no longer absorb these from their contents. The symptoms are a feeling of listlessness, a dry mouth and lips and a low urine production. Test for advanced dehydration by taking some skin on the top of your hand between your thumb and index finger, and release it. If the skin does not smooth itself straight away, you are dehydrated. Please note that this test does not work well on elderly people. Serious dehydration often leads to a confused state of mind. Dehydration can be prevented by drinking lots of water, soft drinks and soup. If you experience dehydration, it is best to drink water mixed with an ORS solution. This powder, available in sachets from chemists both in Nepal and at home, contains all the minerals which the body loses as a result of diarrhoea. Sugar has been added to improve the uptake of salts and water. The amount to be taken is shown on the sachet. If the diarrhoea is accompanied by high fever, vomiting, blood in the faeces or violent retching, call on a doctor immediately. It is probable that you have dysentery, which is caused by bacteria that may need to be fought with medicine. There are excellent medicines to stop diarrhoea, but they do not remove the cause. Medicines containing loperamide, such as the branded medicines Diacura and Imodium, call a complete halt to all bowel activity, which makes sense when you have to travel. However, never take them when the diarrhoea comes with one of the symptoms mentioned above in case you are suffering from a form of dysentery.

Altitude Sickness: Roughly one in two people who visit Ladakh encounter feelings of altitude sickness of varying degrees. It is the body's reaction to the oxygen supplies which grow scarcer as you travel higher. The most significant and concerning problem is the potential accumulation of fluid in the brain and/or lungs. You must be aware of and look out for any development of the symptoms at all times, both in yourself and your fellow holidaymakers. Before we give you a list of the symptoms, remember that the development of altitude sickness is in no way dependent on your physical fitness and/or routine when walking in mountainous regions. Experienced mountaineers can suffer from altitude sickness for the first time after making many expeditions into high-up regions. There is a whole scale of symptoms related to altitude sickness. The French Mountaineering Association uses a points scale to assess the severity of symptoms.

- Symptoms receiving 1 point: nausea, headaches, insomnia, dizziness.
- Symptoms receiving 2 points: vomiting, headaches which do not respond to aspirin.
- Symptoms receiving 3 points: extreme fatigue/exhaustion, shortness of breath, tightness of the chest as no result of physical exertion, little or no urination.

If any symptoms you may have do not exceed a total of 3 points, then you are safe to slowly go higher up the mountains. A score of between 4 and 6 points means you should watch out and wait till your symptoms ease before climbing any higher. A score of above 6 points means descend to lower ground immediately; a person with such severe symptoms must not remain at such a high altitude and certainly must not sleep at that altitude. Foaming at the mouth, blue lips and/or tongue, inability to lie down flat and any degree of loss of consciousness are signs of very serious altitude sickness and in such a case, the afflicted person must immediately return downhill. There are several medicines which can make the symptoms of altitude sickness temporarily bearable and these medicines, containing the active ingredient acetazolamide, are available in Nepal. As you will be travelling from Delhi to Leh, you will already be subject to high altitude. It is therefore important to acclimatise in Leh before proceeding to higher grounds.

Prickly heat: Prickly heat is an inflammation of the pores caused by excessive perspiration. It is common and innocent, but very annoying. The skin grows red and



irritated in places. Places where skin chafes against itself, such as armpits and thighs, are particularly susceptible. The symptoms will decrease if you take a cold shower – without using soap – a few times a day and dry yourself off well. Applying talcum powder to the affected spots may also help. When it is hot and damp, do not sleep under a sheet but wear a cotton T-shirt. If it is really troubling you, the best thing to do is take an air-conditioned room for a couple of nights.

Doctors, chemists and medicines: Doctors and chemists are usually well trained and reliable in Nepal, although medical facilities are not of good quality. In any case, you can get almost any medicines without needing a receipt, although make sure you check details on the bottle, particularly the use-by date. Besides plasters, bandages and cotton wool, a good first-aid kit for tropical areas might consist of a thermometer, iodine, painkillers, Oral Rehydration Solution packets, Imodium, an insect repellent such as DEET and an itch relief cream. For injuries, elasticated bandages and liniment (cream for muscle pain and stiffness) are useful additions.

Vaccinations: Nepal has no compulsory vaccinations, unless you have been in a region where yellow fever or cholera is prevalent 14 days before your arrival. However, as a precautionary measure, you should consult your doctor for if you have been in an infected area within four weeks of travelling to Nepal. You will usually be advised to get vaccinations against diphtheria, tetanus and polio as well as hepatitis A and typhus. Pills can be acquired to reduce the chances of malaria. Some people receive far less or even no mosquito bites if they begin a course of vitamin B-complex tablets around two weeks before the trip, although unfortunately this treatment does not work for everyone. However, participants in this trip will be staying at an altitude of over 2 miles for the majority of the holiday, and malaria does not affect areas above an altitude of around 1.2 miles. In Nepal, malaria occurs only in the low-lying Terai, so near Chitwan National Park.

Some more advice for a pleasant stay

Take time to allow your body and mind to adjust to the new time zone and location. Avoid stress; do not draw up a busy schedule. In any case, take it easy the first day. It is a good idea to get up early; in hot countries the morning temperature is often the most pleasant. Besides, the people in the country you are visiting are also used to getting up early. If you adjust to the local rhythm, you will be able to do more.

Info for people at home

Ensure that those at home know which country you are travelling in and how long you are planning to stay away. You may wish to fix a date when you will contact them again. Making telephone calls from Nepal is generally not a problem. Provide whoever is picking you up from the airport with your flight times and numbers. Shoestring will not provide flight and/or travel information, hotel names and telephone numbers to third parties. Any information on delays may be retrieved via the airport information number or Teletext.

Contact person

In case of an emergency it is important for us to have details of someone we can contact on your behalf. You have entered a name on the booking form. Please enter a second contact too, just in case the first person is unavailable during your trip.

Luggage and clothing



Appropriate clothing is very highly valued in Nepal. Men should wear long trousers and a shirt, women should make sure that their shoulders are covered and they wear a skirt that at the very least covers the knees. Clothes and many other items are extremely cheap in Nepal, so it is better to pack too little than too much. Throughout the months of October, November, March, April and May you will need summer clothing for the day and warm clothing for the evening and night. The winter months in Nepal tend to bring cold evenings, nights and mornings, and frost is not uncommon. If it is misty, there can be a cold chill in the air for much of the day. A warm coat and jumper are invaluable in this situation. You should also bring a good pair of shoes and a pair of flip flops or sandals. A thin turtle-necked sweater with long sleeves is useful at sunset to protect against insect bites. A rough checklist for packing might consist of headgear, sunglasses, sun cream, a sleeping bag, toiletries, a first-aid kit, any prescription medicine, a (video) camera with enough film, spare batteries, a torch, a pen-knife (but make sure this is not in your hand luggage during the flight), a lighter, an alarm clock, writing equipment, books, your passport and visa, copies of your passport and visa, sufficient money and/or travellers' cheques, all necessary travel insurance documents and details, a diary with important contact numbers/addresses and the booking papers for this trip. You may also wish to bring binoculars, an umbrella (useful as protection from both the rain and sun), maps, travel games and snacks. A mosquito net is not absolutely necessary as these can be bought all over Nepal. It is best that you carry your luggage in a smallish bag or backpack as opposed to a hard suitcase, as these are difficult to transport. In addition to this, a shoulder bag or another small backpack is useful for daily hand luggage. A thin money belt worn under your clothing is recommended for storage of valuables and important documents. Don't bring too much luggage. In our experience, more than 12 kilos is an unnecessary hindrance.

Money and currency

The pocket money we recommend is a minimum to pay for your meals, drinks, optional excursions, entry fees, local airport taxes and tips. Clearly, the amount that you spend depends on your personal purchasing behaviour, and for this reason expenditure on souvenirs is not included in the recommended pocket money. We suggest an amount of £100-£125 per week.

Photography

Never leave a film or camera in a locked bus. The mounting temperatures can badly affect the quality of the photographic material. It is better to have the prints made at home. Not all types of camera batteries are easy to find, so make sure you bring batteries that will last the entire trip. What applies to regular photography, applies for underwater photography in particular. You will have to bring all the gear required from home, and have the pictures developed in Europe.

Safety

In many ways, Nepal is a safe country. Mugging and other forms of physical violence against tourists occur only sporadically. Theft is also less frequent than in Britain, despite the wide difference in wealth between westerners and Nepali. Still, in the eyes of the local population each 'white nose' is a millionaire and those who come into contact with you will make numerous efforts to share in your infinite wealth in some way. In almost all cases this will come in the form of begging or ripping you off. This relative security does



not mean, however, that you can afford to be careless with money, valuables and luggage. Cash and travel documents are best worn underneath your clothing. Do not leave anything valuable in your hotel room – it is better not to invite theft. In each hotel, you can leave valuables at reception in exchange for a token.

Tipping

Hotel staff will expect a tip for the carrying of luggage and other small errands. Aside from the most expensive hotels, the wages of hotel personnel in Nepal are next to nothing, so the staff, are dependent on tips to make ends meet. If you are going to stay somewhere for a couple of days, it is a good idea to offer a tip straight away, as this will increase the speed and attentiveness of your service. About 10 rupees is a reasonable guideline. Taxi and motorised rickshaw drivers will not expect a tip. Neither will bicycle rickshaw drivers, although these poorly-paid fellows can be made very happy by a couple of extra rupees for their service. In expensive restaurants there is a service charge, while tips are non-existent in some of the cheaper places. Our bus driver and his assistant will be travelling with us for nearly the whole of the trip, and assuming they have performed their duty in a satisfactory manner, an amount of 400 rupees per passenger for each of them is recommended as a tip. The tour guide will also expect a tip at the end of the holiday, and we recommend around 8-10 pound per person.

Adresgegevens