

# Himalayan Explorer

**Country(ies):** Nepal , Bhutan & Tibet

**Tour type:** Private

**Transport:** A/C minibus & flights

**Group size:** Min: 0 | Max: 0

**Days:** 16 Days

**Start location:** Kathmandu, Nepal

**End location:** Kathmandu, Nepal

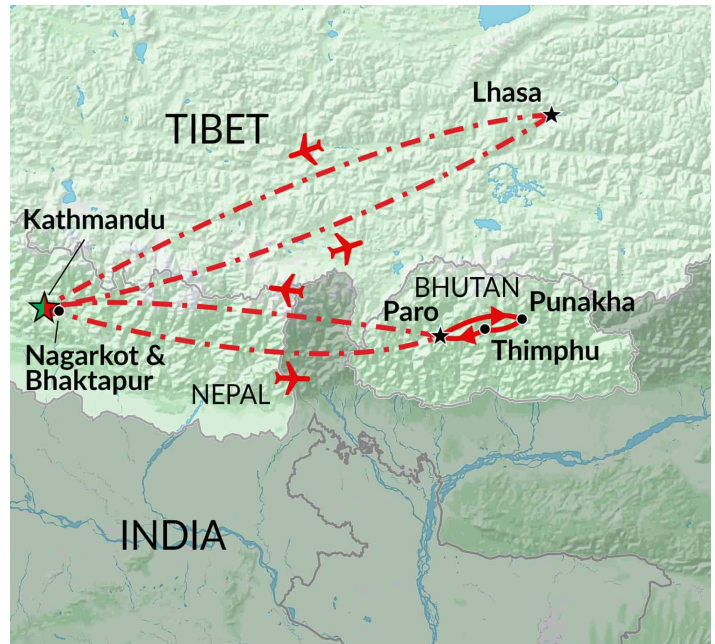
**Departs On:** Any day

**Meals:** Breakfasts - 15, Lunches - 5, Dinners - 5

**Highlights:**

Kathmandu valley, traditional Bhutanese life & architecture, Paro Dzong & National Museum, Thimphu sites, Punakha Valley & Dzongs; Lhasa tour including the Potala Palace, Jokhang Monastery, boat trip to Samye Monastery

**Places Visited:** Kathmandu, Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, Wangdi Phodrang, Bhaktapur & Lhasa



# Itinerary

## Day 1: Arrive in Kathmandu, transfer to hotel

We greet you at the airport and transfer you to your hotel in the centre of Kathmandu, where our Encounters Travel rep welcomes you, helps you settle in, introduces you to your local surroundings, and explains the agenda for the rest of your tour.

**OVERNIGHT:** Kathmandu hotel

**MEALS:** None

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 2: Kathmandu, full day city tour

We start after breakfast this morning with a fascinating and fun walking tour through the busy narrow streets of Kathmandu where you'll see a huge variety of tiny shops and workshops, numerous small street temples and stupas, and start to get a feel for life in this busy and exotic city. After arriving in Durbar Square, your guide will explain the history behind the splendid array of Hindu Temples and the old Royal Palace.

After lunch, we climb up the many steps leading to the immense Swayambhunath Stupa which sits upon a hill overlooking Kathmandu and gives a spectacular view over the city. In the evening you have an opportunity to check out the numerous bars and restaurants, and soak up the unique atmosphere that makes Kathmandu a magnet for travellers from all over the world.

**OVERNIGHT:** Kathmandu hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 3: Fly to Bhutan

We pick you up from the hotel this morning and transfer to the airport. After checking in and showing your visa approval form and flight e-ticket which we will have provided, you fly with Druk Air, Bhutan's national airline and the only one flying into the country. During the flight, try and sit on the left hand side of the plane for spectacular mountain views, including Everest and Kanchenjunga. While en route, complete immigration and custom form formalities for later declaration and keep your customs form safe as you will need to produce it again on departure. On arrival at Paro airport you will know that you've arrived somewhere special as the airport buildings have the same traditional architecture you'll see throughout the country. You'll receive a warm welcome by our local representative and be driven to your hotel.

After an introductory lunch, we visit Ta Dzong, originally the Watch Tower for the Rinpung Dzong in Paro. Now the 'National Museum of the Kingdom', it boasts a wide range of antique thangkha paintings, textiles, weapons, armour, household objects and historic artifacts. Next, walk to the nearby Rinpung Dzong or the 'fortress of the heap of jewels'. Bhutan's Dzongs are impressive and beautiful buildings and host the seat of the district administration and the residence of the monastic school.

**OVERNIGHT:** Paro hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 4: Paro, Taktshang walk & valley tours

After an early breakfast, you drive to the foot of the Taktshang cliff just outside Paro, before walking uphill for 2-3 hours to reach this monastery, giddily perched on a sheer 800m rock face. Taktshang is probably Bhutan's most famous site and means "Tiger's Nest", as legend has it that Guru Padmasambhava flew to this spot on the back of a tigress in the eighth century. He meditated here making this temple a sacred pilgrimage destination for Buddhists. You'll break for lunch at the Taktshang Cafeteria about two thirds of the way up. The return trip to the monastery takes 4-5 hours and riding ponies can be arranged for most of the uphill route if you wish.

In the afternoon, you have a short sightseeing tour to Drukgyel Dzong, the fort of the victorious Drukpas. Although gutted by a fire, this fort is renowned as the stand from which several Tibetan invasions were repulsed. To the north, the dome of sacred Mt. Chomolhari, or the "mountain of the goddess" can be seen. You will also visit one of the oldest landmarks in Bhutan. The 7th century Kyichu Lhakhang was one of the 108 temples built in the Himalayas by the Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo. It is revered as one of the most holy shrines in Bhutan and embodies the arrival of Buddhism here.

In the evening you can have a stroll through the streets of Paro, or enjoy a relaxing traditional hot stone bath to ease any tired limbs.

**OVERNIGHT:** Paro hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 5: Paro, drive to the Punakha Valley

Keen birdwatchers may wish to enjoy a pre-breakfast tour this morning and drive up to the Che Le La Pass for sunrise to look for the beautiful Blood Grouse and colourful Himalayan Monal, as well as other birds.

After breakfast, we drive to the Punakha Valley (77km, approx 3 hours). On the way, and after a winding climb through mixed forests, you'll stop at the Dochu La Pass (3,050 metres) for tea/ coffee and in clear weather enjoy spectacular views of the Eastern Himalayan range. After descending past the new Botanical Gardens, the road winds through beautiful forests and gradually opens out into the Punakha valley where we take a short walk through fields to Chimi Lhakhang, built by Lama Drukpa Kuenley or "The Divine Madman". The temple is renowned for blessing barren women with fertility.

This afternoon you visit Wangduephodrang Dzong, whose unrestored state is a distinct change from the Dzongs in Paro and Punakha. It really gives a feel for how these buildings with their joint monastic and administrative functions have run things in Bhutan over the centuries. A walk through Wangdi's slightly ramshackle old streets follows before you drive up the valley, passing the site planned for a new rebuild of the whole town centre on the far side of the river.

**OVERNIGHT:** Punakha hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 6: Punakha Valley walk & sightseeing

After breakfast, you drive through the valley to the north of Punakha for a morning walk to Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten. This Chorten stands majestically on a strategic ridge above the Punakha valley and was visualised out of the Buddhist treasure teachings by Thrangthung Dudjom Lingpa. It is a sacred religious edifice which will help to ward off negative forces, promote peace, stability and harmony, and is the only one of its kind in the world. The Chorten is also an esoteric embodiment of positive forces prevailing over all negative influences in the three forms of existence. According to Lamas, the Chorten is a quintessence of Buddhism and in various ways it will promote the health, and happiness of the king and people thereby controlling all evils. A pleasant walk down through fields full of chili, bean and wheat crops takes us to the riverbank from where you walk downstream along the river

through fields and forests towards Punakha.

After lunch you visit the spectacular Punakha Dzong, which lies between two rivers known as Phochu and Mochu. Symbolizing masculine and the feminine co-existence, their currents are of different colours and they unite at this spot. Later in the afternoon we drive back over the Dochu La Pass to Thimphu.

**OVERNIGHT:** Thimphu hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 7: Thimphu tours

The whole day is free for sightseeing in and around Thimphu with your driver and guide. You have a choice of various places to visit and you can discuss which are of most interest to you with your guide and arrange your day accordingly.

Options include: -

- the national Takin Reserve where you can see several of these strange looking animals on an easy stroll through open pine forest, and enjoy great views over the Thimphu valley.
- the Memorial Chorten, a stupa conceptualised by the Third King to ward off negative influences. It was later built in his memory by the present King and Queen Mother.
- the School of Arts & Crafts where you can see young students at work honing traditional skills.
- the Folk Heritage Museum, for an insight into the medieval lifestyles of the Bhutanese people.
- the National Library of Bhutan, featuring the largest book in the world, and displays of traditional Tibetan style books written on long strips of handmade paper.
- the National Institute of Traditional Medicine, which has a small museum and a clinic where many people are still treated with traditional herbal and other medicines.
- a traditional hand-made paper factory with a shop selling attractive and interesting souvenirs.
- the Textile Museum which has displays of local weaving and normally some weavers at work.
- Trashichhodzong, the beautiful medieval fortress/monastery which houses most of the Government's office and King's Throne room. It is also the summer residence of Je Khenpo, the Chief Abbot.
- several short half-day hikes are also available around the valley Lunch will be included during the day, and if there is an archery tournament taking place, a stop at the national stadium is well worthwhile. Displays of traditional folk dancing also run every day for those who are interested.

The other main highlight in Thimphu is its vast weekend market with its hundreds of different stalls selling a huge range of fresh vegetables, spices, and of course, chillies. There is also a handicrafts and clothing market here, and overall this is a great place to pick up some souvenirs as a memory of your time in Bhutan. The market runs from Friday afternoon until Sunday lunchtime and we aim to always time our tours or to adjust the itinerary to ensure that you are in Thimphu during this time.

Late in the afternoon, we make the short drive of around two hours back to Paro.

**OVERNIGHT:** Paro hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 8: Fly to Nepal, Bhaktapur & Nagarkot

After an early breakfast, we transfer you to the airport where you depart with Druk Air to fly back to Kathmandu. On arrival, we meet you and transfer to the ancient centre of Bhaktapur. Formely a capital of the Kathmandu Valley, the pedestrianised centre of Bhaktapur is full of squares and temples with some stunning wooden architecture. You have a tour here, as well as time to explore the narrow winding streets which bustle with life.

In the afternoon we leave Bhaktapur and make a short drive uphill to the village of Nagarkot, which sits on a ridge at the north-eastern edge of the Kathmandu Valley. Accepted as probably the best of the valley's mountain views, from the village lodges and hotels you can see all the way from Kanchenjunga in the east, past the tiny (from here!) peak of Mt. Everest, to Dhaulgiri in the west. A couple of kilometres walk from the village there is a lookout tower, which affords an even more spectacular full 360° panorama.

Stunning clear views are all but guaranteed between mid-October and March, with more chance of cloud and haze before and after this period. You can check the weather and the hotel will wake you if the morning is clear so that you can see the sun rise over the distant Himalayas.

**OVERNIGHT:** Nagarkot hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 9: Nagarkot, village walk, temples & stupas

After waking early to enjoy the sunrise views, you have breakfast before enjoying an easy downhill rural walk of a couple of hours. You start by walking through pine forest and the Tilkot Forest Reserve, before following a ridge which brings you down through tiny Chhetri villages with wonderful views to either side, to the beautiful Changu Narayan Temple. From this temple at the end of the ridge, you can either drive back to Kathmandu or carry on walking and descend to the valley floor and the Manohara River. The walk today can be made as long or short as you would like it.

Before returning to the hotel in Kathmandu, you have a tour of two of Nepal's most important pilgrimage sites. First we visit Pashupatinath, the most important Hindu temple in Nepal. Although non-Hindus are not allowed inside the temple itself, you can see into the temple complex from the holy riverbanks where there are bathing and cremation ghats. We also visit the huge Buddhist stupa at Boudhnath which is a complete contrast in style and atmosphere. From here we drive you back to your hotel in the centre of Kathmandu for your last night in Nepal.

**OVERNIGHT:** Kathmandu hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 10: Fly to Tibet, transfer to Tsetang

Another short flight takes us into Tibet this morning, where our Tibetan guide meets us and transfers us to the town of Tsetang. You'll really get a feel for the size and contrasting plains and mountains of the Tibetan plateau. We take the rest of the day easy to adjust to the increase in altitude.

**OVERNIGHT:** Tsetang hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 11: Yumbulagang Palace & Samye Monastery

We start today with a visit to the Yumbulagang Palace, home to the early Tibetan kings. We then take an interesting and beautiful flat-bottomed boat trip for 1 to 1 ½ hours across the Bhramaputra (Tsangpo) river to Samye, the first monastery to be built in Tibet. Fully restored and rebuilt after being destroyed in the Cultural Revolution it is a great

example of Tibetan religious architecture. We then drive on to Lhasa (3,750m).

**OVERNIGHT:** Lhasa hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 12: Lhasa tours

Today we have arranged for you to be taken on a guided tour of the fascinating city of Lhasa and you start the day with a visit to its cardinal landmark - Potala Palace. One of the great wonders of world architecture, it was the former winter home of the Dalai Lama and is probably the image of Lhasa that most people have in their minds when they think of Tibet. Learn more about its eventful history as you explore the countless rooms of richly decorated rooms, halls and palaces as pilgrims bring silk scarves, coins and yak butter to the shrines as offerings.

We then visit the Barkhor. Perhaps similar to the Kathmandu area around Durbar Square and Freak St, monks sit cross-legged on the streets with alms bowls and the low murmur of prayers can be heard in the air while nearby stall owners offer jewel encrusted daggers with enthusiasm. Away from the square you can begin the Barkhor circuit including Mani Lhakhang (huge prayer wheel), Nangtse Shar (former jail and dungeons) before arriving at Jokhang Temple the spiritual centre of Tibet.

In contrast to the Potala, Jokhang Temple is buzzing with activity and pilgrims from every corner of Tibet arrive here to worship. The temple is the product of Han, Tibetan and Nepalese architectural styles and is, quite simply, the most revered religious structure in the whole of Tibet and a 'must' on any Lhasa/Tibet itinerary. The aroma of yak butter mixed with incense, and the murmur of prayer drift throughout the temple whilst at the entrance, there are always prostrations being made by pilgrims. Inside the temple you pass statues of the four guardian kings before reaching the exposed inner courtyard, or Dukhang, and the former throne of the Dalai Lama. The inner prayer hall houses six large statues including Guru Rinpoche, Avalokiteshvara (sometimes referred to as the Bodhisattva and should be well known to any students of Tibetan Buddhism) and Jampa (Future Buddha). There is also a collection of chapels that encircles the statues and pilgrims walk around this courtyard (always in a clock-wise direction) visiting the various chapels along the way.

**OVERNIGHT:** Lhasa hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 13: Lhasa tours

After breakfast we continue our tour of Lhasa with a visit to the Norbulingka, the former summer palace of the Dalai Lama which served both administrative and religious functions in the past. Norbulingka is divided into three areas: the palaces, government buildings and opera grounds which are considered the best public parkland in Tibet. During the summer and autumn months, the opera grounds become hubs of entertainment with dancing, singing, music and festivities, and also host the annual Sho Dun or "Yoghurt Festival".

We then travel to the Drepung Monastery, about 8 km west of central Lhasa and once the largest monastery in Tibet with over 10,000 monks. Enjoy a pleasant walk uphill to the monastery, to experience the solemn ambience inside the halls and chapels. From the hillside there are wonderful views of Lhasa and the distant mountains. Drepung is one of Lhasa's two great Gelugpa monasteries, the other is Sera. Around 5km north of central Lhasa, Sera may not be as grandiose as Drepung, but is more serene and surrounded by many small temples. Every day at 3pm (except on Sundays), the famous "Buddhism Scriptures Debating" takes place in the courtyard as monks follow the teachings of the Buddha to question everything they are told. They supplement their debating with a variety of gestures including clapping their hands, pushing their partners for answers and plucking their prayer beads.

**OVERNIGHT:** Lhasa hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 14: Fly to Nepal

After an early breakfast, we transfer you to the airport where you depart Lhasa and fly back to Kathmandu where we meet you at the airport and transfer you to your hotel. The rest of the day is free.

**OVERNIGHT:** Kathmandu hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 15: Kathmandu, free day

We leave the whole of the day free today for you to explore Kathmandu further or make some last minute souvenir purchases. While you can fly home today if you wish, we build this free day into the itinerary in case of delays or cancellations to the flight back from Lhasa to Kathmandu, which can happen when the weather or visibility is poor.

**OVERNIGHT:** Kathmandu hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 16: Kathmandu, departure airport transfer

Your time is free today until we transfer you to the airport in time for your flight home.

**OVERNIGHT:** N/A

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Included

- All accommodation in 3-4 star hotels
- All transport and transfers
- 24-hour airport arrival & departure transfer service
- Return flights between Kathmandu & Paro, and Kathmandu & Lhasa
- Sightseeing tours and activities as per the itinerary
- Monastery entrance fees
- Tibet entrance permit (obtained in Kathmandu)
- Bhutan tourist development fee and visa fee
- Professional English speaking guides in each country
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary

## Excluded

- International flights (available on request)
- Nepal visa fees (available on arrival for most nationalities)
- Travel insurance (compulsory, available on request)
- Meals not indicated in the itinerary
- Drinks, snacks and other personal expenses (e.g. laundry)
- Tips for guides and drivers
- Any other items not mentioned above

## Notes

Tibetan visas are only issued in Kathmandu on certain days each week, and there is a limited flight schedule between Kathmandu and Lhasa. To fit in with these, this tour itinerary normally needs to start in Kathmandu on Sundays, but please check the current situation with us before confirming any international flights.

# 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.

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## 1. Tipping - Bhutan

While an accepted part of the tourist industry in Bhutan (i.e. guides, drivers and hotel staff), tipping elsewhere is generally discouraged and unnecessary. Any amounts you do tip should always reflect the level of service provided. 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 can give the following guidelines...

1-2 persons travelling:

US\$8-15 pp per day for your guide & US\$4-7 pp per day for your driver.

3-8 persons travelling:

US\$5-10 pp per day for your guide & US\$3-5 pp per day for your driver.

9-12 persons travelling:

US\$4-8 pp per day for your guide & US\$3-5 pp per day for your driver.

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## 2. Passports and Visas - Bhutan

We will arrange your Bhutan for you in advance of your arrival. You will need to provide us with:

- a scanned colour copy of your passport identity page (with your photo and personal details). This cannot be a photo showing fingers holding the passport. If you don't have a scanner, then place the passport completely flat and open on a white A4 piece of paper and take a photo of the whole piece of paper with the passport in the middle. That should suffice.
- a scanned colour passport photo (digital versions are available from most passport photo machines or shops doing passport photos now)
- a copy of your travel insurance policy certificate

Please send these to us as soon as possible after booking or at least 2 months before your arrival. The visa will normally be issued by the Bhutanese authorities around 10 days before your arrival and we will then email it to you. You will need to print the visa out and show it to the Druk Air staff when you check in. No payment is required from you for the visa at this stage or when you arrive in Bhutan - all costs are included in your tour price. .

If you are connecting the tour with Nepal, then Nepal visas are available for most nationalities on arrival in Kathmandu airport for a fee of US\$25 for single entry, with an extra \$20 charged for a multiple entry visa which will be required for most of our Nepal and Bhutan combination tours. This covers up to 15 days in Nepal (from first arrival to last departure). Single entry visas are also available for \$40 (16-30 days) or \$100 (31-90 days), again with an extra \$20 fee to convert these to multiple entry.

If you are connecting the tour with time in India, then you will need to obtain an Indian visa in advance - these are not available on arrival in Indian airports. We recommend you allow a minimum of 4 weeks to apply for this visa.

If you are connecting the tour with time in Thailand, then many nationalities can arrange a free tourist visa on arrival in Bangkok airport.

Please contact us if you have any questions about visa requirements for your travel plans and nationality.

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## 3. 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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#### 4. 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 (fleeces, 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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## 5. 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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## 6. Health and Vaccinations

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:

**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 transited 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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## 7. 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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## 8. 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 adaptors 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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## 9. Passports and Visas - Tibet

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.

All Encounters Travel tours to Tibet use Kathmandu as a hub to either travel overland or fly into Tibet and whilst in Kathmandu our local team will make arrangements for your Tibet Entry Permit. Our local office do require your passport in hand to be able to arrange this so you'll need at least 1 full day in Kathmandu before departing for Tibet to obtain the Visa. The Chinese/Tibet Embassy in Kathmandu is only open Monday to Friday and is closed on weekends and all public holidays so we'll need to consider this when planning your travel date. For most nationalities we include the cost of obtaining this visa in our tour prices - we'll advise you if this is not the case for your nationality.

**Note:** The Chinese authorities generally always close the Tibetan borders to tourists for the whole of March and re-open the country to visitors at the start of April. However, sometimes the borders are kept closed for longer or at other times during the year, very little if any advance notice being given. If you are not able to travel to Tibet for this reason then we will arrange a revised itinerary for you in Nepal or Bhutan for that section of your tour. We will arrange a partial refund or extra charge if the Nepal/Bhutan sections work out cheaper/more expensive than your original Tibet itinerary.

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## 10. 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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## 11. 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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## 12. 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 prejudge: 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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### 13. 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/encounterstrav](https://twitter.com/encounterstrav) (yes, without the 'e')

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### 14. 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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## **15. 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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