

## Delhi to Kathmandu

**Country(ies):** India & Nepal

**Tour type:** Small Group

**Transport:** A/C minivan/minibus, sleeper train, domestic flight

**Group size:** Min: 2 | Max: 12

**Days:** 16 Days

**Start location:** Delhi, India

**End location:** Kathmandu, India

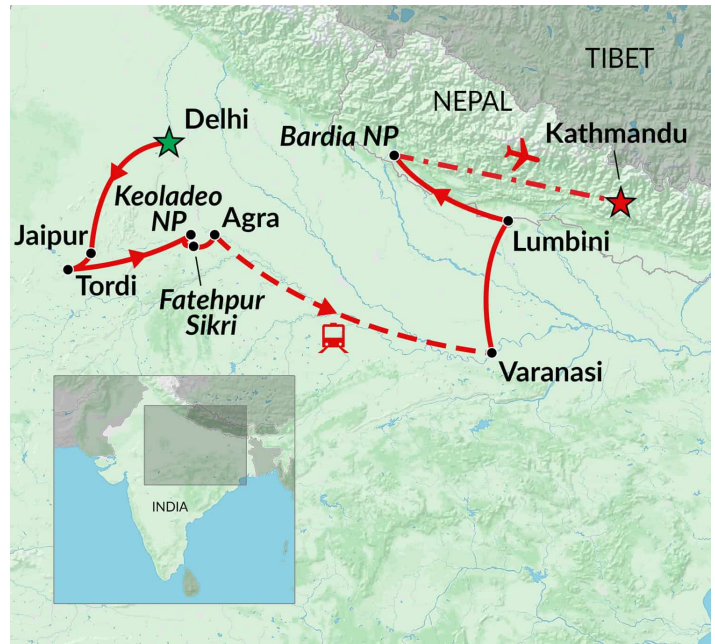
**Departs On:** Saturday

**Meals:** Breakfasts - 15, Lunches - 3, Dinners - 4

**Highlights:**

Old and New Delhi, Pink city of Jaipur, Tordi Garh, Abhaneri step well, Keoladeo NP, Fatehpur Sikri, Taj Mahal at sunrise, Agra Fort, River Ganges at Varanasi, Buddhist Sarnath & Lumbini, Bardia NP wildlife safaris, Kathmandu tour

**Places Visited:** New Delhi, Jaipur, Tordi Garh, Keoladeo NP, Agra, Varanasi, Lumbini, Bardia NP, Kathmandu



# Itinerary

## Day 1: Arrival in Delhi - hotel transfers included

Your Indian adventure starts in the capital city of Delhi. One of our local staff members will be waiting to greet you at the airport, before transferring you to your hotel. You'll have some time to settle in, before we run you through the tour itinerary, introduce you to the local area and discuss a time to collect you tomorrow.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Delhi

**MEALS:** None

**EXTRAS:** Single room supplement (INSGDK)

## Day 2: Exploring India's capital city & unique street food

If you're looking for one place to experience the diversity of India, then the capital city of New Delhi should be right at the top of your list. You'll start with a morning tour of the city, which has been built on the banks of the Yamuna River.

We'll visit the towering India Gate Monument, which is inspired by the famous Arc de Triomphe in Paris. India Gate is dedicated to the 82,000 soldiers who participated in the undivided Indian Army.

Since New Delhi is the home of India's government, we'll drive past important buildings such as Parliament, the Bangla Sahab Gurudwara Sikh Temple and Humayun's Tomb - a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

After exploring the New Delhi, you'll hop on a metro train to visit Old Delhi as well, exploring its old and busy markets and bazaars such as the Chandni Chowk and the Chawri Bazaar, famous for its brass, copper and paper products.

This afternoon, you'll have a chance to try Delhi's unique street food cuisine, tasting various snacks and delicacies for lunch. Once you're nice and full, your tour continues with a rickshaw ride and a visit to the Jama Masjid Mosque - one of the largest mosques in India.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Delhi

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 3: The Pink City of Jaipur & a visit to an ancient fortress

You'll say goodbye to Delhi and head towards Rajasthan's largest city - Jaipur. On our way there, we'll stop at Amber Fort, also known as Amer Palace. The fort got its name from Amba Mata, the goddess of earth and fertility.

Built in the 16th century by the ruling Kachhawa clan of Amber, it's one of the best hilltop forts in India, with its breathtaking architecture and marble palaces enthralling visitors from all corners of the earth. It overlooks the Maota Lake, a water source for the palace.

You also have the chance to taste Lassi and MI Road, the pride and joy of Punjabi cuisine. Lassi is a yogurt-based, sweet or salty drink made with water, spices and sometimes fruit. You'll then head to your accommodation for the night or as an option, you can watch a Bollywood movie at the Raj Mandir cinema.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Jaipur

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 4: A sightseeing tour of Jaipur

You have an option to embark on a hot air balloon ride this morning, soaring over Jaipur's magnificent palaces and forts as you take in the beauty of the Pink City from above. If you decided not to, your day starts with a sightseeing tour of the city.

You'll visit India's largest astronomical observatory known as the Jantar Mantar Monument, built by the Rajput king Sawai Jai Singh II between 1724 and 1730. You'll also make your way to the City Palace created between 1729-1732 AD, which was once the seats of the King of Jaipur and the leader of the renowned Kachwaha Rajput clan.

After lunch, you'll head to Jaipur's famous craft markets, where you can see craftsmen such as jewellers, silversmiths, textile workshops and bangle makers producing some of the most unique creations. You'll also have the chance to browse the fruit, vegetable and spice markets here.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Jaipur

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Hot air balloon in Jaipur

## Day 5: Visiting the ancient village of Tordi

Your day starts with a visit to the rural Rajasthan village of Tordi, which was founded in the 16th century by Th. Akhey Singh, a descendant of Khangar Singh who overthrew the regional chief and built a hilltop fortress. All that remains today are ruins, however, the family still lives in the palace and in a fort on the plains below. You'll be accommodated in a wing of the palace which has been created for guests.

After settling in, your afternoon begins with a walk through the village, visiting a temple, a school and a potter's house, before chatting to some of the locals to find out more about their way of life.

You have a few optional activities available to you today, such as camel cart riding, a jeep safari to a 300-year-old stepwell, visiting a shepherds village and watching the sun go down at the Tordi Sagar Dam. You can also hike to the 400-year-old Tordi Fort for drinks and snacks at sunset or try some horse-riding or henna hand art.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Tordi Garh

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Dinner

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 6: A guided cycle rickshaw ride and the world's largest step well

Say goodbye to Tordi as we make our way to Bharatpur to visit the Keoladeo Ghana National Park, one of the best birdwatching locations in India.

On our way, we'll stop at the Abhaneri step well, which has 3500 steps and is 13 stories deep, making it the largest and deepest step well on the planet.

Once you arrive, you'll check into your accommodation before going on a guided cycle rickshaw ride through Keoladeo, which was once a duck hunting reserve but has since become a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with over 360 species of birds calling this sanctuary home.

Keoladeo is also a stopover for the birds who partake in the Central Asian migration, especially for wintering water birds and the endangered Siberian Crane and its huge heronry which in good years can host more than 20,000 nesting birds of various species.

The national park is also home to other wildlife such as wild boar, black buck, sambar, chital, mongoose, porcupine,

several different wild cats, and some huge pythons.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Bharatpur

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 7: The first view of the Taj Mahal. Optional cooking class

Today we'll make our way to the ancient city of Agra - the home of the most famous mausoleum on the planet - the Taj Mahal.

Agra was once the capital of the Mughal between 1572 and 1585 and is the only Indian city to have three UNESCO World Heritage Sites - the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri. Once you've checked into your hotel and settled it, your afternoon will be spent exploring the Mughal Heritage Walk through the ancient village of Kachhpura and surrounding farmland on the banks of the Yamuna River, which will provide you with spectacular views of the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort.

The Mughal Heritage walk was designed by a non-governmental organization who provides employment and new infrastructure to the locals. You'll also be given a tour of the village life and the homes of the locals who live here as well as getting a unique insight into the local cottage industry for leather shoe making which helps Agra export shoes all over the world.

You'll also visit some of the lesser known, but still important Mughal Era Monuments.

As the day comes to an end, we'll visit the Mehtab Bagh Park, which one of 11 parks created by Emperor Babur on the east banks of the Yamuna River, before taking in the spectacular sight of the Taj Mahal at sunset.

This evening you have an option to join a Hindu family for a vegetarian Thali cooking lesson and meal tonight before settling in at your hotel for the night.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Agra

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Cook with a Hindu family in Agra

## Day 8: Exploring the majestic Taj Mahal and Agra's backstreets

Our day starts with a visit to one of the seven wonders of the world - watching the sunrise at the towering Taj Mahal mausoleum. Built over the course of 22 years by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, this morning we'll watch how the colours of the monument changes as the light gets brighter. It's a once in a lifetime experience.

We'll have a tasty breakfast before we hit the road once more, this time to visit the Agra Fort - a UNESCO World Heritage Site - which served as the home of the emperors of the Mughal Dynasty until 1638, before the capital was shifted from Agra to Delhi.

This afternoon, we'll continue to discover Agra from the back of an electric rickshaw, experiencing the incredible culture and cuisine that the city has to offer, before visiting its old bazaars, restaurants and places of worship.

We'll also visit the Gurdwara, situated a stone's throw away from the Taj Mahal, Dara Shikoh's library, Mirza Ghalib's birthplace, the ancient Mankameswar Temple, the Jama Masjid as well as Asia's oldest convent, St. Patrick's Junior College. While we're here, you'll visit the Johri Bazar, the paan mandi, the petha mandi and the chaat-pakori street of Seth Gali.

We'll head back to our accommodation, where a day-use room will be available for you to relax and freshen up before we head to the station to board an overnight train to Varanasi.

**OVERNIGHT:** Overnight sleeper train to Varanasi

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 9: Discovering the villages of Varanasi and the holy Ganges River

Upon arrival in Varanasi - one of India's holiest cities, you'll enjoy breakfast before visiting the Sarai Mohana Weavers Village, famous for its silk weaving, in fact, most of the residents here are skilled in the craft. In fact, the Banarasi sarees made here are some of the most expensive in India. While you're here, we'll also visit the Chirgaon Village, famous for its pickles, jams and guavas.

This evening, we'll make our way to the holy Ganges River to partake in an Aarti ceremony - a Hindu ritual which sees small candles lit inside cups made from leaves and flowers, before it's floated down the river - a very important ceremony for the people who call Varanasi home.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Varanasi

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 10: A boat trip on the Ganges and a Brahman family lunch

Our day begins with a morning boat ride along the holy waters of the Ganges, which is a constant hub of activity during the day, as the locals head to the banks of the river to pray and immerse themselves in its spiritually cleansing waters.

Today we'll explore the city on foot, browsing its medieval streets, holy temples and bustling markets, abuzz with the authentic noise of Indian life. We'll then visit a Hindu Brahman family, where you'll learn how to make authentic Indian dishes, before enjoying the fruits of our labour by having lunch with the family.

After lunch, we'll make our way to the ancient Buddhist site at Sarnath, the place where Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon after becoming enlightened. Explore the brilliant stupas and monasteries erected here, as well as an engraved pillar, which was built in the 3rd century BC by the Emperor known as Ashoka.

We'll overnight at our hotel in Varanasi, be sure to get enough rest as we'll have another early start tomorrow.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Varanasi

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 11: Crossing the border to Nepal

We'll leave Varanasi early this morning and drive north to the India-Nepal border. It's a long drive, but you'll see a lot of typical Indian rural life on the way, passing through the busy town of Gorakhpur before reaching the border.

After entering Nepal you'll change vehicles and drive to nearby Lumbini, the birthplace of the Lord Buddha where we'll spend the night.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Lumbini

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 12: From Lumbini to Bardia National Park

We start this morning with a tour of the most important sites in Lumbini with a local guide. Despite being one of the world's most important religious sites, Lumbini has a very relaxed and peaceful atmosphere and the sites are spread over a large area, called the Lumbini Development Zone.

Our tour will include the Temple of Mayadevi, built over the spot that Buddha was born, the Mayadevi pond, where the Buddha's mother is said to have bathed before giving birth, the Bodhi Tree covered in prayer flags, and the Ashoka Pillar.

We'll then drive through the Terai lowland region of Nepal to Bardia National Park. During the drive we'll see tiny Nepalese villages and farmland, and can contrast these to the Indian rural life we saw along the road yesterday. We'll break for a snack lunch along the way, and also stop at a bridge close before the park where we can often see mugger or gharial crocodiles in the river below.

Finally we arrive at our lodge located right next to a branch of the Karnali River, overlooking the park where we settle in for the evening.

**OVERNIGHT:** Bardia Eco Lodge

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Dinner

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 13: Safaris in Bardia National Park

Bardia National Park is the largest wildlife sanctuary in Nepal and is home to a huge variety of animals, plants and birds. Much less visited than the better known Chitwan due to its more remote location, we prefer Bardia for many reasons, not least the fact that you have a much better chance of seeing wild tigers here, as well as rhino, wild elephant, crocodiles, otters, a variety of deer and monkeys and numerous birds. There's even a chance of seeing Gangetic dolphins in the Karnali river though sightings are very rare.

The lodge we use also makes you feel much closer to both nature and the surrounding village community. From our vantage point on the lodge balcony we often see monkeys, peacocks, deer, eagles, bee-eaters, as well as the National Park's domestic elephants passing to and fro from their stables.

We include a variety of safaris into the park during your stay. These include a jeep safari and a jungle walk with a local guide.

This evening we will take a walk through the surrounding villages, seeing a local school, and learning how the Tharu people of the region here make their living.

**OVERNIGHT:** Bardia Eco Lodge

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 14: Easy rafting safari on the Karnali River

We spend a full day in the park today, taking an easy rafting trip along branches of the mighty Karnali River both outside and through the park itself. We break the journey regularly for short jungle walks to good viewing spots, and aim to stop to watch some of the local villagers panning for grains of gold in the river.

While the Karnali is famous for its white water rafting, this is a very different experience as we drift slowly down the river with only a few very minor rapids. You'll see lots of birdlife on the river, hopefully some otters and dolphins too, as well as looking for tigers, rhinos and other land animals during the jungle walks. A packed lunch is provided.

**OVERNIGHT:** Bardia Eco Lodge

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 15: Fly to Kathmandu. Pasupatinath and Boudhanath visits

We leave Bardia reluctantly this morning and drive to the nearest major town, Nepalganj, about two and a half hours away. From here we fly to Kathmandu (aim to sit on the left side of the plane for great views of the Annapurnas, Langtang and other Himalayan peaks).

On arrival in Kathmandu we tour the important Hindu pilgrimage temple of Pasupatinath, and the correspondingly important, but very different Buddhist Boudhanath stupa. Our final evening is spent exploring the cafes and restaurants of the busy Thamel area of the city.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Bodhnath

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 16: Tour ends. Transfer to airport included

Our tour ends today and your time is free until we transfer you to the airport for your flight home.

If you would like to extend your time in Nepal then we offer a range of extra sightseeing tours in Kathmandu and the surrounding valley, as well as trekking and whitewater rafting trips into the Himalayas.

**OVERNIGHT:** N/A

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Extra day in Kathmandu - post-tour

## Included

- All accommodation in mid-range hotels, heritage properties and wildlife lodge
- 24-hour airport arrival and departure transfer service
- Transport and transfers in AC vehicles
- Sleeper train from Agra to Varanasi (2nd class AC)
- Domestic flight from Nepalganj to Kathmandu
- Sightseeing tours and activities as per the itinerary
- Wildlife safaris in Keoladeo and Bardia National Parks
- Services of English speaking tour leaders and specialist local guides
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary (15 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 4 dinners)

## Excluded

- International flights (available on request)
- Visa fees for India and Nepal
- Travel insurance (compulsory, available on request)
- Meals not indicated in the itinerary
- Drinks, snacks and other personal expenses (e.g. laundry)
- Tips for drivers and guides
- Entrance fees (budget USD 180, payable in Delhi)
- Any other items not mentioned above

## Notes

**Restoration of the Taj Mahal**

The Taj Mahal, one of India's most iconic structures, is getting a much need facelift. The almost-four-century-old Taj Mahal is finally showing signs of ageing. Air pollution is unfortunately turning its ivory-white complexion - yellow. Adding to the colouration problems, the Yamuna River, with which the Taj Mahal shares a river bank, is contaminated and the insects that breed in its waters are leaving patches of green residue on its marble. In order to restore the Taj Mahal's glistening white marble, mud-pack therapy is being used. If you're worried that it might affect your India tour, this handy [Taj restoration guide](#) will tell you everything you need to know.



# Options

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Our tours are designed to include all that you need to enjoy a really special time in the destination you're visiting.

However, we do also offer some extra options to complement the tour and add some additional sightseeing or activities, or some extra time at either end of the tour.

All accommodation based options (e.g. Single supplements, extra nights, cruise upgrades) should be booked and paid for in advance so that we can make the appropriate arrangements.

Other options may either be booked and paid for in advance or while you are on the tour, though we recommend booking in advance to ensure there are no issues with availability.

Many options are priced the same throughout the year, but some may incur single or high season supplements - full details are given on the tour reservation form or on request.

## Extra day in Delhi - pre-tour

**Min numbers:** 1

This option adds an extra day to the start of your tour, staying in the same hotel as the main tour itself (subject to availability). Your airport arrival transfer is still included. Prices shown are per person and based on two people sharing. Note: Single room and peak season supplements apply.

**Price:** Starting from - \$45

## Hot air balloon in Jaipur

**Min numbers:** 1

Capture the spectaculars views of Rajasthan's forts with an early morning hot air balloon ride over Jaipur for a different perspective of this vibrant capital. Float high above the pink painted rooftops and enjoy a bird's eye view of Jaipur. This option runs from 1st of September to 10th of May each year, subject to weather conditions.

**Price:** Starting from - \$315

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## 1. Accommodation

We use good quality hotels rated at the Indian 3-star and 4-star level on this tour as well as some heritage properties. These heritage hotels are often converted from former palaces or merchant houses and are full of historical character, though they may feel a little dated. They are often a highlight of your stay. In Nepal we stay in a basic but comfortable eco-lodge in Bardia National Park. Cottages are rustic and built in traditional local village style and with re-usable materials. The hotels in Lumbini and Kathmandu at the better end of the local 3-star level.

The specific hotels listed on our website are our preferred hotels for our small-group tours. However, these may be changed from time to time based on current availability and other logistics. In this event alternative hotels of a similar standard will be used. If you would like to guarantee any particular hotels for your trip, please contact us to request a tailor-made tour.

Accommodation is based on twin or double en-suite rooms with air conditioning. All couples will receive a private double room. See the Transport notes for details on the sleeper train accommodation.

Please check the Single Room Supplement option for details on room sharing options and charges for solo travellers on this tour.

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## 2. Transport

Our trips feature a mix of different transport options. We want you to feel like you're really experiencing the country you're travelling through, but at the same time finish journeys refreshed enough to enjoy the next stage of the tour. Due to the somewhat chaotic nature of Indian and Nepalese roads, we only use private vehicles for all road journeys on this tour.

The vehicles used in Nepal will travel from Bardia National Park to meet you at the India/Nepal and are often open backed jeeps or similar. Larger groups will use several of these vehicles or a minibus. A domestic flight takes you from Nepalganj airport to Kathmandu (aim to sit on the left side of the plane for great views of the Himalayas along the way).

The tour also features an overnight journey on India's famous railway network from Agra to Varanasi. This provides a great way of seeing more of the country and meeting other local travellers. We aim to book seats in the AC2 class (2<sup>nd</sup> class air-conditioned carriage). This is relatively clean, comfortable and not overcrowded. You get a padded seat during the day which the carriage steward will convert into a flat padded bunk with pillows, sheets and blankets in the evening. There are no separate self-contained compartments, with the layout more open plan with curtained bays of four bunks on one side of the aisle (two upper and two lower) and two arranged along the wall of the carriage across the aisle from there. Meals and drinks are available on board.

Due to the huge distances some trains cover, Indian trains are subject to delays and on these overnight journeys of around 12 hours a delay of an hour is not unusual. Delays can be longer in the winter months if the weather is foggy.

Tickets are issued 120 days in advance and are subject to full cancellation fees after you have arrived in India (US\$10 up until that point). If you book within 120 days of departure we cannot guarantee that you will be allocated a berth next to other people in the group, though the carriage stewards are generally very helpful in arranging to swap you with another traveller.

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## 3. Transfers

The tour price includes a 24-hour airport meet & assist service in New Delhi airport, your arrival and departure airport-hotel transfers and all other transfers involved in the tour. You are not generally accompanied on the sleeper train or internal flight but will be shown to your berth on the train and met on the platform on arrival in Varanasi. In Nepal you'll be helped to check in for your flight in Nepalganj and met on arrival in Kathmandu.

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## 4. International Flights

We want to give you as much flexibility as possible when it comes to booking your holiday with us. So, to take account of people with varying travel plans, we don't include your international flights in the main tour price. We are however very happy to suggest flights to go with the tour. Please contact us with your preferred dates and departure airport and we'll give you a selection of airlines, times and fares to choose from.

Your airport arrival & departure transfers are included on the first and last days of the tour. Most of our Indian tours start and finish at Delhi airport (DEL).

We do also sometimes advertise flight inclusive packages from selected airports. Where these are shown on our website, prices are correct at the time of quoting, but are subject to continued availability of the fare used. Prices will be reconfirmed at the time of booking, and we will also provide the flight times and airline details before tickets are issued.

Flight inclusive prices are based on the cheapest Economy ticket class available which is generally non-refundable and non-changeable unless the flight is cancelled for reasons such as Covid-19, in which case the airlines are more flexible. More flexible ticket options, as well as Premium Economy and Business Class tickets are available on request for an additional supplement. Any changes made to flight inclusive bookings will be subject to the airline rules on your ticket.

### **Flight CO2 Emissions:**

Traveling by air is an amazing way to explore the world, but flights also contribute to carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions that impact the environment. By considering the airline's CO2 emissions when you choose your flight, you can help minimize your travel footprint.

When selecting your international flights and airline, we do therefore recommend that you try and also take into account the flight CO2 emissions. Some airlines and flight search websites (eg. Google Flights, Skyscanner) do publish this information, so you can compare between your flight options and make an informed decision. Thankfully, many airlines are working towards sustainability efforts, and choosing a greener option allows you to contribute to positive change while still enjoying your incredible adventure.

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## **5. Group Size/Tour Leaders/Guides**

We are committed to being a small group operator, as we feel this gives everyone in the group the best chance to get to know their fellow travellers and to hear and make the most of their guide. There's no point in us providing great guides if you've got to peer over 30-40 shoulders to see them! So, we won't ever put you in a 50-seater coach with 49 other people and just one guide. Instead, we set our India small-group departures to have a maximum of 12 travellers. The minimum group size is 2.

In India we provide a fully trained, local English-speaking tour leader/driver to accompany our groups. On this tour they will accompany you from Delhi through to Agra where you will be shown to your seat on the train. You will then be met on arrival in Varanasi station by your guide for the stay there. Additional specialist local guides are used for some of the sightseeing tours and national park activities included in the tour.

One of our Nepalese team from Bardia National Park will meet you on arrival at the India/Nepal border and accompany you throughout your time in Lumbini and Bardia. A specialist local guide will be used for the tour in Lumbini and the lodge guide will take you on your safaris into the park. A Kathmandu city guide will escort you on the tours of Pasupatinath and Boudhanath.

At Encounters Travel we have a policy of aiming to use only local Indian and Nepalese guides and reps. We feel this gives you the best experience of the countries and the sites you are seeing.

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## **6. Entrance Fees**

The tour price does not include entrance fees to the Indian tourist sites mentioned in the itinerary. This allows for fluctuations in the prices set by the local authorities, which do change from time to time. All entry fees, national park fees and park activity fees are included in Nepal.

You should currently allow approx. US\$139 per person to cover the entrance fees in India (this includes one visit to the Taj Mahal). You will also need to cover the cost of entrance to any other extra sites that you may wish to visit that are not listed in the main tour itinerary. Your guide will offer to collect the entrance fee cost from everyone at the start of the tour and pay on your behalf, or you can arrange them yourself as you go along.

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## 7. Tipping and Haggling

Haggling is a traditional necessity, so it's wise not to pay too much regard to initial prices. Instead fix an item's value in your mind then negotiate towards it unhurriedly and don't be afraid to simply walk away if the price isn't right. Once you have offered a price though, you should be prepared to pay it as you may cause offence if you then back out.

While an accepted part of the culture and customs in India, tipping is always optional, and the amounts paid should reflect excellent service. We are often asked for advice on common amounts, and for assistance with tipping. Some suggested guidelines are given below.

**Restaurants and taxis:** Local markets and basic restaurants - leave the loose change. More up-market restaurants we suggest 5% to 10% of your bill.

**Local guides:** Throughout your trip you may at times have a local guide in addition to your tour guide. We suggest USD 5-10 per person per day for local guides.

**Drivers:** You may have a range of private drivers on your trip. Some may be with you for a short journey while others may be with you for several days. We would suggest a higher tip for those more involved with the group, for example if you don't have an extra accompanying guide. However USD 3-6 per person per day is generally appropriate.

**Tour Guides:** To answer your next question. . . as a guideline for tour guides who accompany you on the entire tour, we suggest you allow around USD 5-10 per person per day, but ultimately, as with all the tipping described above, it's up to your satisfaction with their service and your personal budget. You should not feel pressured to tip any particular amount.

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## 8. Health and Vaccinations - India

You should ensure you are fully insured for medical emergencies including emergency evacuation and repatriation.

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection measures vary according to the country you are visiting and where you are travelling from. We recommend you contact your GP/medical practitioner or a travel clinic for current information on vaccinations needed for your destination. You should ensure that you are up to date with vaccines and boosters recommended for your normal life at home, including for example, vaccines required for occupational risk of exposure, lifestyle risks and underlying medical conditions. In addition, additional courses or boosters normally recommended for the countries in this region are:

**India:** Additional vaccinations: Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Yellow fever rules for India are quite complicated and lengthy. Please read the [WHO guidance](#).

**Malaria:** Vaccinations are not available against Malaria, which is a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that can be very serious and sometimes fatal. You should avoid mosquito bites by covering up bare skin with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers and applying insect repellents to exposed skin. When necessary, sleep under a

mosquito net. Mosquitoes are most active during and after sunset. You should consult with your GP/medical practitioner/travel clinic about the most appropriate malaria prophylactic medication to take for the regions you are visiting. In general the north eastern regions of India including Assam and Orissa are considered high risk, while the rest of India is generally considered low enough risk that anti-malarial tablets are not necessary for most travellers doing relatively short tours.

**Yellow Fever:** This disease is spread by infected mosquitoes that bite during the day. A Yellow Fever Certificate of vaccination may be required as a condition of entry depending on which country you are arriving from, or that you have travelled or transitted through recently (including connecting flights with stopovers of over 12 hours). You can view this [US CDC information](#) about where the virus is present and follow the links to further information detailing which countries need you to have a Yellow Fever vaccination as part of their entry requirements. Please ensure you have this certificate with you and to hand if necessary.

Please inform us of any pre-existing conditions such as diabetes or asthma and any prescription medicine you may be taking. We also need to know about any food allergies or physical disabilities that you may have.

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**Nepal:** Additional vaccinations: Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from or having transitted through an infected area.

**Bhutan:** Additional vaccinations: Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from or having transitted through an infected area.

**Tibet:** Additional vaccinations: Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from or having transitted through an infected area.

**Malaria:** Vaccinations are not available against Malaria, which is a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that can be very serious and sometimes fatal. You should avoid mosquito bites by covering up bare skin with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers and applying insect repellents to exposed skin. When necessary, sleep under a mosquito net. Mosquitoes are most active during and after sunset. You should consult with your GP/medical practitioner/travel clinic about the most appropriate malaria prophylactic medication to take for the regions you are visiting. In general the lowland regions Bhutan are considered malarial zones, while higher altitudes including central Bhutan including Paro, Thimphu, Punakha and Bumthang are not. Nepal is considered mainly low risk with prophylactics not normally required.

**Yellow Fever:** This disease is spread by infected mosquitoes that bite during the day. A Yellow Fever Certificate of vaccination may be required as a condition of entry depending on which country you are arriving from, or that you have travelled or transitted through recently (including connecting flights with stopovers of over 12 hours). You can view this [US CDC information](#) about where the virus is present and follow the links to further information detailing which countries need you to have a Yellow Fever vaccination as part of their entry requirements. Please ensure you have this certificate with you and to hand if necessary. Please inform us of any pre-existing conditions such as diabetes or asthma and any prescription medicine you may be taking. We also need to know about any food allergies or physical disabilities that you may have.

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## 10. Passports and Visas - India

Your passport expiry date must be at least 6 months after your time in India finishes. Do not bring a full or almost expired passport. You must also have a machine-readable passport or you may be denied entry. If you have an old-style manually issued passport you will need to replace this with a new machine-readable passport before you travel.

Most nationalities (including UK, USA, European, Australian, Canadian) will need to arrange their Indian tourist visa in advance. A new online e-visa system is available which makes the process more straightforward than before. You can make your application online at [indiavisaonline](http://indiavisaonline).

Visa requirements for India can and do change regularly and we suggest that you arrange your Indian visa early and re-check your specific visa requirements prior to travel for any changes.

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## 11. Passports and Visas - Nepal

Passports should be valid for at least six months after your departure from the country. Please do not bring an almost full or almost expired passport. Visa arrangements are the responsibility of the traveller, and requirements are subject to change by the local authorities.

Many nationals can obtain their Nepalese visa in Kathmandu airport upon arrival (including UK, EU, US, CA, AU, NZ, SA citizens). The costs for a single entry visa are currently:

- up to 15 days - US\$ 25
- 16 to 30 days - US\$ 40
- 31 to 90 days - US\$ 100

An additional \$20 fee is charged to convert these into a multiple entry visa which will be needed for any tours returning to Nepal after visiting Bhutan or Tibet.

The visa is obtained in the immigration area at the point where your passport is stamped. Forms to fill in are available in this immigration hall and may also be given out on your flight (if so, do fill them in before you land as it will reduce your queuing time). You will also need to fill in an arrivals card. Once your paperwork is completed, head to the immigration desk and hand over your forms, 2 passport photos, your visa fee and passport. The visa fees are set in US Dollars, but you can also pay in other currencies, but don't rely on getting given change.

**Passport Photos:** You will need two passport photos for your Nepal visa if you are obtaining it on arrival. If you are doing any trekking, rafting or visiting a National Park (i.e. on many of our tours), you should bring extras, as some of the permits we may need to get require these. Please bring at least 4 passport photos with you - they will always come in useful later if you don't need them all.

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## 12. Time

The time in India and Sri Lanka is GMT plus 5 1/2 hours.

The time in Nepal is GMT plus 5 3/4 hours.

The time in Bhutan is GMT plus 6 hours.

The time in Tibet is GMT plus 8 hours.

Daylight saving adjustments are not applied.

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## 13. Voltage

In Nepal, India and Sri Lanka, sockets are mainly two round pronged and 230 volts (Type C,D,M). In Bhutan a range of different sockets can be found, including two and three round pronged and three flat pronged (Type D,F,G).

Universal adaptors are available in most airport shops if you don't have one already. Standard UK-European adapters will work fine, though sometimes they may feel a little loose in the sockets. All hotel rooms have electrical sockets where you can re-charge cameras, phones etc. Hair dryers are sometimes available on request from the hotel reception if not in your room already but cannot be guaranteed.

If you have US appliances (110 volts) you will need a voltage converter as well as a plug adapter.

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## **14. Money**

Rupee (INR; symbol Rs) = 100 paise. Notes are in denominations of Rs 2,000, 1000, 500, 200, 50, 20, 10 and 1. Coins are in denominations of Rs 10, 5, 2 and 1, and 50 paise (Rs 0.5). Note: The import and export of local currency is prohibited. Sometimes smaller vendors will not take bills larger than Rs 500. It is best to carry a range of rupee notes if you are shopping at bazaars and local markets.

Note: You must present your passport whenever you change currency or travellers cheques. Commission for foreign exchange is becoming increasingly rare; if it is charged, the fee is nominal.

Credit cards: In major cities, the full cadre of banks cards are generally accepted including debit cards, American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa. However, in smaller towns and villages, choice is generally narrowed to cash or MasterCard and Visa.

ATM: 24 hour ATM machines can be found in all the major cities and most large towns. Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus, Maestro and Plus are amongst the most commonly accepted cards.

Travellers cheques: These are gradually getting less accepted but may still be changed at larger banks and some larger hotels. The most widely accepted currencies include US Dollars and Pounds Sterling. Some banks may refuse to change certain brands of traveller's cheques whilst others may exchange quite happily.

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## **15. Tipping - Nepal**

While an accepted part of the culture and customs in Nepal, tipping is always optional, and any amounts paid should reflect excellent service. Tipping in Tibet and Bhutan is less prevalent though it is still normal practice to tip your guide and driver at the end of the tour.

We support and follow international guidelines for the employment of any trekking porters we use, including those of the IPPG (International Porter Protection Group). We therefore pay all our porters a higher than average wage, but an additional tip is still normal practice at the end of your trek.

It is normal and accepted for people to tip differently, and you should not feel under any pressure to tip any particular amount. We are often asked for advice on common amounts however, and suggest that you consider around US\$ 5-10 per person per day for guides, US\$ 3-7 p/p/day for assistant guides or tour leaders, and US\$ 2-5 p/p/day for porters and drivers.

Haggling or bargaining is also prevalent throughout Nepal and Tibet, particularly in Kathmandu, and is still done in markets in Bhutan though to a lesser extent in other shops. More often than not the start price is at least double the actual price the vendor will be happy to accept. Do not take offence, but be prepared to bargain if you want to, consider your budget (and what you'd be happy to pay for things at home), pay fairly and enjoy this as part of the experience. Note: if you do offer a price, then you are expected to purchase – do not start bargaining unless you really want to buy.

While you are out in rural/hill areas, we recommend that you should stick to published price lists and pay fair prices for local food, accommodation and services, as this aids local economies (bear in mind that when you are trekking,

nearly everything you eat or buy will have been carried there by porters or donkeys).

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## 16. What to take

**Luggage:** Whatever you're doing in Nepal, Tibet or Bhutan, you'll find that large rigid wheeled suitcases are cumbersome - you may be able to wheel them inside the airport and your hotel, but due to the condition of roads and pavements that's often about it. As many of our tours involve a degree of adventurous activity, we strongly advise you to bring a more practical bag for these i.e. a rucksack or holdall. These are easier for both your porters, and yourself to carry around. Suitcases are OK for our cultural tours in Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan though, but please aim to bring small or medium sized ones rather than very large. If you are trekking or rafting, or doing a lot of travel throughout the country, then as little as possible is the basic message. A rucksack or holdall (50-70 liter approx.) for your main luggage, and a daypack for you to use during the day should be plenty. While rafting we only take essential kit on board the rafts, and your main luggage will travel by bus to the take-out point. While trekking your porters (Nepal) or ponies (Bhutan) will carry your main luggage, leaving you with just a daypack with things you'll need during the day. You can also leave some luggage locked safely in the pre-trek hotel if you wish. We recommend that couples plan to leave one main bag behind, and pool their remaining luggage in their other bag for the porter to carry.

**Luggage limits:** Most international airlines allow 20-23kg per person of hold luggage. Domestic flights often have smaller allowances around 15kg. As airline rules vary we recommend that you take no more than 20kg of luggage if your tour just includes international flights, and no more than 15kg if there are any domestic flights included in your itinerary. Please ask us for details if you are unsure. Any excess baggage fees will be your responsibility to cover. Most airlines allow between 5kg and 10kg for hand luggage so we suggest that you take no more than 5kg unless you have confirmed that your airline(s) will allow more than this.

If you are trekking with us, we ask that you keep the weight of your main bag that the porter will carry to a maximum of 12.5kg. This then allows the porter to carry up to 2 bags, and a maximum of 25kg (the International Porter Protection group's advised limit for Nepal is 30kg, which then leaves a little more weight for their own kit). This weight allowance includes your sleeping bag if you are hiring it from us and not carrying it with you to Nepal. If you are doing an Everest trek and flying from Kathmandu to Lukla, then flight luggage limits are 10kg for your main bag and 5kg for hand luggage - total 15kg. You can re-arrange that after you arrive in Lukla. Please keep to these limits as while you can pay for extra weight, it may be held back until the next flight which may then be delayed or cancelled.

Treks in Bhutan follow the same weight limits for your ponies.

You may leave other luggage securely locked in your hotel during the trek. If you are travelling as a couple then we suggest you leave one main bag in Kathmandu and share the other main bag that the porter will then carry.

**Clothing & Climate:** Nepal and Bhutan have a climate that ranges widely depending on when you visit, and where you are visiting.

- Autumn - late Sep-Nov: The weather is good and very warm, with lots of sunshine, getting quite hot during the day in lowland regions. It will still be cold at night at higher altitudes if you are trekking. Shorts & T-shirts are fine while you are walking, but you should still bring warmer clothes for the evenings. There is a good chance of rain in September and early October, so bring a waterproof.

- Winter - Dec-Feb: It will be pleasant in lowland regions with very little rain, but will be cooler at night. Long trousers and shirts are advised during the day, and you will need warm clothes in the evenings. If you are trekking, then it will be cold during the day, and extremely cold at night, particularly at higher altitudes. Several warm layers are recommended so you can regulate your comfort as you walk, including a waterproof, even if only to protect from cold winds. We include thick down jackets in our optional trekking packs for comfort in the evenings at higher altitudes.

- Spring - Mar-May: The weather is very pleasant during the spring, and again shorts & t-shirts are fine while you are walking. There is a higher chance of rain as the season progresses, so a thin waterproof is recommended in case. It gets very hot and humid in the lowlands from May onwards.

- Monsoon - Jun-mid Sep: It will be hot and sticky during these months, with lots of rain, so come prepared accordingly if you are visiting during these months - gaiters are highly recommended if you are trekking to keep out



leeches.

A huge variety of cheap trekking gear is available in Kathmandu (fleece, waterproofs etc.) and buying some here can save you carrying it with you, and support the local economy. However, you should definitely bring your own walking boots.

Modesty rates highly in Nepal and Bhutan especially for women, so please ensure all clothes are loose fitting and not too revealing. You'll find the Bhutanese dress fairly smartly or in national dress, so you will stand out even more if you look scruffy.

### **Whilst rafting:**

**On the raft:** Shorts, Tevas (sandals) or trainers, baseball style cap to keep the sun off your face, sunglasses with a strap to keep them on your head, swimwear, sarong for women, sun-cream, lip balm, water bottle, several t-shirts.

Note: All footwear on a raft should be rubber soled, and of the type that will not come off easily.

**Off the raft:** Long trousers, warm sleeping bag (provided, but you may want to bring a sheet sleeping bag as well), petzel type head torch, warm jacket/fleece, dry shoes, boots, warm socks, towel, warm long sleeved shirt, toiletries.

**Cameras:** You can take cameras on the raft, and we endeavour to keep that sort of kit dry in waterproof bags. But there is always an element of risk of getting the camera wet.

**What you shouldn't take on the raft:** All the rest of your kit and you're your valuables. We will make arrangements for their transport to your take-out point.

### **Whilst trekking:**

**Suggested Clothing and equipment:** Strong hiking boots or walking shoes that you have broken in; Good sized rucksack or holdall; 3 to 4-season sleeping bag (only if you want to use your own rather than the one provided in our optional trekking pack); silk or cotton sleeping bag liner; lightweight waterproof and windproof jacket; (waterproof gaiters, waterproof over trousers - these are only necessary on some treks in some seasons - contact us for further info if required); 3 or 4 t-shirts; small day pack; several pairs of light socks; 2 pairs of heavier woollen socks; underwear including thermals; warm hat and gloves; swimwear; pair of lightweight trousers; pair of shorts; 1 fleece or warm jumper and 1 sweatshirt. Also, sunglasses, torch and batteries, toiletries (include a lighter to burn toilet paper), bring biodegradable shampoo & soap, towel, blister kit, money belt and any personal medication you might require. Remember, Lots of layers are the key to staying warm and comfortable. Also, keeping your feet comfortable and healthy makes a huge difference to how you enjoy your trek. So, bring waterproof boots/walking shoes and plenty of pairs of socks so you can change them regularly.

**Day Packs and Main luggage:** You will want a sturdy and comfortable daypack to carry your day-to-day items with you while you are walking (clothes you may change in and out of regularly, drinks, snacks, camera). You will also need a sturdy holdall or backpack for your main luggage. Your porters or ponies will carry this for you, so suitcases are not appropriate. They may leave earlier than you, and may not walk with you throughout the entire day, so bear in mind that you won't have access to this luggage all the time - you need to ensure you are carrying everything you require during the days walk in your daypack. You can leave luggage behind in storage at your hotel so you don't need to take everything with you on the trek.

### **Whilst in the game parks:**

You should bring long trousers and long-sleeved shirts for jungle walks and travel within the park. Please ensure these are of drab colours to avoid drawing attention. Sunglasses and sun-hats are advisable for hot and bright days. Mosquito repellent is highly recommended. Binoculars are extremely useful at any of Nepal's National Parks, and are not generally available for hire locally. Don't forget fast film for those jungle shots and moving animals/birds. A good cleaning kit is essential as these items are unavailable once at the park. It is also better to take quality film, either from home or Kathmandu into the parks, and to ensure you have a spare fully charged battery and memory card.

**All tours:** We recommend that you bring a sun hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, a basic first aid kit, toiletries, money belt, small torch, camera & charger.

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## 17. Dates & Prices

We run small-group departures on this tour from mid-September through to early June, avoiding the monsoon months of July and August. All departures are guaranteed to run with a minimum of 2 travellers. Departure dates and prices are listed on our website (please check the website for up-to-date prices and special offers).

Private and tailor-made tours are available on any dates and may be adjusted to fit your personal requirements, available time and budget.

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## 18. Booking & Payment

If you would like to book a place on this tour, please complete the online reservation form on our website (via the Dates & Prices tab on the tour page). You may make a deposit or full payment online, or just hold a reservation if you prefer (full payments are due 8 weeks before departure). We will then contact you with more details about how to complete your booking. Payments may be made by debit or credit card (subject to a card processing fee), or by making a bank transfer, or posting us a cheque/bank draft. Full details will be provided in your booking confirmation email. Please [contact us](#) if you would like any more information or have any questions before making a booking.

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## 19. Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory on all of our tours and needs to cover personal accident & liability, medical expenses and repatriation, travel delay & abandonment. We also strongly recommend that you take out cover against cancellation and lost/stolen baggage. Personal medical insurance does not normally provide sufficient cover and is generally not suitable for travel on our tours. You will not be able to join your tour if you have not provided us with details of your insurance or if you arrive without cover in place (no refunds will be due in this event). [More information...](#)

You may arrange your own insurance, or you can take advantage of a comprehensive policy that we can arrange for you through Endsleigh Insurance which has been designed to be suitable for our tours. The policy is available to travellers of all nationalities and you do not need to live in the UK to take out the policy. For full details of cover provided, prices and to apply for one of our policies, please complete [travel insurance application form](#).

Note: Any country that borders the Mediterranean is considered as 'Europe' for the purposes of travel insurance (including Turkey, Israel, Egypt and Morocco). If you are doing a tour that visits one country in 'Europe' and one that is 'Worldwide' (for example, an Egypt and Jordan tour), then you need a 'Worldwide' policy. When completing the form you should enter your travel dates including any extra days involved in overnight flights or connecting travel between your home and the tour. Our policies are not able to cover any extra time or activities other than your tour and options booked with us and your travel to & from home.

Note - to comply with insurance sales regulations, our travel insurance policies are only available to customers booking directly with us. If you have booked through a travel agent you will need to arrange your own insurance.

If your tour includes car hire, or if you plan to arrange a hot air balloon flight locally or do some scuba diving during your tour, you should check the small print in your policy to make sure these are covered (these are covered in our policy). Please also check the maximum altitude that you will be reaching and that full cover including emergency evacuation is provided up to this altitude.

If you are taking expensive camera gear or other electronic equipment with you then please check the coverage and the fine print of your policy to ensure that you have sufficient cover.

*IMPORTANT: We must have your travel insurance details (policy number and type of insurance) before you depart or you may not be allowed to join the tour. If you haven't told us already, please let us know the details when you can. You should take a paper copy of your insurance policy with you as you may be asked to show this at the start of the tour.*

## **Covid-19**

**Before purchasing any travel insurance, please check the coverage provided for situations related to Covid-19, and for the rules about government travel advice. Your normal policy may not be suitable. Details about our own policies cover levels are given [on our website](#).**

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## **20. Financial Security**

We are a UK registered company and are committed to providing our customers with financial protection to provide peace of mind and to allow you to book with confidence.

We have therefore partnered with Trust My Travel Ltd., which provides financial protection services to over 2000 partners around the world. Funds paid to us by our customers are protected via an Insurance policy held by Trust My Travel. Each traveller and the description of services sold is declared against Trust My Travel's insurance policy directly against our financial failure. In the event of our insolvency, you will be refunded for any unfulfilled products and/or repatriation to the UK (where applicable). Please see [our website](#) or [booking conditions](#) for more information.

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## **21. Responsible Tourism**

It is impossible not to have an impact on the local environment, cultures and eco-systems when you travel. However, it is very possible to try and ensure that these impacts are as limited, or positive as possible. We are committed to ensuring that we try to leave our host countries in a better state than we found them and encourage and assist our travellers to help us with this.

The following are a few simple tips that require very little effort on your part but which will help ensure that any effect you have on the locations you visit is positive rather than negative.

- Don't prejudice: Things in different countries will almost certainly be different. That doesn't make them worse or inferior, just different.
- Communicate: Don't expect locals to speak your language. Take the trouble to learn a few words or phrases of the local language. Don't worry about sounding silly. Most locals are patient and accommodating and appreciate you making the effort to communicate in their language.
- Conserve energy: Be careful not to waste valuable resources. Use local resources sparingly. Switch off lights, air-conditioning and fans when you leave the hotel room and don't waste water. Remove superfluous packaging. Many countries have far less efficient waste disposal systems than ours. Remove packaging from newly acquired items before leaving home.
- Don't litter: No matter how untidy or dirty the country you're travelling in may look to you, avoid littering, as there is no need to add to the environment's stress. Many of the countries we visit have a tough challenge dealing with rubbish and waste. Please consider taking home as much plastic waste as you can (e.g. water bottles).
- Choose environmentally friendly products: By using environmentally friendly (bio degradable) sun creams, shampoos and detergents you can help reduce pollution.
- Respect local customs and traditions: As you are a guest in these countries, you should also comply with the local customs. If you are friendly and well mannered, the locals will reciprocate and it will only enhance your experience. It's important to follow dress and behaviour guidelines especially when visiting religious or sacred sites (your tour leader will advise you how best to do this).
- If a client commits an illegal act the client may be excluded from the tour and Encounters Travel shall cease to have responsibility to/for them. No refund will be given for any unused services.

All porters are employed and equipped following guidelines set by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG).

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## 22. Follow Us Online

You can stay in touch with us online by following us on Facebook and Twitter. We post updates on relevant travel news in our destination countries, special offers and discounts and other interesting travel related news and information.

[www.facebook.com/encounterstravel](http://www.facebook.com/encounterstravel)

[www.twitter.com/encounterstravl](https://www.twitter.com/encounterstravl) (yes, without the 'e')

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## 23. Before you travel

It is important when considering and preparing to travel anywhere in the world that you have a good understanding of the country you are visiting, its laws and customs, and the possible risks and situations that may occur. This includes specific risks related to your itinerary (eg. does it involve water & can you swim, are you fit enough for the activities included), as well as more general risks such as terrorism and natural disasters.

General details and links to more information about health risks, visa requirements, money, and travel insurance are given in these tour notes. We recommend that you re-read all these before your departure as well as the small print of your travel insurance policy so you know exactly what is covered and what is not.

You should take copies of your important travel documents with you and ideally also store them online securely as a backup. Make sure that you have given us your emergency contact details and told that person where and when you are travelling. Ensure you take enough money with you and that you have access to emergency funds.

Finally, you should read through and stay updated with the current [official government travel advice](#) for your destination. We are registered partners with the UK Foreign Office's ['Travel Aware' campaign](#) which provides further useful and invaluable information.



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**Note:** Please [download an up-to-date copy](#) of these tour notes shortly before you travel as itineraries and information does change from time to time.

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