

Himalayan Kingdoms

Country(ies): Nepal & Bhutan

Tour type: Small Group

Transport: A/C minibus/people-carrier & internal flight

Group size: Min: 2 | Max: 12

Days: 12 Days

Start location: Kathmandu, Nepal

End location: Kathmandu, Nepal

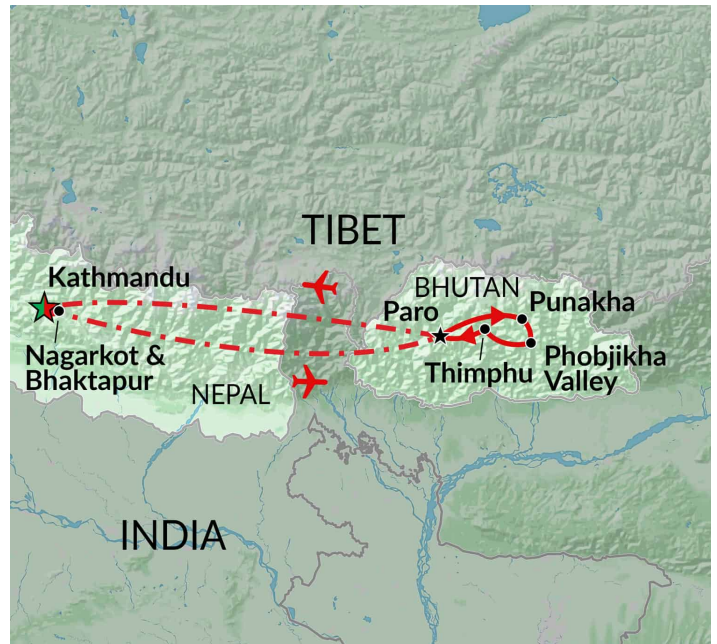
Departs On: Various days

Meals: Breakfasts - 11, Lunches - 5, Dinners - 6

Highlights:

Kathmandu's temples & stupas, Paro Dzong & National Museum, Thimphu weekend market, Dochu La Pass, Punakha Dzong, Phobjika Valley, Taktshang monastery, Nepalese & Bhutanese food & culture, beautiful Himalayan scenery, easy hikes

Places Visited: Kathmandu, Paro, Punakha, Phobjika Valley, Gangtey, Thimphu, Bhaktapur & Nagarkot



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive in Kathmandu, transfer to your hotel

You arrive in Kathmandu today where we meet you at the airport and transfer you to your hotel. Our rep will help you settle in and give you an introduction to the surrounding area. The rest of the day is free to relax after your flight, and perhaps head to one of the many cafes and bars in the touristic district of Thamel near your hotel.

OVERNIGHT: Kathmandu hotel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS: Extra day in Kathmandu - pre-tour || Single Room Supplement (NPSGHK)

Day 2: Kathmandu tour to Durbar Square & Swayambunath

This morning we start with a walking tour from the tourist centre of Thamel, through Kathmandu's busy winding streets passing numerous tiny shops, workshops and street corner temples to Durbar Square with its splendid array of Hindu temples and the old Royal Palace. We'll then drive up to the 'monkey temple' of Swayambhunath Stupa and see great views over the city and surrounding valley.

An option is available early this morning to take a spectacular flight up to view Everest. If the weather is clear you will also be able to see Everest and many other Himalayan peaks on your flight to Bhutan, but from much further away.

OVERNIGHT: Kathmandu hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: Everest Mountain Flight

Day 3: Fly to Bhutan, Paro tour

We pick you up from the hotel this morning and transfer to the airport for the spectacular flight over the Himalaya to Bhutan (try and sit on the left side of the plane for the best views). While en route, complete immigration and custom form formalities for later declaration and keep your custom forms safe, as you will need to produce them again on departure. (Note - the Kathmandu-Paro-Kathmandu flights are not included in the tour price but may be purchased separately or added as an extra option. Please see the Options section and Tour Notes for more details).

Paro airport provides a first taste of Bhutanese architecture and is surely one of the world's most beautiful. After lunch and an introductory chat with your Bhutanese guide, we will start our tours by visiting Ta Dzong, originally the Watch Tower for the Rinpung Dzong in Paro. It was later converted into the National Museum of the Kingdom and boasts a wide range of antique thangka paintings, textiles, weapons & armour, household objects and natural and historic artifacts. You'll then walk downhill from the museum to Rinpung Dzong or the 'fortress of the heap of jewels' which is the seat of the district administration and the residence of the monastic school. The dzong is famous for its wall murals depicting Buddhist parables, symbols and the lives of prominent saints. Here you'll learn how these spectacular buildings have combined the monastic and civic administration of Bhutan for centuries. Finally, you walk down to the cantilever bridge below the dzong where your car awaits to take you to your hotel.

OVERNIGHT: Paro hotel

MEALS: Breakfast, Dinner

EXTRAS: Kathmandu-Paro-Kathmandu flights

Day 4: Cross the Dochu La Pass to the Punakha Valley

Today the tour leaves Paro and crosses the Dochu La Pass on sheer twisting roads through dense forests. You will be driven past multiple chortens at the top of the pass and be able to see the mountains in the distance, if the weather is clear.

When the tour has descended into the Punakha Valley, your guide will take you on a short walk to the Chimi Lhakhang Temple. It was built by Lama Drukpa Kuenley or 'The Divine Madman' and is known for blessing barren women with fertility.

All bird watching enthusiasts are encouraged to do a pre-breakfast tour in the morning that goes up to the Che La Pass at sunrise. You should keep an eye out for the blood grouse and the remarkable Himalayan monal.

OVERNIGHT: Punakha hotel

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS: None

Day 5: Valley walk, Punakha Dzong, drive to Gangtey

Breakfast will be followed by a scenic drive through the valley to the north of Punakha for a morning stroll to Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten. You can't miss this chorten with its striking location on a ridge above the Punakha Valley. This notable shrine was inspired by the Buddhist treasure teachings of Thragthung Dudjom Lingpa.

It is a sacred religious haven that helps to ward off negative forces and promotes peace and stability. The structure also embodies the positive forces that transcend all the negative influences in the world. According to Lamas, this chorten is a quintessence of Buddhism and brings about health and happiness for the people.

After exploring the temple, you can meander through the fields of chili, bean and wheat crops and reach the riverbank. Those who want to continue walking can do so along the river to Punakha. If you want to rest your feet, you can be picked up and driven. In Punakha, you will be shown the wonderful Punakha Dzong that is in the middle of the rivers of Phochu and Mochu. These waterways represent the co-existence of masculinity and femininity and their currents are different colours. You will notice how the rivers merge at this spot. Lunch will be followed by a drive to Gangtey.

OVERNIGHT: Gangtey hotel

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS: None

Day 6: Phobjikha Valley walk, Gangtey

This morning, the tour will depart from the Punakha Valley and head back onto the mountain roads that cut through the oak and rhododendron forests into the Phobjikha Valley (approx. 70km, 3hrs). These dense forests are the winter roosting grounds for the famous and endangered black-necked crane.

These cranes make a high-altitude migration here from the Central Asiatic plateau to escape the harsh winters in October. A festival celebrates their arrival on 12 November, which is then followed by the birthday of the king. The birds then fly from Tibet in February-March so the best months to view them are November, December and January.

Your guide will lead you into the valley so that you can look out for the cranes, if it is the right time of year. Later that day, the tour will visit the Nyingmapa Monastery in the kingdom of Gangtey Gompa.

OVERNIGHT: Gangtey hotel

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS: None

Day 7: Drive to Thimphu via Wangdue Phodrang

This day will consist of a picturesque drive back across the Dochu La Pass to the capital of Bhutan, Thimphu.

On the way back, the tour will make a stopover to view the Dzong at Wangdue Phodrang. This building was destroyed by a fire in 2012 and is still being rebuilt today. This immense task is expected to continue until 2021.

After we have arrived in the city centre, you will have plenty of time to explore the surrounding area before enjoying dinner at the hotel.

OVERNIGHT: Thimphu hotel

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS: None

Day 8: Thimphu tours and weekend market

This day will be spent traversing in and around Thimphu with the assistance of your driver and guide. You will venture in small groups, which allows for flexibility when it comes to choosing where to visit and what to do. You can speak to your guide and arrange your day.

Activities available:

- The National Takin Research Centre where you can view a collection of unique animals while you stroll through an open pine forest with breathtaking views over Thimphu Valley.
- The Memorial Chorten - a stupa inspired by the third king to deter negative influences. It was later constructed in his memory by the present king and the queen mother.
- The School of Arts & Crafts - an institute that allows students to work on honing their traditional skills.
- The Folk Heritage Museum with exhibits that offer insight into the medieval lifestyle of the Bhutanese people.
- The National Library - home to the largest book in the world and displays of traditional Tibetan-style books, written on long handmade strips of paper.
- The National Institute of Traditional Medicine, which has a small museum and clinic where people are treated with traditional herbal medicines.
- A traditional handmade paper factory that sells eye-catching souvenirs and trinkets.
- The Textile Museum has displays of local weaving art with weavers at work.
- Trashichhodzong - the elaborate medieval fortress/monastery, which houses most of the government's office, the king's throne and is also the summer residence of Je Khenpo, the Chief Abbot.
- A variety of short half-day hikes available around the valley.

Lunch will be included during the day and if there is an archery tournament taking place at the National Stadium, our tour will check it out. Traditional folk dancing will also be on display.

It's imperative that you don't miss out on the weekend market with its assortment of stalls selling vegetables, spices and of course, chilies. A handicraft and clothing market is another highlight and an ideal place to purchase some souvenirs. This market runs from Friday afternoon until Sunday lunchtime and we will make sure that our itineraries incorporate the markets.

OVERNIGHT: Thimphu hotel

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS: None

Day 9: Taktshang (Tiger's Nest) walk, Drukgyel Dzong

You will be served breakfast earlier this morning as the tour will drive to the foot of the Taktshang cliff. From here, you will set off on a 2-3 hour uphill hike to reach this monastery, resting on a sharp 800m-rock face. Taktshang is one of Bhutan's most famous sites and translates to 'Tiger's Nest'. Legend has it that Guru Padmasambhava flew to this spot on the back of a tigress in the 8th century. It was believed that he meditated here, which makes this temple a sacred pilgrimage destination for Buddhists.

Lunch will be enjoyed at the Taktshang cafeteria located about two thirds of the way up. This trip takes 4-5 hours and you can also arrange to ride a pony for the uphill trek.

That afternoon, you will be taken on a short sightseeing tour to Drukgyel Dzong, the fort of victorious Drukpas. A fire gutted this fort, but it remains famous for being the stand from which many Tibetan invasions were revolted. To the north, you can spot the dome of the sacred Mount Chomolhari or the 'mountain of the goddess'.

The tour also stops at one of the oldest landmarks in Bhutan - the 7th century Kyichu Lhakhang, which was one of the 108 temples built in the Himalayas by the King Songtsen Gampo. This enchanting sanctuary is regarded as one of the holiest shrines in Bhutan that embodies the arrival of Buddhism here.

As night falls, you can amble through the streets of Paro or indulge in a hot stone bath at the hotel to ease your tired muscles.

OVERNIGHT: Paro hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 10: Fly to Nepal, visit Bhaktapur ancient centre

This morning we fly back to Kathmandu (aim to sit on the right hand side of the plane for the best views) and transfer to the ancient centre of Bhaktapur. (Note - again, this flight is not included in our tour price - see Tour Notes).

Formerly a capital of the Kathmandu Valley, the pedestrianised centre of Bhaktapur is a World Heritage Centre and is full of squares and temples with some stunning wooden architecture. Unfortunately, Bhaktapur was heavily damaged during the 2015 earthquake, though restoration efforts have been substantial. You have a guided tour here, as well as time to explore the narrow winding streets which bustle with life.

In the afternoon we 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.

OVERNIGHT: Nagarkot hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: Kathmandu-Paro-Kathmandu flights

Day 11: Sunrise mountain views and villages, temples & stupas

After waking early to enjoy the sunrise views, we have a downhill ridge walk through the Tilkot Forest Reserve, tiny Chhetri villages and traditional terraced farmland to the somewhat crumbling but atmospheric Changu Narayan Temple. Before arriving at our hotel in Kathmandu for our last night in Nepal, we'll tour the important Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage sites of Pashupatinath temple and Boudhanath stupa. These are both very important to their respective religions, but have a completely contrasting atmosphere and ambience which is fascinating to see.

Our final night in Nepal is then free to head into Thamel to enjoy one last meal together before flying home tomorrow.

OVERNIGHT: Kathmandu hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 12: Kathmandu, tour ends with airport transfer

Your time is free today until we transfer you to the airport in time for your flight home. A range of options are available if you would like to extend your tour in Nepal. These include white water rafting on the Bhote Khosi river, one of the best one day rafting trips in the world, hikes and tours in the Kathmandu valley, or more extensive rafting or trekking tours. We can also arrange visits to Chitwan and Bardia National Parks in the lowland Terai region of Nepal. Please contact us for more information and ideas.

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: Extra day in Kathmandu - post-tour

Included

- All accommodation in comfortable mid-range hotels
- All transport in private AC vehicles with a local driver
- All transfers, including 24-hour airport arrival & departure transfer service
- Services of a local guide throughout your time in Bhutan
- Services of a tour leader in Nepal and specialist city guide for Kathmandu tours
- Entrance Fees to sites visited
- All meals as indicated in the itinerary
- Bhutan visa & tourism development fee (TDF)

Excluded

- International Flights in and out of Nepal
- Return flights between Kathmandu and Paro (see Tour Notes)
- Nepal multi-entry visa fee (\$45)
- Travel Insurance (compulsory, available on request)
- Meals not indicated in the itinerary
- Drinks, snacks, tips and other personal expenses (e.g. laundry)
- Any other items not mentioned above

Notes

Several of our departures on this tour take place during festivals in Bhutan. These festivals, or Tsechus, are a fantastic time to visit the country, with parades and masked dances taking place in and around the Dzongs. On these dates we may adjust the itinerary slightly to make the most of being there during the festival. We also encourage you to book early on these dates as flights in and out of Bhutan can sell out well in advance at these times.

Options

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.

Everest Mountain Flight

Min numbers: 1

This short but spectacular flight takes you from Kathmandu up towards and around Everest and the surrounding high peaks and Tibetan plateau. The planes have good sized clear windows, and window seats are guaranteed. The flight takes around 1 hour and we aim to book one of the first flights of the morning when the views tend to be better and the flights are less liable to delays or cancellations. Transfers to and from your hotel are included. If the flight does not run due to poor weather, we will aim to reschedule it for later in your tour. If that is not possible then you will be refunded.

Price: \$255

Extra day in Kathmandu - 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: \$50

Extra day in Kathmandu - post-tour

Min numbers: 1

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

Price: \$50

Single Room Supplement

Min numbers: 1

This group tour is based on twin-share accommodation. If you are a single traveller and would like to guarantee yourself a single room throughout the tour, please add this option onto your booking. If you are happy to share a room, please let us know and we will see if we can pair you up with another single traveller of the same sex. If a room share is not available when you pay your balance, then 50% of the single room supplement fee will be payable. If a room share becomes possible after you have paid your balance then your payment towards the supplement will be refunded. Room shares are arranged in order of booking. Note: Single supplement prices may vary seasonally.

Price: \$660

Kathmandu-Paro-Kathmandu flights

Min numbers: 1

This option adds the Druk Air flights between Kathmandu and Paro and back to Kathmandu which are required for this tour. You may also book these flights independently directly with Druk Air (required for UK residents). There is only one flight per day, and all transfers to and from the airports are included. We recommend that you aim to sit on the left side of the plane on the way to Bhutan and on the right side on the way back for the best mountain views.

Price: \$420

Tour Notes

1. Note

The accommodation on this tour is in comfortable mid-range tourist class hotels, mainly boutique style, and at the high end of the Nepalese 3-star level, and the Bhutanese 4-star level.

Like all aspects of tourism in Bhutan, hotels used for tourists are strictly regulated and inspected and all must reach a good standard to obtain their license to cater for tourists. So, you should expect good clean rooms, en-suite bathrooms, and some traditional Bhutanese styling in the building's architecture and design.

Please check the Accommodation section on the tour page on our website for the hotels that we currently use most on this tour. These are given as a guide only and may be exchanged some dates for alternative properties of a similar standard. We will advise you of your first hotel in Kathmandu a few weeks before departure when we send out your final confirmation voucher and arrival instructions. We do not normally advise details of all the other hotels used throughout the tour. If you have specific requirements for individual hotels, please request a private/tailor-made tour.

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

2. Transport

The transport used on this tour will be an air conditioned car, STV, modern people-carrier, minivan or minibus, subject to the final number of people in your group or in your party. We always aim to have some free seats so you can spread out a little. You should expect vehicles in Bhutan to be a little better quality than those in Nepal.

Please see the note on International Flights for more information on the connecting flights between Kathmandu and Paro.

3. Transfers

Your airport transfers are only included on the first and last day of the set tour itinerary, plus on any additional days if you book your hotel room with us. If you make your own arrangements for additional accommodation at either the beginning or the end of the tour then you will need to arrange your own airport transfers on these days.

Transfers are also included on the days within the tour when you are transferring to and from the airport for flights during the itinerary.

4. Group Size / Tour Leaders / Guides

We are committed to running small groups on our trips in Nepal and Bhutan, 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. It also allows us to be more creative with the itinerary and do things which would not be possible with larger groups. So, we set our group departures on this tour to have a maximum of 12 travellers.

In Nepal our local representatives will be on hand to provide your airport transfers and accompany you on other journeys through the tour. A professional guide will be arranged for your city tours in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur.

In Bhutan, fully trained English-speaking Bhutanese guides are provided to escort you throughout the tour and many of our travellers consider them a highlight of their tour.

At Encounters Travel we only use local Nepalese and Bhutanese guides and drivers. We feel this gives you the best experience of the country and the sites you are seeing.

5. International flights including Nepal/Bhutan

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 to Nepal in the main tour price. We are however very happy to make suggestions for flights to go with your tour and can provide you with list of possible airlines and flight times from your preferred departure point to fit with the tour.

The return flight between Kathmandu (KTM) and Paro (PHB) is also not included in our tour prices. This makes the whole tour more cost effective for our travellers as it means we do not to account for agency commissions or discounts on top of the fixed flight price.

You can book this flight independently through the [Druk Air website](#) or we may be able to book it for you, subject to your location and local regulations (UK residents will need to book the flights themselves). There is often only one flight per day and therefore everyone on the tour will therefore usually be using the same flight. All transfers are included at each end.

An option is available to add onto the tour to book these flights.

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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. Money

Nepal

The local currency in Nepal is the Nepalese Rupee (NRs). There are a banks and several ATMs in Kathmandu where you can use a debit/credit card to withdraw cash (Visa, Mastercard), but these are not generally available out of Kathmandu or Pokhara. There are numerous money change shops in the main towns. Travellers cheques can be changed in some banks in Kathmandu and Pokhara, but not elsewhere.

You should ensure you have all the Nepalese rupees you think you will need before you leave for any trekking or visiting any more remote areas (including Bardia National Park). You can pay with US Dollars cash in some places but should not rely on this.

Bhutan

The local currency in Bhutan is the Ngultrum (Ng), which is pegged to the Indian Rupee. Indian rupees are accepted widely (except 500 or 1000 rupee notes which are not accepted) so if you are entering Bhutan from India you don't need to dispose of your Indian currency before departure.

All your meals, plus mineral water & tea/coffee during mealtimes are included in the price of your tour. You will only need to carry spending money to cover souvenirs, small offerings at temples & monasteries, alcoholic or soft drinks in your hotel or other bottled drinks during the day. There are only a few ATMs in the country (including Paro & Thimphu) where you can withdraw local currency (Visa, Mastercard) so we recommend bringing some cash in US Dollars, Euros, GB Pounds, or Indian Rupees with you that you can exchange into local currency on arrival. You can tip your guide & driver with any currency.

Tibet

The local currency in Tibet is the Chinese Yuan (RMB). Coins are not used in Tibet.

You can exchange money in Lhasa and in some of the better 3, 4 & 5 star hotels. Many of these in Lhasa will accept credit card payments though a 3-5% fee will normally be charged.

ATMs are available in Lhasa, Tsedang, Shigatse and some other smaller cities though there may only be one or two in each and those may not be working. So, outside of these three areas we recommend that you plan to have enough cash ready instead. Withdrawal limits of RMB 2000 normally apply.

9. 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.

10. 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).

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. 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 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.

15. 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.

16. 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.

17. 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).

18. 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](#).

19. 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

www.twitter.com/encounterstravl (yes, without the 'e')

20. 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.

21. Money

The local currency in Nepal is the Nepalese Rupee (NRs). There are a banks and several ATMs in Kathmandu where you can use a debit/credit card to withdraw cash (Visa, Mastercard), but these are not generally available out of Kathmandu or Pokhara. There are numerous money change shops in the main towns. Travellers cheques can be changed in some banks in Kathmandu and Pokhara, but not elsewhere.

You should ensure you have all the Nepalese rupees you think you will need before you leave for any trekking or visiting any more remote areas (including Bardia National Park). Try to obtain as many small denomination notes as possible, as higher value notes can be very hard to change in remote areas. You can pay with US Dollars cash in some places but should not rely on this.

22. Money

Nepal

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You should ensure you have all the Nepalese rupees you think you will need before you leave for any trekking or visiting any more remote areas (including Bardia National Park). You can pay with US Dollars cash in some places but should not rely on this.

Tibet

The local currency in Tibet is the Chinese Yuan (RMB). Coins are not used in Tibet.

You can exchange money in Lhasa and in some of the better 3, 4 & 5 star hotels. Many of these in Lhasa will accept credit card payments though a 3-5% fee will normally be charged.

ATMs are available in Lhasa, Tsedang, Shigatse and some other smaller cities though there may only be one or two in each and those may not be working. So, outside of these three areas we recommend that you plan to have enough cash ready instead. Withdrawal limits of RMB 2000 normally apply.

23. Tipping and Haggling

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 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, and US\$ 2-5 p/p/day for porters and drivers.

Haggling or bargaining is also prevalent throughout Nepal and Tibet, particularly in Kathmandu. 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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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.
