

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation options in this book are arranged according to budget and then subdivided by location. Budget travellers can expect to shell out from US\$5 to US\$15 for a double room, which will normally have a private bathroom. Midrange rooms range from US\$15 to US\$50, with top-end groupings heading up from there. Most hotels have a wide range of rooms under one roof, including larger (often top-floor) deluxe rooms which are good for families and small groups.

In Kathmandu and Pokhara there is a wide variety of accommodation from rock-

bottom flea pits to five-star international hotels that cost US\$150 a night. The intense competition between the many cheaper places keeps prices down and standards up – Kathmandu has many fine places with pleasant gardens and rooms for less than US\$10 a night including private bathroom and hot water. Some of Nepal's best deals are now to be found in its stylish midrange and top-end accommodation, discounted by up to 60% in places thanks to the downturn in tourism in Nepal.

The main towns of the Terai have hotels of a reasonable standard, where rooms with fans and mosquito nets cost around Rs 400, down to grimy, basic places catering to local demand from around Rs 50. Some of the cheap places have tattered mosquito nets, if any at all. The cheaper places only have solar-heated hot-water showers, which won't be hot in the mornings or on cloudy days.

Elsewhere in the country the choice of hotels can be very limited, but you will find places to stay along most of the major trekking trails, making Nepal one of the few places in the world where you can trek for three weeks without needing a tent. On lesser-trekking trails places may be Spartan – the accommodation may be dorm-style or simply an open room in which to unroll your sleeping bag – but the Annapurna and Everest treks have excellent lodges and guesthouses every couple of hours.

The recent drop-off in visitor numbers to Nepal means that many places outside of the main tourist centres are deserted. Managers and even chefs may be absent from off-the-beaten-track resorts so phone ahead to these places. Hotels with only one or two guests may be reluctant to turn on

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

A NOTE ON HOTEL PRICES

Nepal's hotel prices have always been seasonal and, shall we say, flexible, with peak season running from October to November and February to April. The current drop in tourism has had a deepening effect on hotel discounting rates, so much so that currently there's hardly a hotel in Kathmandu or Pokhara that charges full tariff.

The exact room rate you will be quoted depends partly on the season and partly on general tourist numbers. At the time of research the slump in tourism meant that many midrange hotels were offering discounts of up to 60% even in the high season, particularly in Kathmandu and Pokhara where competition is fiercest. In this guide we have generally given the high-season room rates shown on hotel tariff cards, followed, as a guide, by the maximum discount we were offered during high-season research. You may find even lower rates during the monsoon (June to September). If, however, tourist numbers pick up during the lifetime of this book, you may find that smaller discounts are offered. In reality prices are highly negotiable all the time.

At most hotels the printed tariffs are pure fiction, published partly in the hope that you might be silly enough to pay them, and partly to fulfil government star rating requirements; 20% to 50% discounts are par for the course anywhere these days. If business is slow you can often negotiate a deluxe room for a standard room rate. Some midrange hotels offer discounts for booking online (and a free airport transfer) but you'll get at least this much on the spot, if not more.

You can also negotiate cheaper rates for longer stays. In the cool of autumn and spring you get a further discount on air-conditioned rooms simply by agreeing to turn off the air-con.

the hotel heating or hot water. On the plus side (for travellers at least) there are plenty of discounts available, you'll have an excellent choice of rooms and you'll often have smaller towns completely to yourself.

All midrange and top-end hotels charge a value added tax (VAT) of 13% and often quote their prices in US dollars (though you can pay in rupees). Budget places quote prices in rupees and generally forget about the tax.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most government offices in Kathmandu are open from 10am to 5pm Sunday to Friday during summer and 10am to 4pm during the winter (roughly mid-November to mid-February). Offices close at 3pm on Friday and are generally closed for an hour at lunchtime. Saturday is the weekly holiday and almost all offices and banks will be closed. Museums are generally closed on Tuesdays. See p366 for a list of public holidays.

CHILDREN

Few people travel with children in Nepal, yet with a bit of planning it is remarkably hassle-free. Check out Lonely Planet's *Travel With Children* for handy hints and advice about the pros and cons of travelling with children.

In the main tourist centres (Kathmandu and Pokhara), most hotels have triple rooms, and quite often a suite with four beds, which are ideal for families with young children. Finding a room with a bathtub can be a problem at the bottom end of the market. Many Kathmandu hotels have a garden or roof garden, which can be good play areas for kids. Check thoroughly, however, as some are definitely not safe for young children.

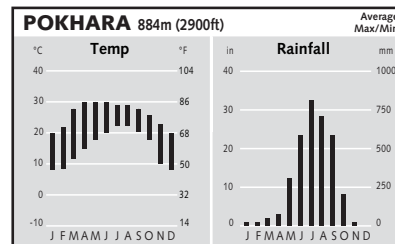
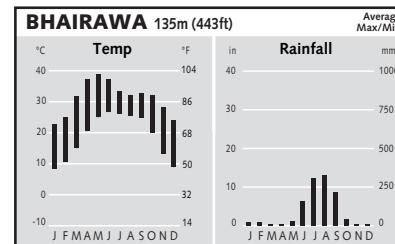
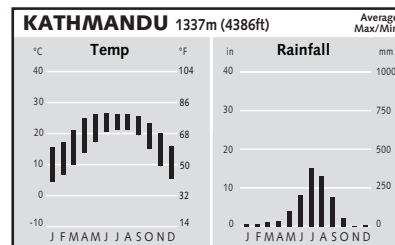
Walking the crowded and narrow streets of Kathmandu and other towns can be a hassle with young kids unless you can get them up off the ground – a backpack is ideal, but a pusher or stroller would be more trouble than it's worth unless you bring one with oversize wheels.

Eating out at restaurants with kids can be difficult. While the food is excellent, the service is usually quite slow. By the time the food arrives your kids will be bored stiff and ready to leave. It's less hassle if you eat breakfast at your hotel, have lunch at a place with a garden (there are plenty of these) where the children can let off steam, and in the evening go to the restaurant armed with colouring books, stories and other distractions to keep them busy.

Disposable nappies are available in Kathmandu and Pokhara, but for a price – better to bring them with you if possible. Cloth

nappies can be a headache, but remember that disposable nappies are almost indestructible, and waste disposal in Nepal is already a major problem.

CLIMATE CHARTS



COURSES

Language

Nepali is not a difficult language to learn, and you will see notices around Kathmandu advertising language courses. Most schools offer courses or individual tuition. Expect to pay about US\$50 for a two-week course or around US\$3 per hour for private tuition.

Places to try in Kathmandu: **Intercultural Training & Research Centre** (ITC; Map p136; ☎ 01-4414490; itc@mos.com.np; Kathmandu) Just off Tridevi Marg, this well-respected language centre works with many NGOs, including the UK's Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). It offers crash courses (three hours), 60-

hour beginner courses and six-week intermediate courses. Tuition is one-on-one and costs around Rs 300 per hour.

Kathmandu Institute of Nepali Language (Map p136; ☎ 01-4220295; www.ktmnepalilanguage.com, namrata@mos.com.np; Jyatha, Kathmandu) Offers a week's course of six hours for Rs 1200.

Thamel Nepali Language Institute (Map p136;

☎ 01-4700949; views@vlink.com.np; Thamel;

☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Fri) Opposite Pilgrims Book House, on the upper floor, this tiny place offers an intensive course of 20 hours a week or a more relaxed six-hours-a-week course, for roughly Rs 250 per hour for one-on-one tuition, plus around Rs 800 for learning materials. For real linguistic immersion you can stay with a local family.

There are often flyers around Bodhnath advertising Tibetan-language tuition and apartments to rent, as well as opportunities to volunteer-teach Tibetan refugees. The **Centre for Buddhist Studies** (www.cbs.edu.np) based at the Rangjung Yeshe Institute (see p359) is part of Kathmandu University and offers a two-month Tibetan-language course (US\$1900) June and July, with accommodation provided with local Tibetan families, it also offers longer university-accredited courses.

Music & the Arts

Gandharba Association (see p152; http://gandharbas.nyima.org; Thamel, Kathmandu) Offers lessons in the *sarangi* (four-stringed instrument played with a bow) and they can probably find teachers for other instruments such as the *madal* (drum), *basuri* (flute) and *arbaj* (four-string guitar). Expect to pay around Rs 150 per hour's tuition.

Trekkers Holiday Inn (☎ 01-4480334; www.4frech/nepal; Chuchepati) Based at the Hotel Samsara, midway between Kathmandu and Bodhnath, this Swiss-run centre offers cookery courses (see p105) and evening lectures on social welfare and Ayurvedic medicine, as well as a Nepali-language course three days a week (Rs 3500 for 15 hours). You can get a programme of talks and courses from the website. The hotel is hard to find; get yourself to Chuchepati Chowk, by the bust of Pasang Lhamo, head north, take the lane on the left and follow it as it curves.

Yoga, Buddhist Meditation & Massage

Nepal is a popular place for people to take up spiritual pursuits, particularly around the Kathmandu Valley, although Pokhara is becoming increasingly popular.

Check the notice boards in Thamel for up-to-date information about yoga and Buddhism courses, and shop around before you commit yourself.

PRACTICALITIES

- Nepal's main English-language daily paper, the **Rising Nepal** (www.gorkhapatra.org.np), is basically a government mouthpiece. For a more balanced view of local issues there's the daily **Kathmandu Post** (www.kantipuronline.com) and **Himalayan Times** (www.thehimalayantimes.com) or the weekly **Nepali Times** (www.nepalitimes.com).
- **ECS** (www.ecs.com.np; Rs 75) is a glossy expat-orientated monthly magazine with interesting articles on travel and culture. **Spotlight** (www.nepalnews.com.np/spotlight.htm) is another local weekly current affairs magazine that is worth a look.
- The *International Herald Tribune* and *Le Monde* are widely available in Kathmandu, as are *Time* and *Newsweek* (Rs 100).
- The glossy **Travellers Nepal** (www.tn.com.np) and **Nepal Traveller** (www.nepal-traveller.com) are free monthly tourist magazines with info on sights, festivals and trekking, directories of airlines offices, embassies and so on.
- In the Kathmandu Valley, tune into Kantipur FM (96.1FM), Hits FM (92.1FM) or HBC FM (104FM), or listen to the BBC World Service on 103FM.
- Nepal TV has an English news bulletin at 10pm. Most midrange and top-end hotels offer satellite channels, such as BBC World.
- Electricity, when available, is 220V/50 cycles; 120V appliances from the USA will need a transformer. Sockets usually take three-round-pin plugs, sometimes the small variety, sometimes the large. Some sockets take plugs with two round pins. Local electrical shops sell cheap adapters.
- Outside Kathmandu blackouts ('load-shedding') are a fact of life. Power surges are also likely so bring a voltage guard with spike suppressor (automatic cut-off switch) for your laptop.

Ananda Yoga Center (☎ 01-4311048; ananda@yoga.wlink.com.np; P/O Box 1774, Kathmandu Valley) On the edge of the valley at Satungal, overlooking Matatirtha Village, 8km west of Kathmandu, this is a nonprofit yoga retreat offering courses in reiki, hatha yoga and teacher training.

Ganden Yiga Chopen Meditation Centre (Pokhara Buddhist Meditation Centre; Map p257; ☎ 01-522923; pokharacentre@yahoo.com) Three-day meditation and yoga courses (Rs 3000) as well as daily sessions at 10am (Rs 200) and 5pm (Rs 150).

Healing Hands Centre (www.ancientmassage.com; Maharajganj, Kathmandu) Various monthly courses in Thai massage. The five-day course (20 hours, US\$175) teaches you how to give a full body massage; there are also 10-day courses and one-month professional courses for US\$800. Accommodation is available at the centre in the northeastern Kathmandu suburbs.

Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre (HBMC; Map p136; ☎ 01-4414843; www.fpmt.org) This friendly place offers talks and meditation courses (three to five days, US\$50 to US\$85). There are also guided meditations Tuesday to Friday and Sunday at 8am, 3pm and 8pm and day-long dharma teachings on Saturday.

Kathmandu Center of Healing (☎ 9851-070786; www.kathmanduhealing.com; Galfutar, Kathmandu)

This place offers one-, two- and five-week professional courses in Thai massage. Other activities include yoga, dance, a monthly four-day reiki course and various 'healing seminars'. Contact Rabin.

Kopan Monastery (☎ 01-4481268; www.kopan-monastery.com) This monastery, north of Bodhnath, offers reasonably priced and popular seven-day (US\$75) or 10-day (US\$100) courses on Tibetan Buddhism, generally given by foreign teachers. There's also a popular annual one-month course (US\$365) held in November, followed by an optional seven-day retreat. See p181 for more details.

Nepal Vipassana Centre (Kathmandu (Map p136; ☎ 01-4250581; nvc@htp.com.np; Jyoti Bhawan Bldg, Kantipath, Kathmandu; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun-Fri); Budhanilkantha (☎ 01-4371655) Ten-day retreats are held twice a month (starting on the 1st and 14th of the month) at this centre northeast of Kathmandu, just north of Budhanilkantha, and there are also occasional shorter courses. These are serious meditation courses that involve rising at 4am every morning, not talking or making eye contact with anyone over the entire 10 days, and not eating after midday. The fee is donation only.

Nepali Yoga Center (Map p257; ☎ 061-532407; www.nepaliyoga.com) Daily hatha yoga classes (1½ hours, Rs 300) at 7.30am and 4.30pm, plus various longer courses can be arranged.

Osho Tapoban (☎ 01-4353762; www.tapoban.com; 6km northwest of Kathmandu) Commune near the Nagarjun Forest Reserve based on the teachings of Osho. Offers daily meditations, Saturday meditation courses and three-day courses every full moon. Accommodation is available and there's a decent vegetarian restaurant.

Patanjali Yoga Center (Map pp110-11; ☎ 01-4278437; www.saptayoga.com) A recommended place for yoga, west of Kathmandu's city centre. Five- and 10-day courses involve attending the centre for three hours per day and include lunch. In theory there are drop-in classes daily at 7am and 4pm but it's best to call in advance.

Rangjung Yeshe Institute (☎ 01-4490498; www.shedra.org) At Bodhnath's Ka-Nying Sheldrup Ling Gumpa. The institute offers a fairly advanced 10-day course ('Vajrayana empowerment') on Tibetan Buddhist teachings, practice and meditation, led by the monastery's abbot Chogyi Nyima Rinpoche. The course is held in mid-November, and costs US\$100. Daily meditation at 8am is open to all.

Sadhana Yoga (www.sadhana-yoga.org.np; Pokhara) One to 21 days are offered here at the cost of Rs 1600 per day, which includes accommodation, meals and steam and mud baths. See p254 for details.

Self-Awakening Centre (Map p116; ☎ 01-4256618; Babar Mahal Revisited; ☎ closed Sat) Commercial classes in t'ai chi, yoga, transcendental meditation and anything else you can dream up. Yoga classes cost Rs 200 per hour; t'ai chi is Rs 2800 per month.

CUSTOMS

All baggage is X-rayed on arrival and departure. In addition to the import and export of drugs, customs is concerned with the illegal export of antiques (see right). You may not import Nepali rupees, and only nationals of Nepal and India may import Indian currency. There are no other restrictions on bringing in either cash or travellers cheques, but the amount taken out at departure should not exceed the amount brought in. Officially you should declare cash or travellers cheques in excess of US\$2000, or the equivalent, but no-one seems to bother with this.

According to the customs sign in the Kathmandu airport arrivals hall, visitors are permitted to import the following articles for their personal use (and we quote):

Cigarettes, 200 sticks; cigars, 50 sticks; alcoholic liquor, one bottle not exceeding 1.15 litre; one binocular; one movie camera films 12 rolls; one tape recorder with 15 tape reels or cassettes; one per-

ambulator; one bicycle; one tricycle; one stick; and one set of fountain pens.

Antiques

Customs' main concern is preventing the export of antique works of art, with good reason, as Nepal has been a particular victim of international art theft over the last 20 years (see the boxed text, p54).

It is very unlikely that souvenirs sold to travellers will be antique (despite the claims of the vendors), but if there is any doubt, they should be cleared and a certificate obtained from the **Department of Archaeology** (Map p116; ☎ 01-4250686; Ramshah Path, Kathmandu) in the National Archives building. If you visit between 10am and 1pm you should be able to pick up a certificate by 5pm the same day. These controls also apply to the export of precious and semiprecious stones.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Despite the continual stream of bad news headlines that flows out of Kathmandu, the most toured areas of Nepal remain remarkably safe. See the box, p19, for an overview of dangers posed by the current struggle between the government and the Maoists.

You can minimise the chances of bumping into trouble by heeding the following general advice:

- Register with your embassy in Kathmandu (see below).

REGISTERING WITH YOUR EMBASSY

Officials of all embassies in Nepal stress the benefits of registering with them, telling them where you are trekking, and reporting in again when you return. The offices of the Kathmandu Environmental Education Project (KEEP; see p114) and the Himalayan Rescue Association (see p331) stock registration forms from most embassies, so it's simple to provide the information.

You can also register online with the **US Embassy** (<https://travelregistration.state.gov>), **Australian Embassy** and **New Zealand Embassy** (www.nzembassy.com; click on 'India'), and by sending an email to the **British Embassy** (ukconsular@mos.com.np). Include the contact details of your next of kin, and your travel dates, itinerary, passport number and insurance details.

GOVERNMENT TRAVEL ADVICE

The following governments publish useful travel advisories, highlighting entry requirements, medical facilities, areas with health and safety risks, civil unrest or other dangers, and are generally bang up to date.

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (☎ 1300 139 281; www.smarttraveller.gov.au)

Canadian Consular Affairs (☎ 1-800-267 6788; www.voyage.gc.ca)

New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (☎ 04-439 8000; www.mft.govt.nz/travel/index.html)

UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (☎ 0845-8502829; www.fco.gov.uk/travel)

US Department of State (☎ 1-888-407-4747, 1-202-501-4444; http://travel.state.gov/travel)

- Seek out local advice on safe/unsafe areas, but be sceptical of official tourist information and trekking touts.
- Keep an eye on the local press to find out about impending strikes, demonstrations and curfews – see the websites p22.
- Don't ever break curfews – instructions have been given to shoot those who are found breaking curfew.
- Don't travel during *bandhs* (strikes) or blockades. Get very nervous if you notice that you are the only car on the streets of Kathmandu!
- Be flexible with your travel arrangements in case your transport is affected by a *bandh* or security situation.
- Avoid marches, demonstrations or disturbances, as they can quickly turn violent.
- Don't trek alone, even on a day hike. Lone women should avoid travelling alone with a male guide.
- Be familiar with the symptoms of altitude sickness when trekking and observe sensible acclimatisation.
- Consider flying to destinations outside Kathmandu to avoid travelling through areas where there have been disturbances.
- Avoid travelling by night buses and keep bus travel in general to a minimum.
- Be prepared to pay the Maoists a 'tax' if approached while trekking and budget the cash for that eventuality. Trekkers have on occasion been beaten up for not paying this tax. It's just not worth arguing with these guys.
- Keep photocopies of your passport, visa, flight ticket and travellers cheques separate from the originals.

Scams

Be wary of deals offered by gem dealers (especially in Thamel, Kathmandu) that involve

you buying stones to sell for a 'vast profit' at home. The dealers' stories vary, but are usually along the lines of the dealer not being able to export the stones without paying heavy taxes, so you take them and meet another dealer when you get home, who will sell them to a local contact and you both share the profit. Travellers falling for this ruse is not as unusual as you might expect.

Other scams include young kids asking for milk; you buy the milk at a designated store at an inflated price, the kid then returns the milk and pockets some of the mark-up (you can prevent this by opening the milk).

Be wary of kids who seem to know the capital of any country you can think of; a request for money will arrive at some point. Then there are the 'holy men' who will do their best to plant a *tika* (a red paste denoting blessing) on your forehead, only to then demand significant payment.

Credit card scam is not unusual; travellers have bought some souvenirs only to find thousand of dollars worth of Internet porn subscriptions chalked up on their bill.

Strikes & Demonstrations

Nepal's political process involves frequent demonstrations and strikes – some called by politicians, some by student groups and some by Maoists, and some by all three! Most common are street processions and rallies in the centre of Kathmandu. It's best to avoid large groups of slogan-chanting youths, in case you end up on the downstream side of a police *lathi* charge (a team of police wielding bamboo staves) or worse.

The US Embassy website gives details of upcoming demonstrations and strikes; go to <http://nepal.usembassy.gov> and click on 'Demonstration Alert'.

A normal procession or demonstration is a *julus*. If things escalate there may be a *chakka jam* (jam the wheels), when all vehicles stay off the street, or a *bandh*, when all shops, schools and offices are closed as well. When roads are closed the government generally runs buses with armed policemen from the airport to major hotels, returning to the airport from Tridevi Marg at the east end of Thamel.

Theft

While petty theft is not on the scale that exists in many countries, reports of theft from hotel rooms in tourist areas (including along trekking routes) are commonplace, and theft with violence is not unheard of. Never store valuables or money in your hotel room.

One of the most common forms of theft is the rifling of backpacks on the roofs of buses. Try to make your pack as theft-proof as possible – small padlocks and cover bags are a good deterrent.

There's little chance of ever retrieving your gear if it is stolen, and even getting a police report for an insurance claim can be difficult. Try the tourist police, or if there aren't any, the local police station. If you're not getting anywhere, go to **Interpol** (☎ 01-4412602) at the Police Headquarters in Naxal, Kathmandu. The documentation requires a passport photo and photocopies of your passport and visa; the process takes two days.

Traffic, Pollution & Hassle

Traffic on Kathmandu's streets is a rum-pus of pollution-belching vehicles with two, three and four wheels. The combination of ancient vehicles, low-quality fuel and lack of emission controls makes the streets of Kathmandu particularly dirty, noisy and unpleasant. Traffic rules exist, but are rarely enforced; be especially careful when crossing streets or riding a bicycle – traffic is supposed to travel on the left side of the road, but many drivers simply choose the most convenient side, which can make walking in Kathmandu a deeply stressful experience. Remember that pedestrians account for over 40% of all traffic fatalities in Nepal.

Consider bringing a face mask to filter out dust and emission particles, especially if you plan to ride a bicycle or motorcycle in Kathmandu.

A minor hassle in Thamel comes from the barrage of irritating flute sellers, tiger-balm hawkers, chess-set sellers, musical-instrument vendors, travel-agency touts, hashish suppliers, freelance trekking guides and rickshaw drivers. In Kathmandu's and Patan's Durbar Squares you'll also come across a string of would-be guides whose trade has been hit badly by the downturn in tourism. There's less hassle in Bhaktapur, though there are some persistent thangka (Tibetan paintings on cotton) touts.

Trekking & Hiking

Fired up by the gung-ho stories of adventurous travellers, it is also easy to forget that mountainous terrain carries an inherent risk. There are posters plastered around Kathmandu with the faces of missing trekkers and travellers. Several solo trekkers go missing every year from the Everest region and one foreign trekker was murdered in Langtang in 2002. In October 2005 two women hikers disappeared (in two separate cases) while hiking in the Nagarjun Forest Reserve, just 5km from Kathmandu. Several tourists have been robbed along the trails to the World Peace Pagoda and Sarangkot, outside Pokhara.

In rural areas of Nepal rescue services are limited and medical facilities are primitive or nonexistent. Moreover, the Maoist insurgency has destroyed many rural phone lines and forced the closure of some park offices and police posts, which have traditionally provided security, information and emergency services for trekkers.

Only a tiny minority of trekkers end up in trouble, but accidents can often be avoided or the risks minimised if people have a realistic understanding of trekking requirements. At a minimum you should never trek alone. See p332 for more advice.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Wheelchair facilities, ramps and lifts (and even pavements!) are virtually nonexistent throughout Nepal and getting around the packed, twisting streets of traditional towns can be a real challenge. It is common for hotels to be multilevel, with most rooms on the upper floors, and many places – even midrange establishments – do not have lifts. Bathrooms equipped with grips and railings are not found anywhere, except perhaps in some of the top-end hotels.

There is no reason why a visit and even a trek could not be custom-tailored through a reliable agent for those with reasonable mobility. As an inspiration, consider Eric Weihenmayer who became the first blind climber to summit Everest in 2001 (and wrote a book called *Touch the Top of the World*), or Thomas Whittaker who summited in 1998 with an artificial leg, at the age of 50.

Accessible Journeys (www.disabilitytravel.com) is a US company that has experience in arranging private tours for disabled travellers. **Navyo Nepal** (☎ 01-4280056; www.navyonepal.com) in Nepal has some experience in running cultural tours and treks for people with disabilities. A useful general website is **Accessible Travel Source** (www.accessible.com).

DISCOUNT CARDS

There aren't any noticeable discounts for holders of a student or seniors card. Those under 30 can get discounts on flights to India without a student card.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Nepali Embassies & Consulates

For embassies and consulates not listed below check out the websites of Nepal's **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (www.mofa.gov.np) or **Department of Immigration** (www.immi.gov.np/location.php).

Australia Consulate General (☎ 08-9386 2102; gregcam@iinet.net.au; Suite 2, 16 Robinson St, Nedlands, WA 6009); Honorary Consulate-General (☎ 02-9223 6161, fax 9223 6144; Level 13, Pitt St, Sydney, NSW 2000); Honorary Consulate-General (☎ 3220 2007; konbridge@selcon.com.au; Level 7, 344 Queen St, Brisbane, Queensland 4000)

Bangladesh (☎ 02-9892490; medhaka@bdmail.net; United Nations Rd, Rd 2, Baridhara, Dhaka)

Canada (☎ 416-865 0200; fax 416-865 0904; Royal Bank Plaza, South Tower, 32nd fl, PO Box 33, Toronto, Ontario M5J 2J9)

China (☎ 010-6532 1795; beijing@nepalembassy.org.cn; No 1, Xi Liu Jie, Sanlitun Lu, Beijing 100600) See also Tibet.

France (☎ 01 46 22 48 67; www.nepalembassy.org; 45 bis rue des Acacias, 75017 Paris) Consulate-General in Toulouse and Rouen.

Germany Embassy (☎ 030-3435 9920; www.nepalembassy-germany.com; Guerickestrasse 27, 10587 Berlin-Charlottenburg); Honorary Consulate (☎ 0221-2 33 83 81; www.konsulatnepal.de, Cologne)

India Embassy (☎ 011-23327361; ramjanki@del.2.vsnl.net.in; 1 Barakhamba Rd, New Delhi 110001); Consulate-General (☎ 033-24561224; rncg@cal.vsnl.net.in; 1 National Library Ave, Alipore, Kolkata/Calcutta 700027)

Japan (☎ 03-3705 5558; nepembjp@big.or.jp; 14-19 Todoroki 7-chome, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo 158-0082)

Myanmar (Burma; ☎ 01-545 880; membygn@datseco.com.mm; 16 Natmang Yeiktha/Park Ave, PO Box 84, Yangon/Rangoon)

Netherlands (☎ 020-6241 530; www.nepal.nl; Keizersgracht 463, 1017 DK, Amsterdam)

Thailand (☎ 0-2391 7240; nepembkk@asiaaccess.net.th; 189 Soi 71, Sukhumvit Rd, Prakanong, Bangkok 10110)

Tibet (☎ 0891-681 5744; rncglx@public.ls.xz.cn; Norbulingka Rd 13, Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region)

UK (☎ 020-7229 1594; www.nepembassy.org.uk; 12A Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QU)

USA Embassy (☎ 202-667 4550; www.nepalembassyusa.org; 2131 Leroy Pl NW, Washington, DC 20008); Consulate-General (☎ 270-370 3988; fax 953 2038; 820 2nd Ave, 17th fl, New York, NY 10017) Honorary consulates in San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, Marina Del Rey and Sun Valley, Idaho.

Embassies & Consulates in Nepal

Travellers continuing beyond Nepal may need visas for Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar (Burma) or Thailand. The only visas dished out in Kathmandu for Tibet (actually a Chinese visa and a travel permit for Tibet) are for organised groups; individuals wishing to travel to China or Tibet may find it easier to get a visa before arriving in Nepal (Delhi is a good place to get one). See p381 for advice about travelling independently in Tibet.

Foreign embassies and consulates located in Kathmandu include:

Australia (Map pp110-11; ☎ 01-4371678; www.embassy.gov.au/np; Bansbari) Beyond the Ring Rd in Maharajganj.

Bangladesh (Map pp110-11; ☎ 01-4372843; fax 4373265; Maharajganj; ☎ 9am-1.15pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Visa application mornings only; tourist visas are not issued here, but are available on arrival in Dhaka.

Canada (Map pp110-11; ☎ 01-4415193; www.cconepal.org.np; Lazimpat)

China (Map pp110-11; ☎ 01-4411740; www.chinaembassy.org.np; Baluwatar; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Fri) Visa applications are accepted Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9.30am to 11.30am; passports are generally returned the next working day between 4pm and 4.30pm, though same-day express services are possible. If applying yourself you will need to have proof (such as an air ticket to Beijing or Shanghai) that you are not travelling via Tibet.

France (Map p116; ☎ 01-4412332, 4411740; www.ambafrance-np.org; Lazimpat; ☎ 9am-12.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri)

Germany (Map pp110-11; ☎ 01-4412786, 4416832; www.kathmandu.dipl.de; Gyaneshwar)

India (Map p116; ☎ 01-4410900; fax 4413132; www.south-asia.com/Embassy-India; Lainchaur; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri) Visa applications 9.30am to noon, collect visas 4pm to 5pm. Allow up to two weeks for processing tourist visas, which cost from Rs 2100 to Rs 3200 depending on nationality, plus a Rs 300 telex fee (Rs 1000 telex fee for US citizens) and are valid for six months. Queues start forming outside the embassy gates around 4am, as only the first 60 or so people get in before the gates slam shut. Agencies will do the queuing for you for a service fee of around Rs 1000 to Rs 2000 and will save you several days of grief. Transit visas (Rs 350; valid for 15 days from date of issue) are issued the same day, start from that date and are nonextendable. Two photos and a photocopy of your passport are required.

Japan (Map pp110-11; ☎ 01-4426680; comjpn@mos.com.np; Pani Pokhari)

Myanmar (Burma; Map p184; ☎ 01-5524788; fax 5523402; Chakupath, nr Patan Dhoka (City Gate), Patan; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Visa applications mornings only. Fourteen-day visas are available, four photos are required, 24-hour turnaround; the cost is US\$20.

Netherlands (Map p184; ☎ 01-5523444; consulate@snv.org.np; Bakhundol, Patan; ☎ 10am-noon Mon & Wed-Fri, 10am-11am Tue)

New Zealand (Map pp110-11; ☎ 01-4412436; fax 4414750; Dilli Bazaar) Honorary consulate only.

Pakistan (Map pp110-11; ☎ 01-4374011; fax 4374012; Narayan Gopal Chowk, Ring Rd, Maharajganj; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Thailand (Map pp110-11; ☎ 01-4371410; fax 4371408; Bansbari; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Visa applications accepted 9.30am to 12.30pm, two photos required, 24-hour turnaround; the cost is about US\$10, though paying the visa fees into a local bank is a pain; most nationalities don't need a visa for stays of less than 30 days.

UK (Map p116; ☎ 01-4410583; www.britisheembassy.gov.uk/nepal; Lainchaur; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Thu, 8.30-11.30am Fri)

USA Embassy (Map pp110-11; ☎ 01-4411179; http://nepal.us.embassy.gov; Pani Pokhari; US citizen services ☎ 1-4pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 8am-4.30pm Tue, Thu); Consular Section (Map p116; ☎ 4445577; Yak & Yeti Hotel, Kathmandu)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Nepal's colourful holidays and festivals occur virtually year-round and a visit to Nepal is almost certain to coincide with at least one, particularly in the Kathmandu Valley. Certain times of year, most notably towards the end of the monsoon in August and September, are packed with festivals. They go a long way towards compensating for the less-than-ideal weather at this time of year.

Nepal's most spectacular festivities are its chariot processions, similar to epic processions held in India. These tottering 20m-tall chariots of the gods are often chronically and comically unstable (imagine hauling a 60ft-tall jelly through the streets of Kathmandu) and moving them requires hundreds of enthusiastic devotees. See the following Chaitra Dasain, Bisket Jatra, Indra Jatra and Rato Machhendranath festivals.

Holidays and festivals aren't declared more than a year in advance, so accurate prediction is difficult. The following calendar lists Nepal's major festivals in the months they occur with the Nepali lunar months listed in brackets. Tibetan festivals are organised by the Tibetan lunar calendar and may fall in different months in different years.

January–February (Magh)

Magh Sankranti The end of the coldest winter months is marked by ritual bathing during the Nepali month of Magh. The festival is dated by the movement north of the winter sun and is one of the few festivals not timed by the lunar calendar. Soon after, on the new-moon day, the Tribeni Mela (a *mela*

NEPALI CALENDARS

Nepali holidays and festivals are principally dated by the lunar calendar, falling on days relating to new or full moons. The lunar calendar is divided into bright and dark fortnights. The bright fortnight is the two weeks of the waxing moon, as it grows to become *punima* (the full moon). The dark fortnight is the two weeks of the waning moon, as the full moon shrinks to become *ausni* (the new moon).

The Nepali New Year starts on 14 April with the month of Baisakh, and is 57 years ahead of the Gregorian calendar used in the West. Thus the year 2007 in the West is 2064 in Nepal. The Newars, on the other hand, start their New Year from the day after Deepawali (the third day of Tihar), which falls on the night of the new moon in late October or early November. Their calendar is 880 years behind the Gregorian calendar, so 2007 in the West is 1127 to the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley.

is a fair) is held at various places including Devghat (p274) in the Terai, where over 100,000 people bathe in the nearby Narayani River. Celebrations are also held at Ridi Bazaar, at the confluence of the Kali Gandaki and Ridi Khola (see p301).

Basant Panchami The start of spring is celebrated by honouring Saraswati; since she is the goddess of learning this festival has special importance for students. The shrine to Saraswati just below the platform at the top of Swayambhunath is the most popular locale for the festivities, although Kathmandu is also popular. This is also a particularly auspicious time for weddings.

Losar Tibetan New Year commences with the new moon in February and falls in either Magh or Falgun. It is welcomed with particular fervour at the great stupa of Bodhnath (Boudha), as well as at Swayambhunath and in the Tibetan community at Jawlakhel, near Patan. The Sherpa people of the Solu Khumbu region also celebrate at this time.

February–March (Falgun)

Maha Shivaratri Shiva's birthday falls on the new-moon day of the Nepali month of Falgun. Festivities take place at all Shiva temples, but most particularly at Pashupatinath, and hundreds of sadhus flock here from all over Nepal and India. The king of Nepal makes an appearance late in the day. The crowds bathing in the Bagmati's holy waters at this time are a colourful and wonderful sight.

Holi This exciting festival (also known as Fagu) is closely related to the water festivals of Thailand and Myanmar and takes place on the full-moon day in the month of Falgun. By this time, late in the dry season, it is beginning to get hot and the water which is sprayed around during the festival is a reminder of the cooling monsoon days to come. Holi is also known as the Festival of Colours and coloured powder (particularly red) and water are also dispensed. Foreigners get special attention, so if you venture out on Holi leave your camera behind (or keep it well protected) and wear old clothes that can get colour-stained.

March–April (Chaitra)

Chaitra Dasain Also known as Small Dasain, this festival takes place exactly six months prior to the more important Dasain celebration. Both Dasains are dedicated to Durga and once again goats and buffaloes are sacrificed early in the morning in Kot Sq in central Kathmandu. The Chaitra Dasain sacrifices also signal the start of the month-long Seto (White) Machhendranath chariot festival in Kathmandu (see p125).

Balkumari Jatra The small town of Thimi celebrates this exciting festival at this time (see p209). The New Year is also an important time in the valley for ritual bathing, and crowds of hill people visit the Buddhist stupas of Swayambhunath and Bodhnath.

April–May (Baisakh)

Bisket Jatra Nepali New Year starts in mid-April, at the beginning of the month of Baisakh; the Bisket chariot

festival in Bhaktapur is the most spectacular welcome for the New Year, and one of the most exciting annual events in the valley (see p203).

Rato Machhendranath This festival in Patan, whose highlight is the showing of the sacred vest of the god Machhendranath, involves a month-long procession of a temple chariot (see p191).

May–June (Jeth)

Buddha Jayanti (the Buddha's Birthday) A great fair is held at Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha, and there are celebrations in Swayambhunath, Bodhnath and Patan. The Swayambhunath stupa's collection of rare thangkas is displayed on the southern wall of the courtyard on this single day each year. There are also colourful monk dances.

July–August (Saaun)

Naga Panchami On the fifth day after the new moon in the month of Saaun, *nagas* (serpent deities) are honoured all over the country. *Nagas* are considered to have magical powers over the monsoon rains. Protective pictures of the *nagas* are hung over doorways of houses and food is put out for snakes, including a bowl of rice. See p206 for more information.

Janai Purnima Around the full moon in the month of Saaun, all high-caste men (Chhetri and Brahmin) must change the *janai* (sacred thread), which they wear looped over their left shoulder. Janai Purnima also brings crowds of pilgrims to sacred Gosainkund Lake, across the mountains to the north of Kathmandu, where they garland a statue of Shiva and throw coins at a sacred lingam. A direct channel is said to lead from the lake to the pond in the Kumbeshwar Temple in Patan and a silver lingam is installed in the pond for the occasion (see p190).

Ghanta Karna This festival is named after 'bell ears', a horrible demon who wore bell earrings to drown out the name of Vishnu, his sworn enemy. This festival, on the 14th day of the dark fortnight of Saaun, celebrates his destruction when a god, disguised as a frog, lured him into a deep well where the people stoned and clubbed him to death. Ghanta Karna is burnt in effigy on this night throughout Newari villages and evil is cleansed from the land for another year.

August–September (Bhadra)

Gai Jatra This 'Cow Festival' takes place immediately after Janai Purnima on the day after the Saaun full moon, and is dedicated to those who died during the preceding year. Newars believe that, after death, cows will guide them to Yama, the god of the underworld, and finding your way on this important journey will be much easier if by chance you should be holding onto a cow's tail at the moment of death. On this day cows are led through the streets of the valley's towns and small boys dress up as cows. The festival is celebrated with maximum energy on the streets of Bhaktapur.

DASAIN FESTIVAL

The pleasant post-monsoon period, when the sky is clearest, the air is cleanest and the rice is ready for harvesting, is also the time for Nepal's biggest annual festival. Dasain lasts for 15 days, finishing on the full-moon day of late September or early October. Although much of Dasain is a quiet family affair, there are colourful events for visitors to see both in Kathmandu and in the country. Dasain is also known as Durga Puja, as the festival celebrates the victory of the goddess Durga over the forces of evil personified in the buffalo demon Mahisasura. Since Durga is bloodthirsty, the festival is marked by wholesale blood-letting and features the biggest animal sacrifice of the year.

Before Dasain commences, Nepalis spring-clean their houses. In the country, swings and primitive hand-powered Ferris wheels are erected at the entrance to villages or in the main squares. On the first day of the festival, a sacred jar of water is prepared in each house and barley seeds are planted in carefully prepared soil; getting the seeds to sprout a few centimetres during Dasain ensures a good harvest.

Fulpati (or Phulpati) is the first really important day of Dasain and is called the 'Seventh Day' although it may not actually fall on the seventh day. Fulpati means 'Sacred Flowers', and a jar containing flowers is carried from Gorkha to Kathmandu and presented to the king at the Tundikhel parade ground. The flowers symbolise Taleju, the goddess of the royal family, whose most important image is in the Gorkha Palace. From the parade ground, the flowers are transported on a palanquin to Hanuman Dhoka (the old Royal Palace) in Durbar Sq, where they are inspected again by the king and his entourage.

Maha Astami or the 'Great Eighth Day' and **Kala Ratri**, the 'Black Night', follow Fulpati, and this is the start of the sacrifices and offerings to Durga. The hundreds of goats you may see contentedly grazing in the Tundikhel parkland prior to Maha Astami are living on borrowed time. At midnight, in a temple courtyard near Durbar Sq, eight buffaloes and 108 goats are beheaded, each with a single stroke of the sword or knife.

The next day is **Navami** and the Kot Sq near Durbar Sq, the scene of the great massacre of noblemen that led to the Rana period of Nepali history (see p33), is the scene for another great massacre. Visitors can witness the bloodshed, but you'll need to arrive early to secure a place. Sacrifices continue through the day and blood is sprinkled on the wheels of cars and other vehicles to ensure a safe year on the road. At the airport, each Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation aircraft will have a goat sacrificed to it! The average Nepali does not eat much meat, but on this day almost everybody in the country will find that goat is on the menu for dinner.

The 10th day of the festival, **Vijaya Dashami**, is again a family affair as cards and greetings are exchanged, family visits are made and parents place a *tika* on their children's foreheads.

In the evening, the conclusion of Dasain is marked by processions and masked dances in the towns of the Kathmandu Valley. The **Kharga Jatra**, or sword procession, features priests dressed up as the various gods and carrying wooden swords, symbolic of the weapon with which Durga slew the buffalo demon. This day also celebrates the victory of Lord Rama over the evil, 10-headed, demon-king Ravana in the Ramayana. The barley sprouts that were planted on the first day are picked and worn as small bouquets in the hair.

Kartika Purnima, the full-moon day marking the end of the festival, is celebrated with gambling in many households, and you will see even small children avidly putting a few coins down on various local games of chance.

Krishna Jayanti (Krishna's Birthday) The seventh day after the full moon in the month of Bhadra is celebrated as Krishna's birthday, sometimes also known as Krishnas-thami. An all-night vigil is kept at the Krishna Mandir in Patan on the night before his birthday. Oil lamps light the temple and singing continues through the night.

Tej The Festival of Women lasts three days, from the second to the fifth day after the Bhadra new moon, and is based in Pashupatinath (see p53).

Indra Jatra This colourful and exciting festival manages to combine homage to Indra with an important annual appearance by Kumari (the living goddess), the paying of respects to Bhairab and commemoration of the conquest of the valley by Prithvi Narayan Shah. The festival also marks the end of the monsoon. It was during the Indra Jatra festival back in 1768 that Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered the valley and unified Nepal, so this important event is also commemorated in this most spectacular of Kathmandu occasions (see p134).

September–October (Ashoj/Ashwin)

Pachali Bhairab Jatra The fearsome form of Bhairab, as Pachali Bhairab, is honoured on the fourth day of the bright fortnight in September or early October. Bhairab's blood-thirsty nature means that there are numerous sacrifices.

Dasain Nepal's biggest annual festival. Dasain lasts for 15 days, finishing on the full-moon day of late September or early October. For more about the festival see p365; for information on disruptions to services during the festival see opposite.

October–November (Kartik)

Tihar With its colourful Festival of Lights, Tihar (also called Diwali or Deepawali after the third day of celebrations) is the most important Hindu festival in India, and in Nepal it ranks second only to Dasain. The five days of festival activities take place in late October or early November. The festival honours certain animals, starting with offerings of rice to the crows which are sent by Yama, the god of death, as his 'messengers of death'. On the second day, dogs are honoured with *tikas* and garlands of flowers; in the afterworld it is dogs who guide departed souls across the river of the dead. On the third day cows have their horns painted silver and gold. On the fourth day bullocks are honoured.

Deepawali The third day of the Tihar Festival is the most important day of the festival when Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, comes to visit every home that has been suitably lit for her presence. No-one likes to turn down a visit from the goddess of wealth and so homes throughout the country are brightly lit with candles and lamps. The effect is highlighted because Deepawali falls on the new-moon day.

Newari New Year The fourth day of Tihar is also the start of the New Year for the Newari people of the Kathmandu Valley.

Bhai Tika On the fifth day of Tihar, brothers and sisters are supposed to meet and place *tikas* on each others' foreheads. Sisters offer small gifts of fruit and sweets to their brothers while the brothers give their sisters money in return. The markets and bazaars are busy supplying the appropriate gifts.

Haribodhini Ekadashi An *ekadashi* falls twice in every lunar month, on the 11th day after each new and full moon, and is regarded as an auspicious day. The Haribodhini Ekadashi, falling in late October or early November (on the 11th day after the new moon) is the most important. On this day Vishnu awakens from his four-month monsoonal slumber. The best place to see the festivities is at the temple of the sleeping Vishnu in Budhanilkantha (p182). Vishnu devotees make a circuit of important Vishnu temples from Ichangu Narayan to Changu Narayan, Bishankhu Narayan and Sekh Narayan, all in the Kathmandu Valley.

Mahalakshmi Puja Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth, and to farmers wealth is rice. Therefore this harvest festi-

val, immediately following Haribodhini Ekadashi, honours the goddess with sacrifices and colourful dances.

Mani Rimdu The Sherpa festival of Mani Rimdu takes place at the monastery of Tengboche in the Solu Khumbu region, on the Everest Base Camp trek. This popular three-day festival features masked dances and dramas, which celebrate the victory of Buddhism over the existing Tibetan Bön religion. The dates for the festivals are worked out according to the Tibetan lunar calendar and occur in October or November. See www.tengboche.org for details and dates. Another Mani Rimdu festival takes place six months later in the lunar month of Jeth (May–June) at Thami Gompa, a day's walk west of Namche Bazaar.

November–December (Mangsir)

Bala Chaturdashi Like *ekadashi*, there are two *chaturdashis* each month; Bala Chaturdashi falls on the new-moon day in late November or early December. Pilgrims flock to Pashupatinath, burning oil lamps at night, scattering grain for the dead and bathing in the holy Bagmati River – see p193.

Sita Bibaha Panchami On the fifth day of the bright fortnight in late November or early December, pilgrims from all over Nepal and India flock to Janakpur (the birth-place of Sita) to celebrate the marriage of Sita to Rama. The wedding is re-enacted with a procession carrying Rama's image to Sita's temple by elephant (see p315).

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

There's little of an open gay scene in Nepal. Homosexuality is not explicitly criminalised but 'any kind of unnatural sex' can bring a year's prison term. Gay Nepalis are frequently subject to police harassment and blackmail. Gay couples holding hands in public will experience no difficulties, as this is socially acceptable, but public displays of intimacy by anyone are frowned upon.

The Blue Diamond Society (☎ 01-4427608; www.bds.org.np) is the first gay organisation in Kathmandu. It provides education, support and advice to Nepal's gay and *methi* (transgender) community, and runs the country's only AIDS/HIV prevention programme, partially thanks to a US\$40,000 grant donated by Sir Elton John.

Aashnepal Travel & Tours (☎ 01-4228768; www.aashnepal.com.np) is a gay-friendly tour company in Kathmandu.

**HOLIDAYS
Public Holidays**

Many holidays and festivals affect the working hours of government offices and banks, which close for the following public holi-

DASAIN STOPPAGES

Dasain (15 days in September or October) is the most important of all Nepali celebrations. Tens of thousands of Nepalis hit the road to return home to celebrate with their families. This means that while villages are full of life if you are trekking, buses and planes are fully booked and overflowing, porters may be hard to find (or more expensive than usual) and cars are hard to hire. Many hotels and restaurants in regional towns close down completely, and doing business in Kathmandu (outside Thamel) becomes almost impossible.

The most important days, when everything comes to a total halt, are the ninth day (when thousands of animals are sacrificed), and the 10th day (when blessings are received from elder relatives and superiors). Banks and government offices are generally closed from the eighth day of the festival to the 12th day.

days and some or all of the days of the festivals below (note this list is not exhaustive). The exact festival dates change annually.

Prithvi Narayan Shah's Birthday 10 January

Basant Panchami January/February

Democracy Day 18 February

Maha Shivaratri February/March

Bisket Jatra (Nepali New Year) 14 April

King's Birthday 7 July

Janai Purnima July/August

Teej August/September

Indra Jatra September

Dasain September/October

Tihar October/November

Constitution Day 9 November

INSURANCE

A travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is an excellent idea in Nepal. There is a wide variety of policies available, so check the small print carefully. Some policies exclude 'dangerous activities', which may include riding a motorbike and trekking (and definitely bungee jumping and rafting). Choose a policy that covers medical and emergency repatriation, including helicopter evacuation for trekkers and general medical evacuation to Bangkok or Delhi, which alone can cost a cool US\$40,000.

You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later make sure you keep all documentation. Some policies ask you to call back (reverse charges) to a centre in your home country where an immediate assessment of your problem is made.

Bear in mind that many insurance policies do not cover 'acts of terrorism' (ie Maoists), civil war or regions that your country's

government advises against travel to, so double-check how your insurance company defines these notions and Nepal's political situation.

Worldwide cover to travellers from over 44 countries is available online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

INTERNET ACCESS

Email and Internet services are offered in dozens of places in Kathmandu and Pokhara and are generally cheap at around Rs 30 per hour. Internet access is also available in most other towns – you can even send email from Namche Bazaar on the Everest trek – but connections are usually slow and relatively expensive, as connection may involve a long-distance call to Kathmandu.

LEGAL MATTERS

Hashish has been illegal since 1973, but it's still readily available in Nepal. Thamel is full of shifty, whispering dealers. Possession of a small amount involves little risk, although potential smokers should keep the less-than-salubrious condition of Nepali jails firmly in mind. Don't try taking any out of the country either – travellers have been arrested at the airport on departure.

If you get caught smuggling something serious – drugs or gold – chances are you'll end up in jail, without trial, and will remain there until someone pays for you to get out. Jail conditions in Nepal are reportedly horrific. Bribery may be an option to avoid jail in the first place but unless you can do it in a way which is deniable, you may just end up in deeper strife.

A handful of foreigners currently languish in jails in Kathmandu, mostly for drug offences. If you want to pay a humanitarian

visit you can contact your embassy for a list of names and their locations. Take along items of practical use, such as reading matter, blankets and fresh fruit.

Killing a cow is illegal in Nepal and carries a punishment of two years in prison.

MAPS

The best maps in Nepal are those produced by **Karto-Atelier** (www.karto-atelier.com), under the name Gecko Maps. These locally made maps are a result of German-Nepali collaboration and are outstanding. Currently available are maps to Nepal, Kathmandu, Chitwan and Island Peak, for Rs 800 each.

There are many locally produced and cheaper maps available in Nepal which for most trekkers prove quite adequate. The main series is produced by **Himalayan Map-house** (www.himalayanmaphouse.com) and these include the brand Nepa Maps. They are decent quality and reasonably priced at Rs 200 to Rs 400 each but they definitely aren't reliable enough to use for off-route trekking. These and other maps are sold at a string of glossy map shops throughout Thamel and elsewhere in Kathmandu.

For details of trekking maps and online map shops see p328.

MONEY

The Nepali rupee (Rs) is divided into 100 paisa (p). There are coins for denominations of one, two, five and 10 rupees, and bank notes in denominations of one, two, five, 10, 20, 25, 50, 100, 500 and 1000 rupees. This is a great contrast to a time not long ago, when outside the Kathmandu Valley, it was rare to see any paper money. Mountaineering books from the 1950s often comment on the porters whose sole duty was to carry the expedition's money – in cold, hard cash.

Away from major centres, changing a Rs 1000 note can be very difficult, so it is always a good idea to keep a stash of small-denomination notes. Even in Kathmandu, many small businesses – especially rickshaw and taxi drivers – simply don't have sufficient spare money to allow them the luxury of carrying a wad of change.

ATMs

Standard Chartered Bank has ATMs in Kathmandu and Pokhara; you can get cash

advances on both Visa and MasterCard 24 hours a day, though travellers have reported that these machines don't take cards that run on the Cirrus system. Other banks, such as the Himalaya Bank, also have ATMs but some only accept local cards. Using an ATM attached to a bank during business hours will minimise the hassle in the rare event that the machine eats your card.

Cash

Major international currencies, including the US dollar, euro and pounds sterling, are readily accepted. In Nepal the Indian rupee is also like a hard currency – the Nepali rupee is pegged to the Indian rupee at the rate of INRs 100 = Rs 160. Be aware that INRs 500 and INRs 1000 notes are not accepted anywhere in Nepal, apparently due to forgeries.

Changing Money

Official exchange rates are set by the government's Nepal Rastra Bank and listed in the daily newspapers. Rates at the private banks vary, but are generally not far from the official rate.

There are exchange counters at the international terminal at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan Airport and banks and/or moneychangers at the various border crossings. Pokhara and the major border towns also have official moneychanging facilities, but changing travellers cheques can be difficult elsewhere in the country, even in some quite large towns. If you are trekking, take enough small-denomination cash rupees to last the whole trek.

The best private banks are Himalaya Bank Nepal Bank Ltd and Standard Chartered Bank. Some hotels and resorts are licensed to change money but their rates are lower.

When you change money officially, you are required to show your passport, and you are issued with a foreign exchange encashment receipt showing your identity and the amount of hard currency you have changed. Hang onto the receipts as you need them to change excess rupees back into hard currency at banks. You can change rupees back into hard currency at most moneychangers without a receipt.

If you leave Nepal via Kathmandu's Tribhuvan Airport, the downstairs exchange counter will re-exchange the amount shown

on 'unused' exchange certificates. Official re-exchange is not possible at any bank branches at the border crossings.

Many upmarket hotels and businesses are obliged by the government to demand payment in hard currency; they will also accept rupees, but only if you can show a foreign exchange encashment receipt that covers the amount you owe them. In practice this regulation seems to be widely disregarded. Airlines are also required to charge tourists in hard currency, either in cash US dollars, travellers cheques or credit cards, and this rule is generally followed.

Credit Cards

Major credit cards are widely accepted at midrange and better hotels, restaurants and fancy shops in the Kathmandu Valley and Pokhara only.

Branches of Standard Chartered Bank and some other banks such as Nabil Bank and Himalaya Bank give cash advances against Visa and MasterCard in Nepali rupees only (no commission), and will also sell you foreign currency travellers cheques against the cards with a 2% commission.

The American Express (Amex) agent is Yeti Travels (p113) in Kathmandu. It advances travellers cheques to cardholders for a standard 1% commission.

International Transfers

In general it's easiest to send money through a private company such as **Western Union** (www.westernunion.com) or **Moneygram** (www.visitnepal.com/moneygram), which can arrange transfers within minutes. Western Union's agents in Nepal include Yeti Travels, Sita World Travel (see p113) and Nabil Bank. Moneygram uses Easylink, with offices in Thamel, Bodhnath, Butwal and Pokhara. To pick up funds at a Western Union branch you'll need your passport and ten-digit transfer code.

Note that money can often only be received in Nepali rupees, not US dollars.

Moneychangers

In addition to the banks there are licensed moneychangers in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Birganj, Kakarbhitta and Sunauli/Bhairawa. The rates are often marginally lower than the banks, but there are no commissions, they have much longer opening hours (typ-

ically from 9am to 7pm daily) and they are also much quicker, the whole process often taking no more than a few minutes.

Most licensed moneychangers will provide an exchange receipt; if they don't you may be able to negotiate better rates than those posted on their boards.

Tipping

Tipping is accepted (and appreciated) in tourist restaurants. Your loose change (or 5%) is fine in cheaper places; around 10% is fine in more expensive restaurants. Round up the fare for taxi drivers.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Bringing a video camera to Nepal poses no real problem, and there are no video fees to worry about. The exception to this is in Upper Mustang and Langtang border regions where an astonishing US\$1000 fee is levied.

Airport Security

All luggage (including carry-on cabin baggage) is X-rayed at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan Airport on the way in and the way out of the country; signs on the X-ray equipment state that the machines are not film-safe for undeveloped film. Have exposed film inspected manually when leaving the country.

Film & Equipment

There are numerous camera and film shops in Kathmandu and Pokhara and good-quality film is readily available. Do check, however, that the packaging has not been tampered with, and that the expiry date has not been exceeded. Out in the smaller cities and towns there is little choice and even greater chance of coming across expired film.

In Kathmandu there are numerous places offering a same-day service for print film (see p154). Typically, 100 ASA 36-exposure colour print film costs about Rs 150. Developing is typically around Rs 400 for 36 prints.

Slide film costs Rs 350 to 400 for Sensia (100 ASA) and a bit less for Elitechrome (Rs 280). Slide processing costs around Rs 360 for 36 mounted shots.

Almost all flavours of memory stick, flash card etc and batteries are available in Kathmandu.

A panoramic camera can be very useful if you're trekking; it's the only way to do service to those jaw-dropping views.

Photographing People

Most Nepalis are content to have their photograph taken, but always ask permission first. Sherpa people are an exception and can be very camera-shy. Bear in mind that if someone poses for you (especially sadhus – holy men), they will probably insist on being given *baksheesh* (a donation).

For more advice and general rules for photographing people and events in Nepal, please see p63.

Restrictions

It is not uncommon for temple guardians to disallow photos of their temple, and these wishes should be respected. Don't photograph army camps, checkpoints or bridges.

Technical Tips

Nepal is an exceptionally scenic country so bring plenty of film. To photograph Nepal's diverse attractions you need a variety of lenses, from a wide-angle lens if you're shooting in compact temple compounds to a long telephoto lens if you're after perfect mountain shots or close-ups of wildlife. A polarising filter is useful to increase contrast and bring out the blue of the sky.

Remember to allow for the intensity of mountain light when setting exposures at high altitude. At the other extreme it's surprising how often you find the light in Nepal is insufficient. Early in the morning, in the dense jungle of Royal Chitwan National Park or in gloomy temples and narrow streets, you may find yourself wishing you had high-speed film. A flash is often necessary for shots inside temples or to 'fill in' shots of sculptures and reliefs.

Rechargeable batteries can be juiced up at most trekking lodges for a fee of Rs 100 to 300 per hour. To charge up batteries or an iPod on a trek, consider a solar charger like the iSun or Solio (www.solio.com).

POST

The postal service to and from Nepal is, at best, erratic but can occasionally be amazingly efficient. Most articles do arrive at their destination...eventually.

Rates

Airmail rates for a 20g letter/postcard are Rs 2/1 within Nepal, Rs 18/15 to India/surrounding countries, Rs 35/25 to Europe/UK and Rs 40/30 to the USA/Australia. An aerogramme costs Rs 32 to the US and Australia and Rs 28 to Europe.

Registered mail costs Rs 85 for international destinations.

Courier

For a 500g package of documents **FedEx** (www.fedex.com/np/) and **DHL** (www.dhl.com) charge around US\$40 and US\$50 respectively to the US and UK; slightly less to Australia. FedEx offers a 25% discount if you drop documents directly to their office. Packages other than documents cost up to 50% more for the same weight.

Parcel Post

Having stocked up on souvenirs and gifts in Nepal, many people take the opportunity of sending them home from Kathmandu. Parcel post is not cheap or quick, but the service is reliable. Sea mail is much cheaper than airmail, but it is also much slower (packages take about 3½ months) and less reliable. As an idea, a 2kg package to the UK/US/India costs Rs 1600/2000/600 at airmail rate, 25% less at 'book post' rate.

The contents of a parcel must be inspected by officials *before* it is wrapped. There are packers at the Kathmandu foreign post office who will package it for a small fee. The maximum weight for sea mail is 20kg; for airmail it's 10kg, or 5kg for book post.

Some specialised shipping companies (see p113) offer air freight, which is considerably cheaper than airmail and not much more expensive than sea mail. It still goes by air; the catch is that it has to be picked up at an international airport and you'll have to deal with customs paperwork and fees there.

If an object is shipped out to you in Nepal, you may find that customs charges for clearance and collection at your end add up to more than the initial cost of sending it. Often it's worth paying extra to take it with you on the plane in the first place.

SHOPPING

Nepal is a shopper's paradise, whether you are looking for a cheap souvenir or a real work of art. Although you can find almost

anything in the tourist areas of Kathmandu, there are specialities in different parts of the Kathmandu Valley. Wherever you shop remember to bargain.

Prices are low for foreign products in Kathmandu and Pokhara but you'll soon realise that you get what you pay for. Thamel's shops in particular are full of poor-quality Indian-printed books, Pakistani pirated CDs and locally-made clothes that don't quite fit properly.

Remember that antiques (over 100 years old) cannot be taken out of the country, and baggage is inspected by Nepali customs with greater thoroughness on departure than on arrival (see p359). It helps to get a receipt and a description of any major purchase from the shop where you bought it.

Unless you are sure about the reliability of the shop, do not ask the shop where you made the purchase to send it for you. See opposite for details on posting goods home.

Bargaining

Bargaining is regarded as an integral part of most commercial transactions in Nepal, especially when dealing with souvenir shops, hotels and guides. Ideally, it should be an enjoyable social exchange, rather than a conflict of egos. Remember to keep things light; Nepalis do not ever appreciate aggressive behaviour. A good deal is reached when both parties are happy. Try to remember that Rs 10 might make quite a difference to the seller, but in hard currency it amounts to very little (less than US\$0.15).

Clothing & Embroidery

Tibetan and Nepali clothes have always been a popular buy, but Western fashions made strictly for the tourist market have also become a big industry.

Embroidery is popular and there are lots of little tailor shops around Kathmandu where the sewing machines whir away late into the night adding logos and Tibetan symbols to jackets, hats and T-shirts. Mountaineers like to return from Nepal with jackets carrying the message that this was the Country X, Year Y expedition to Peak Z. You can also buy badges for your backpack saying that you walked to Everest Base Camp or completed the Annapurna Circuit.

A Nepali *topi* (cap) is part of Nepali formal wear for a man and they are tradition-

ally made in Bhaktapur. There's a group of cap specialists between Indra Chowk and Asan Tole in the old part of Kathmandu. Caps typically cost from Rs 50 to 300.

Jewellery

Kathmandu's many small jewellery manufacturers turn out a wide variety of designs with an equally wide range of standards. You can buy jewellery ready-made, ask them to create a design for you or bring in something you would like copied. There are several good shops around greater Thamel, particularly down towards Chhetrapati. See p360 if you are approached to buy gems.

These outlets mainly cater to Western tastes but there are also shops for the local market as Nepali women, like Indian women, traditionally wear their wealth in jewellery. For a few rupees you can buy an armful of glass bangles or colourful beads by the handful.

Masks & Puppets

Papier-mâché masks and colourful puppets are sold at shops in Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur. Thimi is the manufacturing centre for masks, which are used in the traditional masked dances in September – it's interesting to see masks being made there. Ganesh, Bhairab and the Kumari are the most popular subjects for masks and they make good wall decorations.

Puppets make good gifts for children and are made in Bhaktapur as well as other centres. They're often of multiarmed deities clutching little wooden weapons in each hand. The puppet heads may be made of easily broken clay or more durable papier-mâché. Smaller puppets cost from around Rs 100 to 400 but you can also pay from Rs 500 to 1000 for a larger figure. As usual, quality does vary and the more puppets you inspect the more you will begin to appreciate the differences.

Metalwork

Patan is the valley centre for bronze casting and the best variety of metalwork is found in the shops around Patan's Durbar Sq (see p194 for more details).

Other Souvenirs

A *khukuri* (traditional knife of the Gurkhas) can cost from Rs 300 to 2000. Most

are made in eastern Nepal and come with a scabbard and a blade sharpener (*chakmak*). Notice the notch (*kaudi*) in the blade which allows blood to run off before hitting the hilt. You may well have troubles explaining the knife to customs officials in your country (always carry it in your check-in, rather than carry-on, baggage).

Bhaktapur is the centre for woodcarving, and you can find good objects in and around Tachupal Tole.

Cassettes and CDs of Nepali, Indian and general Himalayan music are a fine souvenir of a visit to Nepal, though much of it is of the woolly New Age variety. There are lots of music shops in Kathmandu selling local music as well as pirated Western tapes and CDs (Rs 150 to 250). The best-quality recordings are from Russia, though most come from Pakistan or Singapore. It's a good idea to test them out in the shop as there are a few rogues about. MP3 recordings are also available.

Tibetan crafts include a variety of religious items such as the *dorje* (thunderbolt symbol), prayer flags and the popular prayer wheels. Tibetans are keen traders, and prices at Bodhnath and Swayambhunath are often high. New Age Tibetophiles love Tibetan 'singing bowls', whose alloy of seven metals creates a ringing sound when you rotate a dowl around the rim, creating a sound said to be conducive to meditative thought.

Dhoop (incense) is a popular buy, as are spices, ranging from single spices like *jeera* (cumin), *besar* (turmeric) and *methi* (fenugreek) to various kinds of masala mixes.

Paper Products

Locally produced paper from the *lokta* (daphne plant) is used to make picture frames, photo albums, cards and lanterns. The *lokta* bark is boiled and beaten with wooden mallets and the pulp is spread over a frame to dry. The finished product (often mistakenly called rice paper) folds without creasing and is used on all official Nepali documents.

There's a good selection in the shops of Thamel and Bhaktapur, where you can see the manufacturing process.

Pashmina

One of the most popular souvenirs is a shawl or scarf made from fine *pashmina*

(the under hair of a mountain goat). The cost of a *pashmina* depends on the percentage of *pashmina* in the mix and from which part of the goat's body that *pashmina* originated, starting from the cheapest back wool and rising through the belly and chest to neck hair, which is about five times more expensive than back hair.

There are literally dozens of shops in Thamel selling *pashmina* items. The cheapest shawls are a 70/30% cotton/*pashmina* blend, and these cost around Rs 1500 for a 78cm by 2m shawl. Silk-*pashmina* blends cost around Rs 2500, while a pure *pashmina* shawl ranges from around Rs 3500 to US\$275 for a *pashmina* ring shawl (named because they are fine enough to be pulled through a finger ring).

Shahtoosh is a form of *pashmina* that comes from (and results in the death of) the endangered Tibetan antelope. It is illegal in Nepal. See the boxed text, p61, for more information.

Tea

Tea is grown in the east of Nepal, close to the border with India near Darjeeling where the finest Indian tea is grown. The Ilam, Ontu, Kanyan and Mai Valley teas are the best Nepali brands, but they are not cheap. Expect to pay anything from Rs 600 (in Ilam) to Rs 3000 (in Thamel) per kilogram for good Ilam tea, which is not much cheaper than Darjeeling tea. The excellently named 'super fine tipi golden flower orange pekoe' tea is about as good as it gets. Connoisseurs choose the first (March) or second (May) flush, rather than the substandard monsoon flush. Lemon tea flavoured with lemongrass is another favourite (Rs 150 per 100g).

Thangkas

Thangkas are Tibetan Buddhist paintings that depict fierce protector deities, aspects of the Buddha, various Bodhisattvas, historical figures, a mandala (geometric design) or the wheel of life.

Although there are some genuine antique thangkas to be found, it's highly unlikely that anything offered to the average visitor will date from much beyond last week. Judicious use of a smoky fire can add the odd century in no time at all. Thangkas do vary considerably in quality but buy one because you like it, not as a valuable investment.

Thangkas are available in Kathmandu's Thamel, Durbar Marg and Durbar Sq areas, as well as the Tibetan shops around Bodhnath. Like many other crafts, the more you see the more you will appreciate the difference between those of average and those of superior quality. Traditionally thangkas are framed in silk brocade.

Tibetan Carpets

Carpet weaving is a major trade in Nepal. The skill was brought by Tibetan refugees who have transplanted the craft with great success into their new home. Some of their output is now exported to Tibet, where the skills have largely been lost. A genuine Tibetan carpet purchased in Tibet is probably indeed made by Tibetans, but in Nepal the Tamang people also make carpets.

Jawlakhel, on the southern outskirts of Patan, is the carpet-weaving centre in the valley. The traditional size for a Tibetan carpet is 1.8m by 90cm. Small square carpets are often used to make seat cushions.

Carpet quality depends on knots per inch, and the price is worked out per square metre. A 60-knot carpet costs around Rs 1700 per sq metre, while a 100-knot carpet is Rs 4800 per sq metre.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Kathmandu, Pokhara and trekking lodges everywhere are supersociable places and it's not hard for solo travellers to hook up with other travellers.

Most hotels have different rates for single and double occupancy but the 'single room' may be much smaller than the double. The best deal is to get a double room for a single price.

Organised treks may charge a single supplement if you don't want to share a tent or room, though most other organised adventure activities don't have any such penalties.

TAX

There is a 13% value added tax (VAT) on most purchases. It is possible to get this VAT refunded but it's an ordeal and is probably only relevant if you've bought something like electrical equipment. You need to have spent more than Rs 15,000 in stores that display refund stickers, have bought products less than 60 days before departure, have

been in the country less than 183 days, and depart Kathmandu by air. Each individual receipt must be for more than Rs 1500.

You must complete an application form at the store where you make the purchase and get two copies of the form stamped by customs officers before you check in for your flight. Take two copies of the form, along with photocopies of the photo and visa pages of your passport, to the Rastriya Barijya Bank desk after immigration. You should then get the 13% tax refunded, minus Rs 500 commission. Then you'll have to change those rupees into dollars, losing another commission.

TELEPHONE

The phone system works well, and making local, STD and international calls is easy. Reverse-charge (collect) calls can only be made to the UK, USA, Canada and Japan.

The cheapest and most convenient way to make calls is through one of the hundreds of private call centres that have sprung up across the country. Look for signs advertising STD/ISD services. It's only worth using the government telegraph offices if you need to make a call in the middle of the night when other places are closed. Many hotels offer international direct-dial facilities but always check their charges before making a call.

Private call centres charge around Rs 40 per minute to most countries.

Internet phone calls are cheaper, costing Rs 10 to 20 per minute (calls to mobile phones are often more expensive), but these are available only in Kathmandu and Pokhara. There is some delay (echo) in the line when making Internet calls, but it is generally fine for most purposes.

Local phone calls cost Rs 5 for two minutes, or Rs 5 per minute if calling a local mobile phone.

Mobile Phones

The mobile network in Nepal is spotty and not very reliable. The Nepali government cuts mobile service during times of political tension (activists coordinate demonstrations through text messaging). Even when the network is up, connections are often awful.

Nepal Telecom (www.ntc.net.np) uses the GSM system and has roaming agreements with some companies, such as Vodafone and BT Cellnet. Getting a prepaid SIM card in Nepal is possible but is a laborious process.

TIME

Nepal is five hours and 45 minutes ahead of GMT; this curious time differential is intended to make it very clear that Nepal is a separate place to India, where the time is five hours and 30 minutes ahead of GMT! There is no daylight-saving time in Nepal. See the World Time Zones map on p418.

When it's noon in Nepal it's 1.15am in New York, 6.15am in London, 1.15pm in Bangkok, 2.15pm in Tibet, 4.15pm in Sydney and 10.15pm the previous day in Los Angeles, not allowing for daylight saving or other local variations.

TOILETS

Throughout the country, the 'squat toilet' is the norm, except in hotels and guesthouses geared towards tourists. Next to the toilet (*charpi* in Nepali) is a bucket and/or tap, which has a two-fold function: flushing the toilet and cleaning the nether regions (with the left hand only) while still squatting over the toilet. More rustic toilets in rural areas may simply consist of a few planks precariously positioned over a pit in the ground.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The **Nepal Tourism Board** (☎ 01-4256909, 24hr tourism hotline ☎ 4225709; www.welcomenepal.com) operates an office in Kathmandu's Tribhuvan Airport and a more substantial office at the Tourist Service Centre in central Kathmandu (see p114), both of which have brochures and maps.

The other tourist offices in Pokhara, Bhairawa, Birganj, Janakpur and Kakarbhitta are virtually useless unless you have a specific inquiry.

VISAS

All foreigners, except Indians, must have a visa. Nepali embassies and consulates overseas issue visas with no fuss. You can also get one on the spot when you arrive in Nepal, either at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan Airport or at road borders: Nepalganj, Birganj/Raxaul Bazaar, Sunauli, Kakarbhitta, Mahendranagar, Dhangadhi and even the funky Kodari checkpoint on the road to Tibet.

A Nepali visa is valid for entry for three to six months from the date of issue. Children under 10 require a visa but are not charged a visa fee. Your passport must have

at least six months validity. Indian nationals do not require a visa. Citizen of South Asian countries and China need visas but these are free.

You can download a visa application form from the websites of the Nepali embassy in Washington, DC (www.nepalembassyusa.org) or London (www.nepembassy.org.uk).

To obtain a visa on arrival by air in Nepal you must fill in an application form and provide a passport photograph. Visa application forms are available on a table in the arrivals hall, though some airlines (like Thai) provide this form on the flight. To get a jump on the immigration queue, you can download the visa-on-arrival form from www.treks.com.np/visa. A single-entry visa valid for 60 days costs US\$30. At Kathmandu's Tribhuvan Airport the fee is payable in any major currency but at land borders officials will probably require payment in cash US dollars; bring small bills. Only single-entry visas are routinely available on arrival, though you may be able to score a multiple-entry visa if you ask.

If you have already visited Nepal during the same calendar year the visa fee is the same but you'll only get a 30-day visa. Much of the time you spend in the visa-on-arrival queue is waiting while officers scour your passport for previous entry stamps. It's worth knowing that if you stayed longer than 15 days in Nepal and are planning a second visit within the same calendar year, your second 30-day visa should be free.

At Nepali embassies abroad it's possible to get a multiple-entry visa (US\$80 or equivalent), which gives you multiple trips into Nepal for a year, with each stay valid for 60 days, up to a total of 150 days in any calendar year. Multiple-entry visas are useful if you are planning a side trip to Tibet, Bhutan or India. You can change your single-entry visa to a multiple-entry visa at Kathmandu's Central Immigration Office for US\$50.

If you are just planning a lightning visit to Kathmandu it's possible to get a free non-extendable three-day transit visa at Kathmandu airport, as long as you have an air ticket out of the country within three days.

If you stay in Nepal for longer than the duration of your initial 60-day visa, you will require a visa extension (see opposite). Transit visas are nonextendable.

Don't overstay a visa. You can pay a fine of US\$2 per day at the airport if you have overstayed less than 30 days (plus in theory US\$3 per day between 30 and 90 days and US\$5 per day for over 90 days). If you've overstayed more than a week get it all sorted out at Kathmandu's Central Immigration Office *before* you get to the airport, as a delay could cause you to miss your flight.

It's a good idea to keep a number of passport photos with your passport so they are immediately handy for trekking permits, visa applications and other official documents.

Visa Extensions

Visa extensions are available from immigration offices in Kathmandu and Pokhara only and cost US\$30 (payable in rupees) for a 30-day extension. You get a 30-day extension whether you are staying for an extra day or an extra 30 days. A multiple-entry visa extension costs US\$80.

Every visa extension requires your passport, money, photos and an application form. Collect all these before you join the queue. Plenty of places in Kathmandu and Pokhara will make passport photos for you and there are several pricier instant-photo shops near the immigration offices.

Visa extensions are available the same day, sometimes within the hour. For a fee, trekking and travel agencies can assist with the visa extension process and can usually save you the time and tedium of queuing.

You can extend your visa up to a total stay of 120 days without undue formality. You should be able to get a further 30 days extension but you may need to show a flight ticket proving that you are leaving the country during that time period, since you are only allowed to stay in Nepal for a total of 150 days in a calendar year on a tourist visa.

You can get up-to-date visa information at the website of the **Department of Immigration** (www.immi.gov.np). See the Kathmandu (p112) and Pokhara (p249) sections for more details

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Generally speaking, Nepal is a safe country for women travellers. However, women should still be cautious. Nepali men may have peculiar ideas about the morality of

Western women, given Nepali men's exposure to Western films portraying 'immodest' clothing and holiday flings with locals. Dress modestly, which means wearing clothes that cover the shoulders and thighs – take your cue from the local people if you need to gauge what's acceptable. Several women have written to say that a long skirt is very useful for impromptu toilet trips, especially when trekking.

Sexual harassment is low-key but does exist. Trekking guides have been known to take advantage of their position of trust and responsibility and some lone women trekkers who hire a guide have had to put up with repeated sexual pestering – see p361 for more on this. The best advice is never to travel off the beaten track, nor to hike or trek alone with a local guide. The Chhetri Sisters trekking agency in Pokhara is run by women and specialises in providing women staff for treks (see p325 for contact details).

The best chance of making contact with local women is to go trekking, as it is really only here that Nepali women have a role that brings them into contact with foreign tourists – as often as not, the man of the house is a trekking guide or porter, or is away working elsewhere, which leaves women running the lodges and the many teahouses along the routes.

WORK

For Western visitors, finding work in Nepal is very difficult, though not impossible. The easiest work to find is teaching English, as there are many private schools and a great demand for English-language lessons. However, at less than US\$100 a month the pay is very low. Other faint possibilities include work with airline offices, travel and trekking agencies, consultants or aid groups.

Officially you need a work (nontourist) visa if you intend to find employment (even unpaid) in Nepal and you should arrange this before you arrive in the country. Changing from a tourist visa once you are in the country is rarely permissible. The work permit has to be applied for by your employer and you are required to leave the country while the paperwork is negotiated. The process can take months and many people don't bother.

For information on volunteer opportunities in Nepal see p64.

Transport

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THINGS CHANGE

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change: prices for international travel are volatile, routes change, special deals come and go, and rules and visa requirements are amended. You should check carefully to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel.

The upshot of this is that you should get opinions, quotes and advice from as many airlines and travel agencies as possible before you part with your hard-earned cash. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Nepal is a traveller-friendly country and arrival is straightforward. All entry points to Nepal offer visas on arrival and money exchange.

Flights, tours and railway tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

AIR

In the last couple of years international air connections to Nepal have withered, so don't expect a great deal of choice of routes or heavily discounted fares.

Airports & Airlines

AIRPORTS

Kathmandu is the site of Nepal's only international airport, **Tribhuvan Airport** (☎ 4472 256). The international terminal is a modern building but security measures are a little bit lax.

Bhairahawa airport is being upgraded to become Lumbini International Airport in 2008.

Arrival & Departure

When you arrive, just before immigration, there is a bank that's open for flight arrivals and has decent exchange rates. Next door is the visa counter where you pay for your visa if you haven't got one already (see p374). There is a hotel reservation counter as soon as you get out of customs at the airport.

When departing for an international flight check in at least two hours early, preferably three in the high season, as the check-in desks can be a bit of a scrum. You need to show your ticket as you enter the departure hall, where all baggage is X-rayed and tagged. The X-ray machines that screen cargo baggage are not film safe, so insist that the security officers physically inspect your film.

You pay your departure tax at the airport branch of Nabil Bank. It is possible to re-exchange Nepali rupees into US dollars at the Nabil Bank, if you have your unused foreign-exchange encashment receipts; commission is Rs 50, or 2%. Also here is a sporadically open post office and telephone office.

After immigration there's a VAT refund booth (see p373) and a café, where you can blow your last rupees. Next comes another X-ray and a manual inspection of luggage, before everyone crams into a hall far too small for the purpose.

AIRLINES

The airline offices listed in this section are all in Kathmandu (☎ 01).

DEPARTURE TAX

When leaving Kathmandu by air, an international departure tax of Rs 1695 is payable in Nepali rupees at the Nabil Bank in the departures terminal. The tax is Rs 1356 if you are flying to South Asian Area Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries (ie India, Pakistan, Bhutan or Bangladesh). This includes a 'Tourism Service Fee' of Rs 565. There's no departure tax if you leave Nepal overland.

When you buy an air ticket in Kathmandu you will probably be quoted a fare without tax, insurance surcharge and, recently, a fuel surcharge, which can add on US\$30 to an international ticket. International fares quoted in this section include these taxes.

The notoriously unreliable **Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation** (RNAC; code RA; Map p116; ☎ 4220 757, 4248614; www.royalnepal-airlines.com; Kantipath) has a limited number of international services, currently to Hong Kong, Delhi, Bangkok, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Dubai, Bangalore and Mumbai (Bombay), but nothing to Europe. A chronic lack of aircraft means that even these skeleton services are frequently subject to delays and cancellations. It is worth flying with any airline other than RNAC if at all possible, and in fact only a limited number of travel agencies abroad will book RNAC flights. When King Gyanendra embarked on a tour of Africa in 2005, half of Royal Nepal's international flights were cancelled at short notice!

Air Nepal International (code SZ; Map p116; ☎ 2050 678; www.airnepalinternational.com; Kamaladi) is a new (2005) private airline with one lonely jet that flies to Bangkok, Dubai, Doha and Kuala Lumpur, with plans to extend operations to Bangalore, Mumbai, Kolkata (Calcutta) and New Delhi.

Cosmic Air (code F5; Map p115; ☎ 4215771, 4468321; www.cosmicair.com) is a domestic airline that has international services to Delhi, Dhaka, Kolkata and Varanasi, with plans to extend services to Rangoon, Colombo, Bangalore and Mumbai. Flights were suspended briefly in 2005.

The following airlines currently fly into Kathmandu.

Air China (code CA; Map p116; ☎ 4440650; www.airchina.com) Hub Beijing.

Air Sahara (code S2; Map p115; ☎ 4262121; www.air-sahara.net) Hub New Delhi.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines (code BG; Map p116; ☎ 4434740; www.bimanair.com; Lazimpat) Hub Dhaka.

Druk Air (code KB; Map p116; ☎ 4239988, fax 4239658; www.drukair.com.bt) Hub Paro airport.

Gulf Air (code GF; Map p116; ☎ 4435322; www.gulf-airco.com) Hubs Dubai and Bahrain and Dammam; be warned – this office gets incredibly busy.

Indian Airlines (code IC; Map p116; ☎ 4410906; www.indian-airlines.in) Hub New Delhi.

Jet Airways (code 9W; Map p115; ☎ 4222121; www.jetairways.com) Hub New Delhi.

Pakistan International Airways (PIA; code PK; Map p116; ☎ 4439234; www.piac.com.pk) Hub Karachi.

Qatar Airways (code QR; Map p115; ☎ 2556579, 4256579; www.qatarairways.com) Hub Doha.

Thai Airways International (code TG; Map p115; ☎ 4223565, 4224917; www.thaiair.com) Hub Bangkok.

Other airlines that don't fly directly to Nepal but which offer popular routes to the region, and have offices in Kathmandu, include **British Airways** (☎ 4226611), **Cathay Pacific** (☎ 4246155) and **Austrian Airlines** (☎ 4223331). Most airline offices are closed Saturdays, though a few (including THAI) open between 10am and 2pm.

Tickets

There are limited flights into Kathmandu these days, and bargain fares are few and far between. You may find that the cheapest flights from Europe or the US east coast fly into New Delhi, to connect with final short flight to Kathmandu.

Likewise, though you may find Kathmandu as part of a round-the-world ticket, you'll most likely find it cheaper to go overland from Delhi or Kolkata (Calcutta).

From the west coast of North America or from Australasia, Bangkok is the usual

WHERE TO SIT

If you want to see the mountains as you fly into Kathmandu you must sit on the correct side of the aircraft. Flying in from the east – Bangkok, Kolkata (Calcutta), Hong Kong, or Yangon (Rangoon) – you want the right side (seat J on Thai Airways). Flying in from the west – New Delhi, Varanasi or the Gulf – you want the left side (A on Thai). Leaving Kathmandu, you want to sit on the opposite sides.

transfer point, although there are also flights to Kathmandu from Hong Kong. Thai Airways and RNAC share the popular Bangkok–Kathmandu route.

Many fares from Australia or the western USA allow stopovers in Bangkok or the hub airport of the main airline (eg Hong Kong for Cathay Pacific). This effectively allows you a multicountry trip to southeast Asia at no additional cost.

Asia

Flights from Kathmandu to Asian destinations include Bangkok (US\$240), Dhaka (US\$90), Karachi (US\$195), Hong Kong (US\$353), Lhasa (US\$295), Kuala Lumpur (US\$260), Dubai (US\$253), Osaka (US\$618) and Shanghai (US\$368).

There are also some interesting through fares; one to consider is with Biman Bangladesh Airlines, whose Kathmandu–Dhaka–Yangon–Bangkok ticket sells for US\$380 one way and allows a stop in Yangon and (mandatory) Dhaka. Biman should put you up in a hotel for one night in Dhaka – all other costs are left to you. The Dhaka–Yangon–Bangkok leg runs just once a week.

Thai Airways' Kathmandu to Bangkok flight (US\$240) is the most popular connection into and out of Nepal and can get booked up for weeks at a time, particularly mid-December to January. Make your booking as far in advance as possible. Bangkok–Kathmandu tickets are generally cheaper bought in Bangkok.

Air Nepal International is currently offering flights to Bangkok for US\$200 each way, twice a week. Royal Nepal costs US\$238 and gets you into Bangkok early enough to make a same day connection (whereas the afternoon Thai Airways flight necessitates an overnight stay).

Biman Bangladesh and Cosmic Air operate flights to Dhaka. PIA flies to Karachi three times a week.

Air China has three weekly flights to Lhasa and on to Chengdu (US\$320). Foreigners are not allowed to buy a Lhasa ticket without a tour package (see p381) but can buy tickets to Chengdu and on to other Chinese cities like Beijing (US\$382) and Shanghai (US\$360). The Lhasa flights have traditionally stopped over the winter (November to March) but one flight a week is scheduled for winter 2006/7.

Australia & New Zealand

Fares from Australia depend on the season and typically cost around A\$1500 return. Bangkok is the most popular transit point because it links with the reliable Thai Airways flight, although you can also fly via Hong Kong or Kuala Lumpur.

From Kathmandu to east coast Australia, the cheapest one-way ticket at time of research cost US\$480 with Cathay Pacific. Thai Airways and Singapore Airlines are more expensive.

Return flight to Kathmandu from Auckland New Zealand start from around NZ\$1980.

Agencies in Australia include **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au), **STA Travel** (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au) and **Trailfinders** (☎ 1300 780 212; www.trailfinders.com.au).

Agencies in New Zealand include **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel.co.nz).

Online agencies include www.travel.com.au and www.zuji.com.au.

Continental Europe

Austrian Airlines offers the only direct flight between Europe (Vienna) and Nepal, but you may find a cheaper fare with Gulf Air or Qatar Airways. Return airfares in high season start around €1000. One-way air fares from Kathmandu to most European destinations cost around US\$560.

STA Travel (www.statravel.com) has branches in major cities across Germany and the rest of Europe.

OTU Voyages (☎ 0820 817 817; www.otu.fr), **Voyageurs du Monde** (☎ 01 42 86 16 00; www.vdm.com) and **Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 0825 000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr) all have branches across France.

In Italy try **CTS Viaggi** (☎ 06-462 0431; www.cts.it). In Spain try **Barcelo Viajes** (☎ 902-116226; www.barceloviajes.com). **Just Travel** (☎ 089-7473330; www.justtravel.de) is an English-speaking agency in Munich.

Online European agencies include www.anyway.fr, www.odysia.fr, www.airfair.nl, www.travelchannel.de and the various country sites of www.lastminute.com and www.expedia.com.

India

The main routes between India and Nepal are operated by RNAC, Indian Airlines, Jet

Airways, Cosmic Air and Air Sahara. The first three give a 25% discount to anyone under 30 on flights between Kathmandu and India; no student card is needed.

Fierce competition on the Kathmandu–Delhi route means that at time of research normal fares of US\$160 had dropped as low as US\$80 with Druk Air (three weekly), or US\$100 with Air Sahara.

Other cities in India with direct connections to Kathmandu are Kolkata (US\$120), Bangalore (US\$233) and Mumbai (US\$228 with RNAC). Cosmic Air flies thrice-weekly to Varanasi (US\$135).

RNAC has offices in Bangalore (☎ 80-5597878), Delhi (☎ 11-23321572) and Mumbai (☎ 22-22836197), among others.

UK & Ireland

London to Kathmandu costs from £550 to around £650 return in the high season, generally with Gulf Air (via Abu Dhabi) or Qatar Airways (via Doha). Austrian Airways often has cheapish fares via Vienna and New Delhi. The cheapest option is generally to fly to New Delhi and travel overland (train and bus) from there.

From Kathmandu a one-way fare to London costs around US\$600 with Gulf Air or Qatar Airways. Try **STA Travel** (☎ 0870-1600 599; www.statravel.co.uk), **Trailfinders** (☎ 0845-058 5858; www.trailfinders.com) or **North-South Travel** (☎ 01245-608291; www.northsouthtravel.co.uk).

Online travel agencies include www.lastminute.com, www.cheaptickets.co.uk and www.expedia.co.uk.

USA & Canada

Intense competition between Asian airlines on the US west coast and Vancouver has resulted in ticket discounting to Bangkok, on top of which you can add on a few hundred dollars to Kathmandu.

Fares to Kathmandu will often be about the same from the east coast (via Europe) or west coast (via Asia) – it's about as far away as you can get in either direction! Multiple connections can make for some mammoth trips, especially as most connections to Kathmandu involve a layover.

From New York the cheapest connection is with Aeroflot to New Delhi via Moscow and then RNAC to Kathmandu.

From the west coast the cheapest flights go to Bangkok via Tokyo (Northwest), Seoul

(Asiana), Taipei (China Airlines or Eva Air) or Singapore, overnighing in Bangkok, at your expense, to catch a flight the next day with Thai Airways.

The cheapest return fares start around US\$1400. At time of research Cathay Pacific was offering good deals, with the advantage of quality connecting airlines (Thai Airways) and no stopover on the way out.

From Kathmandu, a one-way ticket with Cathay Pacific cost US\$511/560 to Los Angeles/New York, or US\$584 to Vancouver. Thai Airways and Northwest offer pricier alternatives.

Note that if you have more than three connecting flights you may have problems fitting all these flight details onto your baggage labels and may have to re-check your luggage en route – a real pain.

The *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *LA Times* and the *San Francisco Examiner* all produce weekly travel sections in which you'll find any number of travel-agency ads.

Agencies include **STA Travel** (☎ 800-781 4040; www.statravel.com; 24 hrs), a student specialist with offices throughout the US, and **Travel CUTS** (☎ 1-866-416-2887; www.travelcuts.com), Canada's national student travel agency, with offices in major cities

Specialist Nepal operators like **Third Eye Travel** (☎ 1-800-456-393; www.thirdeyetravel.com) know the best offers and connections and often offer the best deals. Specialist Asia agencies such as **Angel Travel** (☎ 1-800-922 1092; www.angeltravel.com) and **USA Asia** (☎ 1-800-8722742; http://usaasiatravel.com) also book flights to Nepal.

Online booking agencies include **Cheap Tickets** (www.cheaptickets.com), **Orbitz** (www.orbitz.com), **Expedia** (www.expedia.com, www.expedia.ca) and **Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com, www.travelocity.ca).

LAND

Political and weather conditions permitting, there are six main entry points into Nepal by land: five from India, one from Tibet. There are no international bus or train services; everyone changes buses at the borders.

Bring Your Own Vehicle

A steady trickle of people drive their own vehicles overland from Europe, for which an international carnet is required. If you

want to abandon your transport in Nepal, you must either pay a prohibitive import duty or surrender it to customs. It is not possible to import cars more than five years old. Make sure you bring an international driving permit.

India

All of the land borders between India and Nepal are in the Terai. The most popular crossing point is Sunauli, near Bhairawa, which provides easy access to Delhi and Varanasi in India.

Border crossing (Nepal to India)	Page
Belahiya to Sunauli, for Varanasi, Agra and Delhi	p289
Mahendranagar to Banbassa, for Delhi and hill towns in Uttaranchal	p310
Kakarbhitta to Panitanki, for Darjeeling, Sikkim and Kolkata	p321
Birganj to Raxaul Bazar, for Patna and Kolkata	p302
Nepalganj to Jamunaha, for Lucknow	p306

SUNAULI/BHAIRAWA

The crossing at Sunauli is by far the most popular route between India and Nepal and it's also the easiest route from Delhi or Varanasi (see p290 for more information). There are direct buses from Delhi to Sunauli (Rs 405, 24 hours) but many people prefer to do as much of the journey as possible by train – several trains run daily from Delhi to Gorakhpur (22 hours), where you can pick up a bus to Sunauli (Rs 50, three hours). Varanasi also has direct buses to Sunauli (Rs 150, 10 hours).

Once you cross the border, day and night buses run regularly to Kathmandu (day/night Rs 230/280, eight hours) and Pokhara (Rs 230/270, eight hours). A more comfortable option to Kathmandu is the air-con service operated by Golden Travels (see p291), changing buses in Kalanki.

MAHENDRANAGAR

The crossing at Mahendranagar is also used by travellers coming from Delhi, see p311 for more information. There are daily buses from Delhi's Anand Vihar bus stand to Banbassa, the nearest Indian village to the border (INRs 156, 10 hours). Banbassa is also connected by bus with most towns in Uttaranchal, as well as Agra and Dharamsala. Slow and inconvenient trains run

as far as Barielly, about three hours from the border by bus.

From Mahendranagar, there are slow direct bus services to Kathmandu (Rs 735, 16 hours) but it's better to do the trip in daylight and break the journey at Royal Bardia National Park, Nepalganj, Butwal or Narayangarh. Note that this route is often blocked during the monsoon. Maoists are active throughout western Nepal – check the security situation before you travel.

KAKARBHITTA

At the eastern end of Nepal, Kakarbhitta is the closest border crossing to Darjeeling and Sikkim, and trains from Kolkata to northeast India stop close to the border at Siliguri, see p322 for more information. Travel agencies in Kathmandu and Darjeeling offer 'through buses' across the border, but these involve a change in Siliguri and Kakarbhitta. It's just as easy to do the journey in stages, which will also allow you to refresh your batteries with an overnight stop along the way.

From Darjeeling, take a morning bus/jEEP to Siliguri (INRs 60/70, two hours) then a bus (INRs 15, one hour) to Panitanki on the Indian side of the border. If cross-border traffic is busy, jeeps sometimes go straight to the border from Darjeeling. Jeeps also run to the border from Kalimpong (Rs 90, three hours) and from Gangtok (Rs 140, 4½ hours), in Sikkim. Coming from Kolkata, you can take an overnight train to Siliguri, then a bus to the border.

From Kakarbhitta, there are day/night buses to Kathmandu (Rs 530/607, 17 hours) but it's more interesting to break the journey at Janakpur, the centre of Mithila culture in Nepal. However, there is Maoist activity in eastern Nepal so you should check things are calm before you travel.

BIRGANJ/RAXAUL BAZAAR

The border crossing from Birganj to Raxaul Bazaar is handy for Patna (in India's Bihar province) and you can also get here easily by train from Kolkata. Buses run from the bus station in Patna straight to Raxaul Bazaar (INRs 90, five hours). From Kolkata, you can take the daily Mithila Express – it leaves Kolkata's Howrah station at 4pm, arriving into Raxaul at 9.10am the next morning (INRs 276/748/1165 in sleeper class/air-con 3-tier/air-con 2-tier).

From Birganj, there are regular day/night buses to Kathmandu (Rs 225/280, eight hours) and Pokhara (Rs 225/270, seven hours). All buses pass through Narayangarh, where you can change for Royal Chitwan National Park.

NEPALGANJ

Few people use the crossing at Nepalganj in western Nepal, see p307 for more information. The nearest town in India is Lucknow, where you can pick up slow buses to the border at Jamunaha (INRs 160, seven hours). You might also consider taking a train to Nanpara, 17km from the border.

Over the border in Nepalganj, there are regular day/night buses to Kathmandu (Rs 450/540, 12 hours) and Pokhara (Rs 400/520, 12 hours), passing close to Royal Chitwan National Park. As always, you should check the security situation before crossing at Nepalganj.

Tibet

The bad news is that, officially, only organised 'groups' are allowed into Tibet. The

good news is that travel agencies in Kathmandu assemble overland groups to get you into Tibet. Depending on the ever-changing regulations you should then be able to continue on in China (but currently not Tibet) as an independent traveller.

This is not an easy trip by any means. Altitude sickness is a real danger as the maximum altitude along the road is 5140m and budget overland tours do not allow sufficient time to safely acclimatise. The road is often temporarily closed by landslides during the monsoon months (May to August). Political protests, sensitive political dates and political meetings inside Tibet or China are often followed or preceded by additional restrictions on visitors to the region (particularly from mid-September to mid-October).

The bottom line is that if you intend to enter or leave Nepal via Tibet you should come prepared with alternative plans in case travel along this route proves impossible.

In general, travellers face far fewer restrictions entering Tibet through China, so if you are flexible with your plans it makes

TICKET PACKAGES TO & FROM INDIA

Some private Indian companies make bus and train bookings all the way through to Kathmandu and Pokhara, including basic accommodation at Sunauli, but many travellers have complained about these services. The package usually involves coordination between at least three different companies, so the potential for an honest cock-up is at least as high as the potential for a deliberate rip-off. In general, if you organise things yourself as you go, it will be cheaper, and you will have more flexibility, including a choice of bus and accommodation within Nepal.

Note that everyone has to change buses at the border whether they book a through ticket or not and, despite claims to the contrary, there are no 'tourist' buses on either side of the border.

Leaving Nepal, the most reliable Nepali company handling through tickets is **Wayfarers** (Map p136; ☎ 4266010; www.wayfarers.com.np) in Thamel, Kathmandu. It requires a minimum of a week to arrange tickets.

Buses through to Varanasi cost around Rs 900 and involve an overnight in Sunauli and then a 10-hour bus ride from the border to Varanasi. Bus-and-train packages to Agra cost Rs 2300/3425 for three-tier/two-tier air-con, or Rs 1275 in a 2nd-class sleeper. Bus and train to Delhi costs Rs 2700/3875 for three-tier/two-tier air-con, or Rs 1475 in a 2nd-class sleeper. For train connections you spend a night in Sunauli, take a morning bus to Gorakhpur (three hours) and then a lunchtime train to Agra (18 hours) or Delhi (22 hours).

These prices are significantly more expensive than buying the tickets as you go, but they do give you confirmed bookings and peace of mind.

It is worth considering making advance bookings on the Indian railways if you are in a hurry or are fussy over which class you want. Some trains, and especially sleeping compartments, can be heavily booked (this is apparently the case for Gorakhpur to Delhi trains). Make sure you get a receipt clearly specifying what you think you have paid for, and hang on to it. For schedules check out www.indianrail.gov.in. For information on booking tickets online see www.irctc.co.in and www.seat61.com/India.htm.

a lot more sense to visit Nepal after a trip through Tibet, not after.

Bear in mind that travel restrictions in Tibet are always in flux and may even be scrapped altogether in the near future.

See p233 for information on getting from the Nepali border town of Kodari to the capital, Kathmandu.

Organised trekking groups only are also allowed to trek from Simikot in far western Nepal to Purang in far western Tibet, and then on to Mt Kailash. For details see Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Himalaya*.

TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

At the time of research you can't cross the Chinese border into Tibet without a Tibet Tourism Permit, which can only be arranged through a travel agency when you book a package tour to Lhasa. If you turn up at the border at Kodari with just a Chinese visa you'll be turned away. Air China won't sell you an air ticket to Lhasa without a Tibet Tourism Bureau (TTB) permit.

At the time of research, when people booked this tour they were put on a group visa and any existing Chinese visas in their passports were cancelled. Splitting from this group visa in Lhasa is almost impossible but it is apparently allowed if you fly out of Tibet to Chengdu, making onward independent travel through China possible.

TOUR OPTIONS

A variety of options are currently available in Kathmandu. The quickest way to get into Tibet is to buy a fly-in package to Lhasa from Kathmandu. Depending on the political climate in Tibet, agencies can sometimes offer a one-way flight (US\$285) with a visa and permits (US\$68) and airport transfers (US\$110). At times of political sensitivity you may have to book a pricier tour and a return flight, though you might be able to cancel the return leg in Lhasa.

Several agencies offer fixed-departure (generally Saturdays), overland trips to Lhasa, via Nyalam, Lhatse, Shigatse and Gyantse. The cheapest is a seven-day, one-way, overland trip, currently around US\$400 plus US\$68 in permit and visa fees, which covers transport by Land Cruiser, accommodation and sightseeing. Dormitory accommodation is provided for the first three nights, then on a twin-sharing basis in en suite rooms.

Packages that include Mt Everest Base Camp (from the Tibetan side) are pricier at US\$550 and harder to find. Some agencies also run return trips to Mt Kailash from Kathmandu (from US\$1600). Rates are slightly higher in the peak season months of July, August and September and start to dry up by December.

The agency will need one week to get your visa and permits. You will probably get between 12 and 15 days on your group visa so can stay in Lhasa for up to a week after the tour.

Before handing over the cash, ascertain whether you are required to share a room, and how many people will travel in each Land Cruiser (often five, plus a driver and sometimes a guide, which is a real squeeze). Note that agencies may pool customers if numbers are low. Travelers have complained that their promised Land Cruiser turned out to be a dilapidated bus (travel to the Tibet border is always in a minibus), or that the agreed bus wasn't available and that they had to pay an extra US\$50 or more per person for a Land Cruiser.

The following agencies in Kathmandu (☎ 01) operate trips to Tibet. Most agencies advertising in Thamel are agents only; they don't actually run the trips.

Ecotrek (Map p136; ☎ 4424112; www.ecotrek.com.np, www.kailashstour.com; Thamel)

Explore Nepal Richa Tours & Travel (Map p136; ☎ 4423064; www.explorenepalricha.com; 2nd fl, Namche Bazaar Bldg, Tri Devi Marg, Thamel)

Green Hill Tours (Map p136; ☎ 4700968; ghill@wlink.com.np; www.greenhilltours.com.np; Thamel)

Royal Mount Trekking (Map p115; ☎ 4241452; www.royal-mt-trekking.com, www.royaltibet.com; Durbar Marg)

Tashi Delek Nepal Treks & Expeditions (Map p136; ☎ 4410746; tashidele@wlink.com.np; Thamel)

Other travel companies in Thamel offering customised tours to Tibet include **Adventure Silk Road** (www.silkroadgroup.com), **Dharma Adventures** (www.dharmaadventures.com), **Earthbound Expeditions** (www.trekktibet.com), **Explore Himalaya** (www.tibet-adventures.com, www.explorehimalaya.com) and **Tibet Travels** (www.tibettravels.com), though there are many more.

BUS

In 2005 Nepal's state bus company Sahja Yatayat started a weekly direct bus service

between Kathmandu and Lhasa. The service costs US\$70 per person, plus US\$60 for three nights accommodation and a service fee. Foreigners currently aren't allowed to take the bus due to Chinese visa and permit hassles, but this could change.

GETTING AROUND

Getting around Nepal can be a challenging business. The impossible terrain and extreme weather conditions, plus a high level of disorganisation, mean that trips rarely go exactly according to plan. On the other hand, Nepali ingenuity will usually get you to your destination in the end. Although travel can be frustrating, it also creates memorable moments by the score. Good humour, patience and snacks are essential prerequisites.

The whole gamut of transport options is available in Nepal, from hot-air balloons to elephants. Walking is still the most important, and the most reliable, method of getting from A to B and for moving cargo; more is carried by people in Nepal than by every other form of transport combined.

One of the major considerations when using any form of public transport is to avoid travelling during festival times (for details see p363), especially major ones such as Dasain and Tihar (Diwali). Buses and planes are booked solid, and forget flying if you haven't booked well in advance.

AIR

Nepal has a fairly extensive domestic air network, served by half a dozen airlines, though only the flights to Pokhara, Meghauri (for Chitwan), Lukla and Jomsom are much used by foreigners.

Residents and Nepali citizens pay approximately 35% of the tourist price for domestic air fares. Airlines will accept payment from visitors only in hard currency. See the Nepal Air Fares chart (p383) for details.

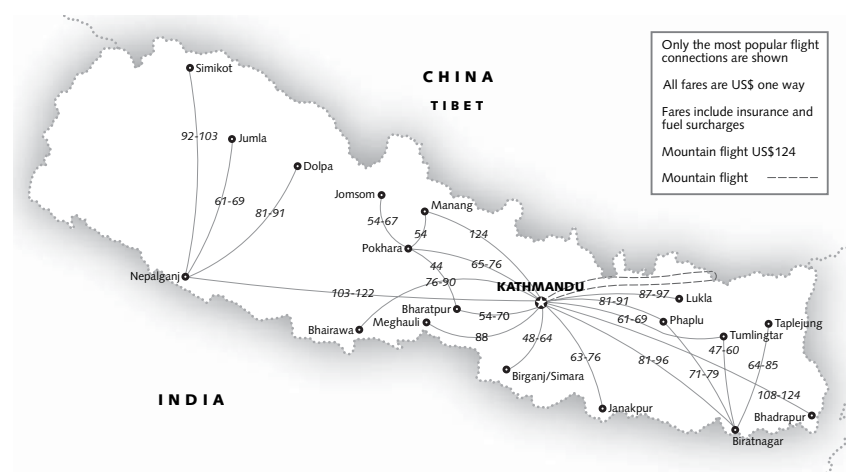
All travellers are charged an insurance surcharge of US\$2 per leg. Air fares quoted in this book include this surcharge. At the time of research there was also a temporary fuel surcharge of between US\$5 and US\$9 per flight, which will continue as long as global fuel prices remain high.

The domestic terminal is the old Kathmandu airport, and its age shows. It can be a chaotic spot, particularly when flights are cancelled and crowds of stressed tourists generate an escalating atmosphere of fear and loathing.

Check in an hour early for domestic flights. Don't carry pocketknives, gas cigarette lighters, matches or even trekking poles in your carry-on luggage on any domestic flights. There is a Rs 170 domestic airport tax payable at check-in.

Airlines in Nepal

A number of private companies operate alongside the long-running, government-owned and chronically inefficient Royal



Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC). These airlines operate largely on the popular (ie economically viable and tourist-oriented) routes, although government regulations require that airlines devote 40% of their capacity to nontourist routes. The prices for the private airlines are slightly more than RNAC (by around US\$10 per sector), but they offer better service and are much more reliable.

Most flights operate out of Kathmandu, but there are minor air hubs at Pokhara, Nepalganj in the southwest and Biratnagar in the southeast.

RNAC operates by far the most comprehensive range of scheduled flights around Nepal, with flights to Bhojpur, Biratnagar, Dhangadhi, Dolpo, Jomsom, Kathmandu, Lamidanda, Lukla, Manang, Nepalganj, Phaplu, Pokhara, Rajbiraj, Ramechhap, Rumpjatar, Simikot, Surkhet, Taplejung and Tumlingtar, among others.

Buddha Air (☎ 01-5542494; www.buddhaair.com) has fast, modern aircraft; the trip to Pokhara from Kathmandu takes just 20 minutes, compared with up to 40 minutes with RNAC. Buddha Air has daily flights servicing Kathmandu, Pokhara, Biratnagar, Bhadrapur, Bhairawa, Nepalganj and Janakpur.

Cosmic Air (☎ 01-4427150; www.cosmicair.com) services Kathmandu, Bharatpur, Jomsom, Pokhara, Bhairawa, Simara, Biratnagar, Nepalganj and Tumlingtar.

The Sherpa-owned **Yeti Airlines** (☎ 01-4421215; www.yetiairlines.com) is one of the best domestic airlines and flies to Kathmandu,

Pokhara, Lukla, Phaplu, Manang, Bhairawa, Bhadrapur, Bharatpur, Biratnagar, Meghauli, Simara (for Birganj), Nepalganj, plus flights to Dolpa and Simikot from Nepalganj, and Jumla and Rara from Surkhet. You can book flights online.

Other airlines include **Skyline Airways** (www.skyair.com.np), **Shangri-La Air** (☎ 4439693; www.shangri-laair.com.np), **Gorkha Airlines** (☎ 4435121; gorkha@mos.com.np) and **Sita Air** (☎ 4445012).

Some flights, such as Kathmandu to Lukla (the main airstrip in the Everest region), are used mainly by trekkers. There are multiple daily flights during the trekking season but these do fill up in October so make a reservation in advance through a travel agency in Kathmandu or direct with an airline website. Flights from Kathmandu to Jomsom and Lukla can be plagued by bad-weather cancellations and a backlog of frustrated travellers, though this isn't the problem it was a few years ago. For flights in and out of Jomsom, Cosmic Air is the one to choose (US\$63 plus US\$7 surcharges); for Lukla, Yeti Airlines (US\$97).

Maoist activity can temporarily close domestic airports in remote parts of the country. Check the state of play before basing your plans around remote airports, especially in the far west.

Try to book domestic flights a week in advance and, just as for flights out of Nepal, the most important rule is to reconfirm and reconfirm again. Names can 'fall off' the passenger list, particularly when there is pressure for seats. This is much more of a problem with RNAC than with the private operators.

There's generally no charge to change the date of a domestic air ticket. Cancellation charges vary but are generally free more than a day or two before departure.

BICYCLE

In Kathmandu and Pokhara there are many bicycle-rental outlets and this is a cheap and convenient way of getting around, particularly around the Kathmandu Valley. Regular bicycles cost around Rs 100 per day to rent, an Indian or Chinese made mountain bike costs from Rs 200 and an imported foreign bike costs around Rs 700. Children's bicycles can also be hired.

See p80 for detailed information on cycling in Nepal.

BUS

Buses are the main form of public transport in Nepal and in relative terms they're incredibly cheap. Very often they're also incredibly uncomfortable. They run pretty much everywhere and will stop for anyone. You can jump on local buses anywhere, but you'll find it much easier to get a seat if you catch a bus at its source rather than in mid-run. For longer-distance buses it's best to book a couple of days in advance.

The government bus company, known as Sajha Yatayat, has distinctive blue-and-white buses that service all the main routes except the far east and far west. Although marginally cheaper than private buses, these buses are generally very shabby, poorly maintained and rarely run to schedule; overall they are best avoided.

On popular tourist runs such as the Kathmandu-Pokhara, Kathmandu-Sunauli and Kathmandu-Nagarkot runs, there are a number of higher-grade, higher-priced and sometimes air-conditioned tourist buses aimed at the tourist market.

There are literally dozens of private bus companies – it seems all you need is one bus and you've got yourself a company. The condition of the buses range from reasonably comfortable minibuses to lumbering dinosaurs held together by little more than bits of wire and the combined hopes of the passengers. As with the Sajha buses, there is a booking office in each town where you can buy tickets for long-distance routes in advance.

On the longer routes there are 'express' minibuses, scheduled both by day and night. Day travel is generally preferable because you get to see the countryside (and there are some spectacular roads) and it's considerably safer. Night travel often involves a stop somewhere en route for a couple of hours sleep.

At the bottom of the heap are the local buses that run shorter routes, carry people, their luggage and often animals, and seem to stop more than they go. Travelling by local bus is no fun and should be kept to a minimum, although to reach many of the trekking roadheads there is little alternative.

Long-distance bus travel has slowed down recently due to the large number of tedious checkpoints set up by the Nepali military to counter potential Maoist activity. These gen-

AIR-CONDITIONING OF THE GODS

Though we don't particularly recommend it, many people – both locals and Westerners – prefer to ride on bus roofs. While this is officially banned in the Kathmandu Valley, it is common elsewhere, particularly during Dasain when pressure for seats is greatest. The arguments in favour are that you get an exhilarating ride with great views, the opportunity to watch your bags and, sometimes, room to stretch your legs.

If you do ride on the roof, make sure you are well wedged in, so you don't catapult off when the bus swerves, brakes or lurches. It's also best to sit facing forwards – that way you can see low-hanging wires and branches before you get swatted. Make sure you have sunscreen and appropriate clothing too, as it can be surprisingly cold up there.

erally involve everyone getting off the bus and walking through a checkpoint. Tourists are normally exempt and can stay on the bus. A couple of these checks can severely delay a trip, especially when buses start to back up. See p311 for details on the problems of road travel in far western Nepal.

Bus travel in Nepal poses a significant risk of accident. It's uncommon to drive for more than an hour on any stretch of road without passing the burnt-out shell of a public bus crushed like tin foil into the canyon below. Travelling on an overnight bus trip is probably the most dangerous thing you can do in Nepal, and is certainly a bigger risk than that currently posed by the Maoists and even more dangerous than the bungee jump (only kidding on that one). You are more than 30 times more likely to die in a road accident in Nepal than in most developed countries.

During the course of researching this guide we passed ten fatal bus crashes in one ten-day period, which between them killed over 200 people. Tourist buses are generally safer than public buses but still the message is clear; keep bus travel to a minimum.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE Hire

There are no drive-yourself rental cars available in Nepal, but you can easily hire cars with drivers, or just a taxi. Expect to pay

MOUNTAIN FLIGHTS

Every morning during the clear dry-season months (October to April), all the major private airlines offer mountain flights, with panoramic dawn views of the Himalaya and commentary on the passing peaks. Each passenger on six- to 30-seat turbo props is guaranteed a window seat and a visit to the cockpit.

The hour-long flight from Kathmandu costs US\$124 (fuel charge included). If the weather is clear the views are stunning. Purists recommend Buddha Air as its planes are more spacious and fly you closer to Everest itself.

between US\$50 and US\$60 per day, including fuel, which at the time of research was set at Rs 67 per litre across the country.

It is quite popular to hire cars for return trips to both Pokhara and Royal Chitwan National Park from Kathmandu. A car from Kathmandu to Pokhara will probably cost around US\$70 one way, or US\$60 to Chitwan. A day's sightseeing around the Kathmandu Valley costs between US\$20 and US\$35. Remember that you'll have to pay for the driver's return trip whether or not you yourself return, as well as his food and accommodation for overnight trips.

Motorcycles can be rented in Kathmandu and Pokhara for around Rs 400 to 450 per day. See p158 and p265 for details.

Insurance

If you are planning to drive a motorbike in Nepal you should double check to see if your insurance coverage will cover you, as it may be excluded under 'dangerous activities'.

Road Rules

If you do drive be aware that left turns are allowed without stopping, even at controlled intersections with red lights. Also, traffic entering a roundabout has priority over traffic already on the roundabout. Almost no-one in Nepal signals and will pull out into traffic whether or not anyone is coming.

Finally, our best advice is to trust nothing and nobody. Expect kids, chickens, ducks, women, old men, babies, cows, dogs and almost anything else that can move to jump in front of you at any moment, without any kind of warning. Good luck.

Tours

A few Nepali travel companies, such as **Himalayan Offroad** (☎ 4700770; www.himalayanoffroad.com), run motorbike tours of Nepal and may be able to help with queries.

Himalayan Enfielders (☎ 4440462; www.enfielders.tk; Israeli Embassy, Lazimpat, Kathmandu) is an enthusiasts' touring club and service centre for Enfield Bullets.

Most foreign tour companies such as **Asia-Bike-Tours** (www.asiabiketours.com), **Ferris Wheels** (www.ferriswheels.com.au) and **Himalayan Roadrunners** (www.ridehigh.com) have suspended motorbike tours of Nepal until the security situation improves.

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

Autorickshaw & Cycle-Rickshaw

Cycle-rickshaws are common in the old part of Kathmandu and can be a good way of making short trips through the crowded and narrow streets. They are also the most common form of short-distance public transport in towns throughout the Terai. Prices are highly negotiable.

Nepal's noxious three-wheeled autorickshaws are being phased out everywhere, but a few are still hanging on in a couple of Terai towns.

Taxi

Larger towns such as Kathmandu and Pokhara have taxis which, between a group of people, can be a good way to explore the Kathmandu Valley. Metered taxis have black licence plates; private cars often operate as taxis, particularly on long-distance routes or for extended periods, and have red plates.

Taxi meters are sometimes out of date (at the time of research they were OK), in which case tourists will be hard pushed to convince drivers to use them (with or without a surcharge) and will almost certainly have to negotiate the fare in advance. You will always pay more for a negotiated fare than a metered fare.

Tempo

A tempo is like an autorickshaw but bigger, and runs on fixed routes. In 2000, all diesel tempos were banned in the Kathmandu Valley, and have been replaced by electric and gas-powered *Safa* (clean) tempos and conventional petrol minibuses. This has made a noticeable difference to the levels of air pollution in the valley; the old Vikram tempos have all been relocated and can now be seen doing their smoke-belching best to clog the air between the Indian border and Nepal's border towns. Drivers pick up and drop off anywhere along the route; tap on the roof with a coin when you want to stop.

TOURS

There are few organised tours available in Kathmandu or to places of interest around the valley and further a field; see p162 for details. Normally it's just a matter of organising something through a travel agent, of which there are gazillions.

For organised rafting and mountain biking tours see p82 and p90; for organised treks see p327.

TRAIN

There are two train lines from Janakpur, but only the service east to Jaynagar over

the Indian border carries passenger traffic. They're narrow-gauge trains and very slow, so they offer an interesting, if somewhat crowded, method of seeing the countryside. Note that tourists are not allowed to cross the border using the passenger train. See the boxed text, p316 for more details.

Health

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Nepal is a fantastic travel destination but many of the features that attract us, such as the topography and lack of modern infrastructure, may also pose particular risks to health. The vast majority of travellers to Nepal do so without medical problems. In those that become ill, the most common illnesses include traveller's diarrhoea and viral respiratory infections (colds). Far rarer but potentially more dangerous are accidents, injury and Acute Mountain Sickness.

Because of the remoteness of areas frequented by many visitors, sensible travellers will rely to some extent on their own medical knowledge and supplies when travelling to Nepal. As always, travellers who have pre-existing conditions, such as diabetes, should speak with their home medical practitioners before travel and bring adequate supplies of medications and necessary equipment.

BEFORE YOU GO

INSURANCE

Keep in mind that Nepal is a remote location, and if you become seriously injured or very sick you may need to be evacuated by air. Under these circumstances, you defi-

nately don't want to be without adequate health insurance.

Prior to travel confirm your insurance particulars; certain activities may be classified as 'adventure' or 'extreme' sports, and these may require additional riders to the standard policy. Examples include insurance limitations upon activities above 4000m or specific sports such as paragliding or white-water rafting.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Nepal does not officially require any immunisations for entry into the country, but the further off the beaten track you go, the more necessary it is to take precautions. Travellers who have come from an area infected with yellow fever are required to be vaccinated before entering the country. Record all vaccinations on an International Health Certificate, available from a doctor or government health department.

Plan ahead and schedule your vaccinations as some require more than one injection, while others should not be given together. Note that some vaccinations should not be given during pregnancy or to people with allergies.

It is recommended that you seek medical advice at least six weeks before travelling. Be aware that there is a greater risk of all kinds of disease for children and during pregnancy.

Discuss your requirements with your doctor, but vaccinations you should consider for this trip include the following:

Diphtheria & tetanus Vaccinations for these two diseases are usually combined and are recommended for everyone. After an initial course of three injections (usually given in childhood), boosters are necessary every 10 years.

Hepatitis A The vaccine for Hepatitis A (eg Avaxim, Havrix 1440 or VAQTA) provides long-term immunity (possibly lifelong) after an initial injection and a booster at six to 12 months.

Hepatitis B Vaccination involves three injections, the quickest course being over three weeks with a booster at 12 months.

Influenza 'Flu' is considered by many to be the most common vaccine-preventable illness in travellers. This vaccine is annual and based on the hemisphere of residence and travel destination.

Japanese B Encephalitis (JBE) JBE is a mosquito-borne viral encephalitis. At the time of writing there was a recent outbreak in the border areas of India. The risk of JBE is greatest in the Terai and during and after the monsoon. Like the rabies course, JBE vaccine is given as three injections over three to four weeks and boosted usually at three years. This vaccine is recommended for persons visiting high-risk areas and for prolonged stays.

Meningococcal Meningitis A single-dose vaccine boosted every three to five years is recommended for individuals at high risk and for extended stays.

Polio This serious, easily transmitted disease is still found in some developing countries, including Nepal. Everyone should keep up to date with this vaccination, which is normally given in childhood. A booster every 10 years maintains immunity.

Rabies Vaccination should be strongly considered for long-term or frequent travellers to countries with rabies, especially if you are engaged in activities such as running, trekking, cycling, caving, handling animals or travelling to remote areas, and for children (who may not report a bite). Pretravel rabies vaccination involves having three injections over 21 to 28 days. The vaccine obviates the need for rabies immunoglobulin, which may not be available in many areas (and is extremely expensive) and will also shorten the vaccine course: if someone who has been vaccinated is bitten or scratched by an animal they will require two vaccine booster injections, while those not vaccinated will require more. The booster for rabies vaccination is usually given after three years.

Tuberculosis The risk of tuberculosis (TB) to travellers is usually very low, unless you will be living with or closely associated with local people in high-risk areas. As most healthy adults do not develop symptoms, a skin test before and after travel to determine whether exposure has occurred may be considered. A vaccination (BCG) may be recommended for children and young adults living in these areas for three months or more.

Typhoid This vaccination is available either as an injection or oral capsules. A combined hepatitis A-typhoid vaccine was launched recently but its availability is still limited – check with your doctor to find out its status in your country.

Yellow fever This disease is not endemic in Nepal and a vaccine for yellow fever is required only if you are coming from an infected area. The record of this vaccine should be provided in a World Health Organization (WHO) Yellow Vaccination Booklet and is valid for 10 years.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Following is a list of items you should consider including in your medical kit – consult your pharmacist for brands available in your country.

- aspirin or paracetamol (acetaminophen in the USA) for pain or fever

- antihistamine for allergies, eg hay fever; to ease the itch from insect bites or stings; and to prevent motion sickness
- cold and flu tablets, throat lozenges and nasal decongestant
- multivitamins for long trips, when dietary vitamin intake may be inadequate
- antibiotics, particularly if you're travelling well off the beaten track; see your doctor, as antibiotics must be prescribed, and carry the prescription with you
- anti-inflammatory (ibuprofen) for muscle and joint overuse and pain; also for headache and fever
- loperamide or diphenoxylate 'blockers' for diarrhoea
- prochlorperazine or metoclopramide for nausea and vomiting
- rehydration mixture to prevent dehydration, which may occur, for example, during bouts of diarrhoea; particularly important when travelling with children
- insect repellent, sunscreen, lip balm and eye drops
- calamine lotion, sting-relief spray or aloe vera to ease irritation from sunburn and insect bites or stings
- antifungal cream or powder for fungal skin infections and thrush
- antiseptic (such as povidone-iodine) for cuts and grazes
- bandages, crepe wraps, Band-Aids (plasters) and other wound dressings
- water purification tablets or iodine
- scissors, tweezers and a thermometer, noting that mercury thermometers are prohibited by airlines
- sterile kit in case you need injections in a country with medical hygiene problems; discuss with your doctor

INTERNET RESOURCES

There are a number of excellent travel-health sites on the Internet. From the **Lonely Planet website** (www.lonelyplanet.com) there are links to the WHO and the US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. Kathmandu's **CIWEC Clinic** (www.ciwec-clinic.com) has a very useful website providing medical advice relating specifically to travel in Nepal.

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel Asia & India* is a handy pocket size and is packed with useful information including pretrip

planning, emergency first aid, immunisation and disease information, and what to do if you get sick on the road. *Travel with Children* from Lonely Planet also includes advice on travel health for younger children.

Other detailed health guides:

Complete Guide to Healthy Travel Recommendations for international travel from the US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

Staying Healthy in Asia, Africa & Latin America

A detailed and well-organised guide by Dirk Schroeder.

Travellers' Health By Dr Richard Dawood. This is comprehensive, easy to read, authoritative and highly recommended, although it's rather large to lug around.

Where There Is No Doctor By David Werner. A very detailed guide intended for people going to work in a developing country.

OTHER PREPARATIONS

Make sure you're healthy before you start travelling. If you are going on a long trip make sure your teeth are OK. If you wear glasses, it's a good idea to take a spare pair and your prescription.

If you require a particular medication take a good supply, as it may not be available in Nepal. Necessary medications should be hand-carried aboard international flights. Also, take part of the packaging showing the generic name rather than the brand, which will make getting replacements easier. To avoid problems it's a good idea to have a legible prescription or letter from your doctor to show that you legally use the medication.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Deep vein thrombosis occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. Although most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain in the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and difficulty in breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

MOTION SICKNESS

Eating lightly before and during a trip will reduce the chances of motion sickness. If you are prone to motion sickness try to find a place that minimises movement – near the wing on aircraft, near the centre on buses. Fresh air usually helps; reading and cigarette smoke don't. Commercial preparations for motion sickness, which can cause drowsiness, have to be taken before the trip commences. Ginger (available in capsule form) and peppermint (including mint-flavoured sweets) are natural preventatives.

IN NEPAL

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

Self-diagnosis and treatment can be risky, so you should always seek medical help. Although we do give drug dosages in this section, they are for emergency use only. Correct diagnosis is vital.

In Nepal the top-end hotels can usually recommend a good place to go for advice. In most places in Nepal standards of medical attention are so low that for some

EVERYDAY HEALTH

Normal body temperature is up to 37°C (98.6°F); more than 2°C (4°F) higher indicates a high fever. The normal adult pulse rate is 60 to 100 per minute (children 80 to 100, babies 100 to 140). As a general rule the pulse increases about 20 beats per minute for each 1°C (2°F) rise in fever.

Respiration (breathing) rate is also an indicator of illness. Count the number of breaths per minute: between 12 and 20 is normal for adults and older children (up to 30 for younger children, 40 for babies). People with a high fever or serious respiratory illness breathe more quickly than normal. More than 40 shallow breaths a minute may indicate pneumonia.

ailments the best advice is to go straight to Kathmandu.

Antibiotics should ideally be administered only under medical supervision. Take only the recommended dose at the prescribed intervals and use the whole course, even if the illness seems to be cured earlier. Stop immediately if there are any serious reactions and don't use the antibiotic at all if you are unsure that you have the correct one. Some people are allergic to commonly prescribed antibiotics such as penicillin; carry this information (eg on a bracelet) when travelling.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Hepatitis

A general term for inflammation of the liver, hepatitis is a common disease worldwide. There are several different viruses that cause hepatitis, and they differ in the way that they are transmitted. The symptoms are similar in all forms of the illness and include fever, chills, headache, fatigue, feelings of weakness as well as aches and pains, followed by loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, light-coloured faeces, jaundiced (yellow) skin and yellowing of the whites of the eyes. People who have had hepatitis should avoid alcohol for some time after the illness, as the liver needs time to recover.

Hepatitis A is transmitted by contaminated drinking water and food. You should seek medical advice, but there is not much you can do apart from resting, drinking lots of fluids, eating lightly and avoiding fatty foods. Hygiene and habits may contribute to the virus' spread. In Nepal, the custom of sharing food from a single dish rather than using separate plates and a serving spoon may infect dinner companions. Hepatitis E is transmitted in the same way as hepatitis A; it can be particularly serious in pregnant women.

There are almost 300 million chronic carriers of hepatitis B in the world. It is spread through contact with infected blood, blood products or body fluids, for example through sexual contact, unsterilised needles and blood transfusions, or contact with blood via small breaks in the skin. Other risk situations include having a shave, tattoo or body piercing with contaminated equipment. The symptoms of hepatitis B may be more

severe than those for type A and the disease can lead to long-term problems such as chronic liver damage, liver cancer or a long-term carrier state. Hepatitis C and D are spread in the same way as hepatitis B and can also lead to long-term complications.

There are vaccines against hepatitis A and B, but there are currently no vaccines against the other types of hepatitis. Following the basic rules about food and water (hepatitis A and E) and avoiding risk situations (hepatitis B, C and D) are important preventative measures.

HIV & AIDS

Infection with HIV may lead to AIDS, which is a fatal disease. Any exposure to blood or body fluids may put the individual at risk. The disease is often transmitted through sexual contact or dirty needles – vaccinations, acupuncture, tattooing and body piercing can be potentially as dangerous as intravenous drug use. HIV/AIDS can also be spread through infected blood transfusions; some developing countries cannot afford to screen blood used for transfusions.

If you do need an injection, ask to see the syringe unwrapped in front of you, or take a needle and syringe pack with you. Fear of HIV infection should never preclude treatment for serious medical conditions.

Malaria

At the time of writing, there has been an outbreak of cerebral malaria in remote areas of the Terai. Most malaria in Nepal is the so-called benign vivax malaria and principally occurs in areas far from those frequented by tourists. Extremely small risk is present in some areas of Chitwan National Park during the monsoon; there is no risk in Kathmandu, Pokhara, or typical Himalayan trekking routes.

Long-term travellers and expat workers in high-risk areas should consider medication prophylaxis; all travellers should practise mosquito-bite avoidance (use of netting, repellents, etc) and engage in prompt evaluation if any fever develops after travel to such areas. Again, local knowledge regarding the current situation is essential.

Rabies

This fatal viral infection is found in many countries. Many animals can be infected

(such as dogs, cats, bats and monkeys) and it is their saliva that is infectious. Any bite, scratch or even lick from an animal should be cleaned immediately and thoroughly. Scrub with soap and running water, and then apply alcohol or iodine solution. Prompt medical help should be sought to receive a course of injections to prevent the onset of symptoms and death. Vaccination simplifies the treatment of animal bites.

Respiratory Infections

Upper-respiratory-tract infections (such as the common cold) are a common ailment in Nepal. Why are they such a serious problem? Respiratory infections are aggravated by high altitude, cold weather, pollution, chain-smoking and overcrowded conditions, which increase the opportunities for infection.

Symptoms include fever, weakness and sore throat. Any upper-respiratory-tract infection, including influenza, can lead to complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia, which may need to be treated with antibiotics. Seek medical help in this case.

No vaccine offers complete protection, but there are vaccines against influenza and pneumococcal pneumonia that might help. The influenza vaccine is good for no more than a year.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

While HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B can be transmitted through sexual contact, other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) include gonorrhoea, herpes and syphilis. Sores, blisters or rashes around the genitals and discharges or pain when urinating are common symptoms. In some STIs, such as wart virus or chlamydia, symptoms may be less marked or not observed at all, especially in women. Syphilis symptoms eventually disappear completely but the disease continues and can cause severe problems in later years. Although abstinence from sexual contact is the only 100% effective prevention, using condoms is also effective. Gonorrhoea and syphilis are treated with antibiotics. The different STIs each require specific antibiotics. There is no cure for herpes or AIDS.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Simple things such as a change of water, food or climate can cause a mild bout of diarrhoea, but a few rushed toilet trips with no

other symptoms are not indicative of a major problem. Even Marco Polo got the runs.

Dehydration is the main danger with any diarrhoea, particularly in children, pregnant women or the elderly as it can occur quite quickly. Under all circumstances *fluid replacement* (at least equal to the volume being lost) is the most important thing to remember. Soda water, weak black tea with a little sugar, or soft drinks allowed to go flat and diluted 50% with clean water are all good. With severe diarrhoea a rehydrating solution is preferable to replace lost minerals and salts. Commercially available oral rehydration salts (ORS) are very useful; add them to boiled or bottled water. In an emergency you can make up a solution of six teaspoons of sugar and half a teaspoon of salt to a litre of boiled or bottled water. You need to drink at least the same volume of fluid that you are losing in bowel movements and vomiting. Urine is the best guide to the adequacy of replacement – if you have small amounts of concentrated urine, you need to drink more. Keep drinking small amounts often. Stick to a bland diet as you recover.

Loperamide or diphenoxylate can be used to bring relief from the symptoms, although they do not actually cure the problem. Only use these drugs if you do not have access to toilets, eg if you *must* travel. For children under 12 years these drugs are not recommended. Do not use these drugs if you have a high fever or are severely dehydrated.

In certain situations antibiotics may be required: diarrhoea with blood or mucus (dysentery), any diarrhoea with fever, profuse watery diarrhoea, persistent diarrhoea not improving after 48 hours and severe diarrhoea. These suggest a more serious cause, in which case gut-paralysing drugs should be avoided.

In these situations, a stool test may be necessary to diagnose what bug is causing your diarrhoea, so you should seek medical help urgently. Where this is not possible the recommended drugs for bacterial diarrhoea (the most likely cause of severe diarrhoea in travellers) are norfloxacin 400mg or ciprofloxacin 500mg twice daily for three days. These are not recommended for children or pregnant women. The drug of choice for children would be azithromycin with dosage dependent on weight. A three-day

course is given. Alternative antibiotics may be given in pregnancy, but medical care is necessary.

Two other common causes of persistent diarrhoea in travellers are giardiasis and amoebic dysentery.

Amoebic Dysentery

Caused by the protozoan *Entamoeba histolytica*, amoebic dysentery is characterised by a gradual onset of low-grade diarrhoea, often with blood and mucus. Cramping, abdominal pain and vomiting are less likely than in other types of diarrhoea, and fever may not be present. Infection persists until treated and can recur and cause other health problems.

You should seek medical advice if you think you have giardiasis or amoebic dysentery, but where this is not possible, tindazole or metronidazole are the recommended drugs. Treatment is a 2g single dose of tindazole daily or 250mg of metronidazole three times daily for five to 10 days.

Both metronidazole and tindazole may be obtained in Nepal and are often sold in combination with other medications. If you are going to be travelling in high mountain areas, it might be a good idea to keep your own stock of these other medications with you.

Alcohol must not be consumed during the course of taking these medications; they may cause fatigue, nausea, abdominal discomfort and metallic taste.

Cyclospora

This intestinal parasite may cause significant fatigue and abdominal discomfort. Many expatriates avoid salads and uncooked vegetables, especially during and after the monsoon when this infection is most prevalent. The parasite may be diagnosed with stool examination and antibiotic treatment is for one week.

Giardiasis

Known as giardia, giardiasis is a type of diarrhoea that is relatively common in Nepal and is caused by a parasite, *Giardia lamblia*. Mountaineers often suffer from this problem. The parasite causing this intestinal disorder is present in contaminated water. Many kinds of mammals harbour this parasite, so you can get it easily from drinking 'pure mountain water' unless the area is de-

void of animals. Simply brushing your teeth using contaminated water is sufficient to get giardiasis, or any other gut bug. Symptoms include stomach cramps, nausea, a bloated stomach, watery, foul-smelling diarrhoea and frequent gas. Giardiasis can appear several weeks after you have been exposed to the parasite. The symptoms may disappear for a few days and then return; this can go on for several months.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS Acute Mountain Sickness

You should take care to acclimatise slowly and take things easy for the first couple of days in areas at high altitude. Lack of oxygen at altitudes over 2500m affects most people to some extent. The effect may be mild or severe and it occurs because less oxygen reaches the muscles and the brain at high altitude, requiring the heart and lungs to compensate by working harder. Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) – altitude sickness – is common at high elevations; relevant factors are the rate of ascent and individual susceptibility. The major risk factor in AMS is the speed with which you make your ascent.

AMS is a notoriously fickle affliction and can also affect trekkers and walkers accustomed to walking at high altitudes. AMS has been fatal at 3000m, although 3500m to 4500m is the usual range.

ACCLIMATISATION

AMS is linked to the low oxygen content of air at high elevation. Those who travel up to Everest Base Camp, for instance, reach an altitude where the oxygen content of the air is about half of that at sea level.

With an increase in altitude, the human body needs time to develop physiological mechanisms to cope with the decreased oxygen. This process of acclimatisation is still not fully understood, but it is known to involve modifications in breathing patterns and heart rate induced by the autonomic nervous system, and an increase in the blood's oxygen-carrying capabilities. These compensatory mechanisms usually take about one to three days to develop at a particular altitude. Once you are acclimatised to a given height you are unlikely to get AMS at that height, but you can still get ill when you travel higher. If the ascent is too

high and too fast, these compensatory reactions may not kick into gear fast enough.

SYMPTOMS

Mild symptoms of AMS are very common in travellers visiting high altitudes, and usually develop during the first 24 hours at altitude. Most visitors to the mountains of Nepal suffer from some symptoms; these generally disappear through acclimatisation in several hours to several days.

Symptoms tend to be worse at night and include headache, dizziness, lethargy, loss of appetite, nausea, breathlessness and irritability. Difficulty sleeping is another common symptom.

AMS may become more serious without warning and can be fatal. Symptoms are caused by the accumulation of fluid in the lungs and brain, and include breathlessness at rest, a dry, irritative cough (which may progress to the production of pink, frothy sputum), severe headache, lack of coordination (typically leading to a 'drunken walk'), confusion, irrational behaviour, vomiting and eventually unconsciousness.

The symptoms of AMS, however mild, are a warning – be sure to take them seriously! Trekkers should keep an eye on each other as those experiencing symptoms, especially severe symptoms, may not be in a position to recognise them. One thing to note is that while the symptoms of mild AMS often precede those of severe AMS, this is not always the case. Severe AMS can strike with little or no warning.

PREVENTION

The best way to prevent AMS is to avoid rapid ascents to high altitudes. If you fly or bus into an area at high altitude, take it easy for at least three days – for most travellers this is long enough to get over any initial ill effects. At this point you might step up your programme by visiting a few sights around town. Within a week you should be ready for something a bit more adventurous, but do not push yourself to do anything that you are not comfortable with.

Steps to prevent Acute Mountain Sickness include:

- Ascend slowly. Have frequent rest days, spending two to three nights at each rise of 1000m. If you reach a high altitude by trekking, acclimatisation takes place

gradually and you are less likely to be affected than if you fly directly to high altitude.

- Trekkers should bear in mind the climber's adage 'Climb high, sleep low'. It is always wise to sleep at a lower altitude than the greatest height reached during the day. High day climbs followed by a descent back to lower altitudes for the night are good preparation for high-altitude trekking. Also, once above 3000m, care should be taken not to increase the sleeping altitude by more than 400m per day. If the terrain won't allow for less than 400m of elevation gain, be ready to take an extra day off before tackling the climb.
- Drink extra fluids. The mountain air is dry and cold, and moisture is lost as you breathe. Evaporation of sweat may occur unnoticed and result in dehydration.
- Eat light, high-carbohydrate meals for more energy.
- Avoid alcohol as it may increase the risk of dehydration, and don't smoke.
- Avoid sedatives or sleeping pills.
- When trekking, take a day off to rest and acclimatise if feeling overtired. If you or anyone else in your party is having a tough time make allowances for unscheduled stops.
- Don't push yourself when climbing up to passes; rather, take plenty of breaks. You can usually get over the pass as easily tomorrow as you can today. Try to plan your itinerary so that long ascents can be divided into two or more days. Given the complexity and unknown variables involved with AMS and acclimatisation, trekkers should always err on the side of caution and ascend mountains slowly.

Persons prone to AMS or those required to make a rapid ascent (such as rescuers) may consider taking Diamox (acetazolamide); the usual dose is 125mg to 250mg twice daily. It is essential that this medication not be used as a substitute for slow ascent, or for descent and appropriate treatment if symptoms develop. The medication is a diuretic and possibly contributes to dehydration (extra fluid intake is necessary to compensate). Diamox may cause vision and taste changes and a tingling sensation in the fingers.

TREATMENT

Treat mild symptoms by resting at the same altitude until recovery, which usually takes a day or two. Take paracetamol or aspirin for headaches. If symptoms persist or become worse, however, *immediate descent* is necessary – even 500m can help.

The most effective treatment for severe AMS is to get down to a lower altitude as quickly as possible. In less severe cases the victim will be able to stagger down with some support; in other cases they may need to be carried down. Whatever the case, do not delay, as any delay could be fatal.

AMS victims may need to be flown out – make sure that you have adequate travel insurance.

Other treatments for AMS may include oxygen, acetazolamide (Diamox), nifedipine, dexamethasone and the Gamow bag. Drug treatments should never be used to avoid descent or to enable further ascent.

Cuts, Bites & Stings

CUTS & SCRATCHES

Wash any cut well and treat it with an anti-septic such as povidone-iodine or antibiotic ointment and sterile gauze dressing. Where possible avoid bandages and Band-Aids, which can keep wounds wet.

BEDBUGS, LICE & SCABIES

Bedbugs live in various places, but particularly in dirty mattresses and bedding, evidenced by spots of blood on bedclothes or on the wall. Bedbugs leave itchy bites in neat rows. Calamine lotion or a sting-relief spray may help.

All lice cause itching and discomfort. They make themselves at home in your hair (head lice), your clothing (body lice) or in your pubic hair (crabs). You catch lice through direct contact with infected people or by sharing combs, clothing and the like. Powder or shampoo treatment will kill the lice. Infected clothing should then be washed in very hot, soapy water and left in the sun to dry.

Like lice, scabies is spread by person-to-person contact and is relatively common in some schools and orphanages. Scabies is treated by specific medicated creams.

BITES & STINGS

Bee and wasp stings are usually painful rather than dangerous. However, people

who are allergic to them may have severe breathing difficulties and require urgent medical care. Calamine lotion or a sting-relief spray will give relief and ice packs will reduce the pain and swelling.

LEECHES

In damp low-lying areas, leeches may be present; they attach themselves to your skin to suck your blood. Trekkers often get them on their legs or in their boots. Salt or a lighted match end will make them fall off. Do not pull them off, as the bite is then more likely to become infected. Clean and apply pressure if the point of attachment is bleeding. An insect repellent may help keep them away.

Food

There is an old colonial adage that says 'If you can cook it, boil it or peel it you can eat it...otherwise forget it'. Vegetables and fruit should be washed with purified or bottled water or peeled where possible. Beware of ice cream that is sold in the street or anywhere it might have melted and refrozen; if there's any doubt (eg a power cut in the last day or two) steer well clear. Undercooked meat should be avoided.

If a place looks clean and well run and the vendor also looks clean and healthy, then the food is probably safe. In general, places that are packed with travellers or locals will be fine, while empty restaurants are questionable.

Frostbite

This is the freezing of extremities, including fingers, toes and nose. Signs and symptoms include a whitish or waxy cast to the skin, or even crystals on the surface, plus itching, numbness and pain. Warm the affected areas by immersing them in warm (not hot) water or covering with blankets until the skin becomes flushed. Frostbitten parts should not be rubbed and should be protected from further damage with bulky gauze dressings. Avoid using the frostbitten limb. Pain and swelling are inevitable. Blisters should not be broken. Get medical attention right away. Antibiotics and anti-inflammatories are often prescribed.

Heat Exhaustion

Dehydration and salt deficiency can cause heat exhaustion. Take time to acclimatise to

high temperatures; drink sufficient liquids and do not do anything too physically demanding.

Salt deficiency is characterised by fatigue, lethargy, headaches, giddiness and muscle cramps; salt tablets may help, but adding extra salt to your food is better.

Hypothermia

Weather in Nepal is not to be taken lightly. Even in midsummer, passes and high areas can be hit without warning by sudden snowstorms. You should always be prepared for cold, wet or windy conditions, especially if you're out walking, hitching or trekking at high altitudes or even taking a long bus trip over mountains (particularly at night).

Hypothermia occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it and the core temperature of the body falls. It is surprisingly easy to progress from very cold to dangerously cold through a combination of wind, wet clothing, fatigue and hunger, even if the air temperature is above freezing.

It is best to dress in layers; silk, wool and some of the new artificial fibres are all good insulating materials. A hat is important, as a lot of heat is lost through the head. A strong, waterproof outer layer and a 'space' blanket for emergencies are essential. Carry basic supplies, including food that contains simple sugars to generate heat quickly, and fluid to drink.

Symptoms of hypothermia are exhaustion, numb skin (particularly toes and fingers), shivering, slurred speech, irrational or violent behaviour, lethargy, stumbling, dizzy spells, muscle cramps and violent bursts of energy. Irrationality may take the form of sufferers claiming they are warm and trying to take off their clothes.

To treat mild hypothermia, first get the person out of the wind and rain, remove their clothing if it's wet and replace it with dry, warm clothing. Give them hot liquids (not alcohol) and some high-energy, easily digestible food. Do not rub victims; instead, allow them to slowly warm themselves. This should be enough to treat the early stages of hypothermia. The early recognition and treatment of mild hypothermia is the only way to prevent severe hypothermia, which is a critical condition.

Sunburn

It is very easy to get sunburnt in Nepal's high altitudes. Sunburn is more than just uncomfortable. Among the undesirable effects are premature skin ageing and possible skin cancer in later years. Sunscreen with a high sun protection factor (SPF), sunglasses and a wide-brimmed hat are good means of protection. Calamine lotion is good for treating mild sunburn.

Those with fair complexions should bring reflective sunscreen (containing zinc oxide or titanium oxide) with them. Apply the sunscreen to your nose and lips (and especially the tops of your ears if you are not wearing a hat).

Water

The number-one rule is *be careful of the water* and especially ice. If you don't know for certain that the water is safe you should assume the worst. In the country you should boil your own water or treat it with water-purification tablets. Milk should be treated with suspicion as it will be unpasteurised in the countryside, although boiled milk is fine if it is kept hygienically. Soft drinks and beer are always available wherever there is a shop, and these are always safe to drink, as is tea.

WATER PURIFICATION

The simplest way to purify water is to boil it thoroughly. In Nepal's higher-altitude areas water boils at a lower temperature and germs are less likely to be killed, so make sure you boil water for at least 10 minutes.

Consider purchasing a water filter for a long trip. There are two main kinds of filters. Total filters take out all parasites, bacteria and viruses, and make water safe to drink. They are often expensive, but they can be more cost-effective than buying bottled water. Simple filters (which can even be a nylon-mesh bag) take out dirt and larger foreign bodies from the water so that chemical solutions work much more effectively; if water is dirty, chemical solutions may not work at all. It's very important when buying a filter to read the specifications, so that you know exactly what it removes from the water and what it doesn't. Simple filtering will not remove all dangerous organisms, so if you cannot boil water it should be treated chemically.

Chlorine tablets (eg Puritabs or Steritabs) will kill many pathogens, but not giardia and amoebic cysts. Iodine is more effective for purifying water and is available in tablet form (eg Potable Aqua). Follow the directions carefully and remember that too much iodine can be harmful.

WOMEN'S HEALTH Gynaecological Problems

Antibiotic use, synthetic underwear, sweating and contraceptive pills can lead to fungal vaginal infections, especially when travelling in hot climates. Fungal infections are characterised by a rash, itch and discharge. Nystatin, miconazole or clotrimazole pessaries or vaginal cream are the usual treatment, but some people use a more traditional remedy involving vinegar or lemon-juice douches, or yogurt. Maintaining good personal hygiene and wearing loose-fitting clothes and cotton underwear may help prevent these infections.

Sexually transmitted infections are a major cause of gynaecological problems. Symptoms include a smelly discharge, painful intercourse and sometimes a burning sensation when urinating. Medical attention should be sought and sexual partners must

also be treated. Besides abstinence, the best thing is to practise safe sex using condoms.

Pregnancy

It is not advisable to travel to some places while pregnant as some vaccinations normally used to prevent serious diseases are not advisable during pregnancy. In addition, some diseases are much more serious for the mother (and may increase the risk of a stillborn child).

Most miscarriages occur during the first three months of pregnancy. Miscarriage is not uncommon and can occasionally lead to severe bleeding. The last three months should also be spent within reasonable distance of good medical care. Travel prior to 32 weeks is generally not a problem for pregnant women; airlines may restrict travel after this gestational time. Pregnant women should avoid all unnecessary medication, although vaccinations should still be taken where needed. Additional care should be taken to prevent illness and particular attention should be paid to diet and nutrition. Alcohol and nicotine, for example, should be avoided. Dehydration from diarrhoea is especially dangerous and prompt fluid intake is often important for pregnant women.

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