



PANOS SOUTH ASIA, KATHMANDU, NEPAL

NEPAL INFORMATION FOR VISITORS

LOCATION

The **Kingdom** of Nepal situated in **South Asia** on the Southern slopes of the Himalayan mountain range is geopolitically **landlocked** between India and China. Nepal is an elongated, rectangular country, with an area of approximately 147,181 square kilometers. **Eight of the world's ten tallest peaks, including the highest Mount Everest** are located in Nepal.



CAPITAL

Kathmandu is the capital city of the kingdom.

POPULATION

The population of Nepal by the end of 2002 was around **24 million** (World Bank, 2003).

RELIGION

Nepal is the only officially **Hindu kingdom** in the world. Over 85 per cent of its population is Hindu. The rest is comprised of Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and others.

LANGUAGE

Nepali is the official language spoken by about half the population. And more than a dozen other languages/dialects are also spoken like Newari, Gurung, Thakali and Tamang. **English is widely spoken** in Kathmandu.

TIME

Nepal standard time is **5 hours 45 minutes ahead of GMT** and 15 minutes ahead of Indian standard time.

WORKING HOURS

Government offices around Kathmandu Valley open from **9:00 to 17:00 in summer** and from **9:00 to 16:00 in winter**. Outside the valley, Government offices open from 10:00 to 17:00 in summer and 10:00 to 16:00 in winter.

WEATHER

Climate ranges from Tropical in the low lands to Arctic in higher altitudes.

Winter (December to February) -1 to 15 C

Summer (March – May) 24 to 32 C

Monsoon (June – August) 20 to 28 C

Autumn (September – November) 10 to 18 C

POLITICAL SYSTEM

Nepal is governed by a **constitutional monarchy**, with a bicameral parliament, by a multiparty political system. The current **Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal was proclaimed in 1992**. His Majesty the **King is the head of the state**.

CURRENT SECURITY/POLITICAL SITUATION

Though Nepal has been subject to a Maoist insurgency for the past 9-10 years, it does not affect Kathmandu city unless a strike is called. Things are fairly peaceful in the valley. There are army check posts in the evening at some points in the city that might slow down the traffic a bit but the handling is polite. Generally people keep early nights and are home around 9-10pm. For updates on the political situation, please check the www.nepalnews.com site. The current situation does not hinder daily activities and life goes on at a daily level. Nepalese are at heart very peaceful people. Nepal is still a beautiful and safe country for trekking in case you have some plans to take some time off.

POSTAL SYSTEM

The **central post office (Tel; 227499, 240018) located near Dhrahara Tower**, is open from Monday to Friday (9:00 to 17:00). **Express Mail Service (EMS)** is available at the GPO and at Thamel, Basantapur and airport postal counters. Courier services are available. Internet services have mushroomed all over Nepal via cybercafes/shops often doubling up as telecommunication and mail centres.

BANKS, MONEY CHANGERS AND CREDIT CARDS

Banks are open from 9.00 a.m. to 3 p.m. from Monday to Friday for business transactions. One can also change money in major hotels, banks and licensed money changers. Major Credit Cards are also acceptable at major Hotels, Restaurants, Carpet and Handicraft shops.

ELECTRIC SUPPLY

Electric supply in Nepal is 220 volts 50 cycles.

IMMIGRATION & VISA REQUIREMENTS

In general, we would advise you to get your visa for Nepal in your country or the country of residence to avoid queuing inconveniences at Tribhuvan International Airport at Kathmandu, if there is a Nepalese Embassy in your country. However, visas can easily be obtained on arrival. The Nepalese Immigration Authority may ask you to present an official Panos letter of invitation for securing your visa on arrival but

most times does not. **It would be advisable to bring with you the Panos letter of invitation and present it to the Immigration Authority at the airport.**

The Department of Immigration is located at Bhrikuti-Mandap, the city center of capital Kathmandu. Telephone numbers are: 00977-1- 4222453/4223590. Fax: 00977-1- 4223127.

There is another immigration office in Pokhara. The telephone number is: 00977- 061 – 21167. A Visa extension may be requested from the Department and Pokhara Immigration Office.

Visa can be obtained for the following duration from any Royal Nepalese Embassies or Consulates or at the entry points in Nepal. SAARC citizens are waived from a visa fee.

Visa fee and duration

Facilities	Duration	Fee
Single entry	60 days from the date of entry	US\$ 30
Multiple entry	60 days from the date of entry	US\$ 80

Tourist visa extension fee

Visa extension without re-entry facility for 30 days: US\$ 30

Visa extension with multiple entry facility for 30 days: US\$ 80

Please, note that Nepalese visa cost and payment must be made at the time of issue. Bank receipts for money changed must be kept securely as they may be asked for on departure. The airport tax on departure from Tribhuvan International Airport is NRs. 770 to SAARC nationals and Nrs.1150 to other nationals and is payable in local currency on cash at a designated counter inside the airport.

RECEPTION ON ARRIVAL

Participants will be met on arrival (by hotel bus or taxi) at Tribhuvan International Airport. Consequently, expected date and time of arrival in Tribhuvan International Airport with flight details should be sent as soon as possible to Kishor Pradhan <kishor@panossouthasia.org> or Rati Sharma <rati@panossouthasia.org>. Any subsequent changes should also be similarly transmitted. If you have provided us the above information in full, you need not do that again as we will refer to our correspondence.

TRANSPORT

You will arrive at Tribhuvan International Airport, which is located just half an hour (30 minutes) drive from the city center Kathmandu. Please, note that only those participants who have provided advance information to Panos of their flight number, arrival date and time of arrival will have transportation to their hotel provided (either by hotel bus or taxi).

HOTEL FOR YOUR ACCOMMODATION

The name of the hotel where you will be staying is **Hotel Himalaya** and the address and contact details are as follows:

Contact Person: Kishor Thakur; E-mail: himalhot@mos.com.np ; Phone: 977-1-5523900

For further details on Hotel Himalaya, please visit: www.himalayahotel.com.np

AIRLINE RESERVATIONS

A number of international airlines operate regular services to and from Kathmandu (see list below). It is, therefore, strongly recommended that participants secure their return/onward air passage prior to their arrival. Panos South Asia, Kathmandu will be able to reconfirm your tickets before departure.

MOUNTAIN FLIGHTS

Royal Nepal Airlines and other domestic Airlines in the private sector operate breath-taking mountain flights for tourists round the year. Mountain Flights **are the way to see the Everest when on a short visit**. The cost for the mountain flight varies and should be a little more than US\$ 100.

TREKKING PERMITS

A trekking permit is required to visit the interior of the country except the Annapurna, Everest and Langtang regions. They are obtained at the Immigration/Tour operator/Travel agent offices in Kathmandu or Pokhara.

GETTING AROUND

Metered taxis are easily recognizable by the taxi sign and black number plates and can be hailed off the street. **Metered tempos** (three wheeler scooters) cheaper than taxis are available. No tip is expected. There are regular bus services within the three cities of the Kathmandu Valley. One can also hire mountain or motor bikes at nominal rates.

KATHMANDU CITY

Kathmandu, the **capital city** sits slightly south-east of Nepal's centre. The city is encircled by the Ring Road, with the main bus station in the north and Tribhuvan international airport to the east. Most travellers head to the old city of Kathmandu, between the Vishnumati River and Kantipath, the main north-south road. Durbar Square, home to the old Royal Palace and the centre of the old town, lies between the river and Kantipath on Ganga Path, the city's busiest road. To its south is Freak Street, once the centre of hippy Kathmandu but now a bit of a backwater.

ENTERTAINMENT

There are many types of entertainment in the city of Kathmandu. These include **theatrical shows including classical and light performances, casinos and discos**. The cinema halls in Kathmandu screen Nepali, Indian, English and other regional movies. There are **private art galleries and a national art gallery called NAFA in Kathmandu** that exhibit and sell all sorts of modern and traditional paintings. Many of the tourist hotel restaurants have cultural shows along with dinner.

SHOPPING

There are numerous tourist shops on the main streets and in the hotel arcades brimming with tempting **jewellery, statues, and other typical Nepalese handicraft**. **Thangka** is one of the best buys in Nepal. Each place has its specially product which is unique. Bhaktapur, for instance, is the place to buy pottery. The Traditional Craftman's colony in Patan is a famous center for Nepalese handicraft. You may get carved wooden items while at Patan. As for jewellery, buyers can **opt for loose gems or custom-made items**. Besides handicrafts, Nepal is also a good place for genuine luxury goods. With a host of departmental stores and shopping plazas offering international brand-name products, Kathmandu has become a haven for the serious shopper. **A note of caution:** there is an export ban on certain items. Antiques can be taken out of the country only with special permission granted by the Department of Archaeology.

PLACES OF TOURIST INTEREST IN KATHMANDU

DURBAR SQUARE (PALACE SQUARE)

Very much the centre of old Kathmandu, Durbar Square is a huddle of temples and shrines, with intricately carved roofs, doors and windows. Many buildings are ancient, having survived the great earthquake of 1933. A good place to begin exploring is the unprepossessing **Kasthamandap**, purportedly the oldest building in the valley. It was believed to have been built around the **12th century**. At first it was a community centre, then a temple to the god Gorakhnath, and more recently, a gathering place for porters troling for customers. Nearby is the **Maju Deval**, a **Shiva temple** with platform steps that are ideal for watching hawkers, rickshaw wallahs



and souvenir sellers offering all sorts of services to credulous tourists. Other noteworthy sights include: the **Great Bell** which, when rung, is believed to ward off evil spirits; the **Jaganath Temple**, famed for its blush-inducing array of erotic carvings; the fearsome stone image of the **six-armed Kala Bhairab**; and the **Taleju Temple**, easily the most magnificent of the square's many temples - unfortunately, it's not open to the public; even the Nepalese are denied entrance and can only visit during the annual Dasain festival.

HANUMAN DHOKA (OLD ROYAL PALACE)

The palace was originally founded during the Licchavi period, although most of it was constructed by King Pratap Malla in the **17th century**. Marking the entrance is **Hanuman's statue** (1672), which commemorates the monkey god's brave assistance to Rama during the events of the *Ramayana*. Sheltered under an umbrella, the statue's face is smeared with red splodges - courtesy of paste applied by faithful followers. On each side of the palace gate stand stone lions, one ridden by Shiva, the other by his wife Parvati, while immediately above is a brightly painted niche illustrated with a ferocious Tantric figurine. Inside the palace are a number of **chowks (courtyards)**, including Nasal Chowk. During the Rana dynasty, this courtyard was used for coronations - **a practice which continues today**. Mul Chowk is the site of sacrifices made to Taleju Bhawani, the royal goddess of the Mallas, during the Dasain festival. The western part of the palace, overlooking Durbar Square, is home to an interesting museum that celebrates King Tribhuvan's successful putsch against the Ranas. Wander inside and you get an eerie insight into his life: lots of personal effects, extensive photos and newspaper clippings and magnificent furniture and knick-knackery.

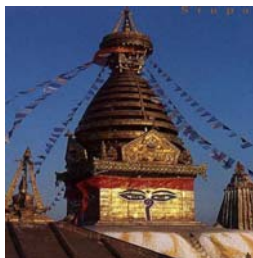
FREAK STREET

Kathmandu's most famous street from the **hippy overland days of the 1960s and 70s** runs south from Basantapur Square. Its real name is **Jochne** but since the early 1970s it has been better known as **Freak Street**. In its prime, the street's squalor and beauty was irresistible: the smell of sweet incense, children fluttering prayer wheels, cheap hotels, ad hoc restaurants, and shops selling enlightenment, epiphany - anything. Not surprisingly, it made an instant rapport with the dusty-haired 'freaks' who gave the street its name. **Love-ins are a thing of the past**, but Freak Street's history and plum position in the heart of old Kathmandu still make it a popular destination.

THAMEL

Thamel, the new tourist epicentre, is about 20 minutes walk north of Durbar Square. This is **hub of the tourists** in Nepal and literally you will be **find everything** that you want here. This is the spot to find **accommodation, food, phone services, trekking gear, bookshops, bars, pubs, night clubs, and Internet cafes and much more**. From Godavari Resort it **takes about 20 minutes** on a taxi to reach Thamel. Don't be surprised if you run into your long lost friend in Thamel!

SWAYAMBHU STUPA



Swayambhunath's stupa is reputed to be the oldest in Nepal. As much as **2000 years old**. This is Buddhist temple, situated on the top of a hill **west of the city, is one of the most popular attractions** in Nepal. Swayambhunath gives a **panoramic view over Kathmandu**, particularly striking in the evening **when the city is illuminated**.

OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST AROUND KATHMANDU CITY

PATAN

Patan, the **second-largest city in the valley** falling in **Lalitpur district**, lies just across the **Bagmati River** from Kathmandu, but it's a much quieter and less frenetic place to visit. **The Godavari Resort where you are going to stay during your visit is in Lalitpur District. Panos South Asia Office is also in Patan.** The city is justly proud of its temples and artisans and it is their handiwork that provides the focus of the **stunning Durbar Square** - choc-a-block with the largest display of Newari architecture in Nepal. It includes the Royal Palace, which contains a richly decorated bathtub, and the two-tiered brick **Jagannarayan Temple**. A few minutes' walk north of the square is the **Golden Temple**, a Buddhist monastery guarded by sacred tortoises that potter around the courtyard; and the **Kumbeshwar**, reputedly the **oldest (1392) temple** in Patan. South of the square is an area of charming streets lined with metal smiths and brassware shops. Patan's other attractions are flung further a field. Among them is a collection of **four stupas, thought to have been built over 2500 years ago**, and **Nepal's only zoo**, which features a reasonable assortment of rhinos, tigers, leopards and bird life. Tibetan carpets can be bought in **Jawalakhel**, east of the city where the zoo is and the **Tibetan Refugee Camp**.

BHAKTAPUR

Bhaktapur is in many ways the most medieval of the three major cities in the Kathmandu Valley. The city still retains a distinctly timeless air with much of its glorious architecture dating from the end of the 17th century. Most sights can be easily **traversed by foot and include yet another Durbar Square**, which is infinitely larger than Kathmandu's and has its fair share of temples, statues and columns, many with grisly histories behind them. For instance, the sculptor of the Ugrachandi and Bhairab Statues had his hands chopped off to prevent him from duplicating his masterpieces. Bhaktapur's second main square is **Taumadhi Tole**, which features **Nyatapola, the highest temple in the valley**, and Til Mahadev Narayan, an important place of pilgrimage. Nearby is **Potters' Square**, where thousands of clay pots are made and sold. East from here, through the sinuous streets of the old city centre, is **Tachupal Tole**, another square containing temples and monasteries plus craft museums. Sometimes it's best to take a break from temples and sit back and watch the unchanging rituals of daily life: the laying out of grain to dry in the sun; families collecting water or washing under communal taps; children playing simple games; dyed yarns flapping in the breeze; or potters at work throwing clay.

NAGARKOT

It is located 32 kilometers east of Kathmandu, is one of the most scenic spots in Bhaktapur district and is renowned for its spectacular sunrise **view of the Himalaya** when the weather is clear. Visitors often travel to Nagarkot from Kathmandu **to spend the night so that they can be there for the breathtaking sunrise. Nagarkot has become famous as one of the best spots to view Mount Everest** as well as other snow-topped peaks of the Himalayan range of eastern Nepal. It also offers an excellent view of the Indrawati river valley to the east. With **an elevation of 2,195 meters**, **Nagarkot also offers a panoramic view of the Valley** and is described by visitors as a place whose beauty endures year round.



QUICK TRIP BEYOND KATHMANDU

POKHARA



Pokhara is a remarkable place of natural beauty. Situated at an altitude of **827m from the sea level and 200km west of Kathmandu valley**, the city is known **as a center of adventure**. The enchanting city with a population of around 95,000 has several **beautiful lakes and offers stunning panoramic views of Himalayan peaks**. So today the city has **not only become the starting point for most popular trekking and rafting destinations but also a place to relax** and enjoy the beauty of nature.

EATERIES

NEPALI FOOD

You will be able to get Nepali set food at Godavari Resort. As the Resort where you are going to stay is bit out from the main city, you may not be able to get other appropriate restaurants nearby. But when you are in downtown Kathmandu, there are couple of restaurants which serve Nepali food set menu for US\$ 5 -10. Some of the popular ones are **Bhancha Ghar (Kamaladai)** and **Thakali Kitchen (in Durbar Marg)**. There are other restaurants which serve Nepali food for less than US\$ 5 also.

OTHER FOOD

There are many **eateries and bars** in Thamel that cater food to your taste. **Fire and Ice** just before entering Thamel is popular among western tourists and locals as well for its **variety of pizzas**. For **Thai food** you can try **Krung Thai**. There is **Kilroys of Kathmandu** run by an English gentleman married to a Nepali, where variety of food is served. There are **Italian, Spanish, Korean, Japanese, Chinese and** other continental eateries also in Thamel and surrounding areas. Most of the eateries serve western food.

If you feel like a pint of beer or something strong to round off your evening, there are several bars that are **popular with trekkers, travelers and tourists** alike like the **New Orleans, Maya Pub, Tom and Jerry, Rum Doodle** in Thamel. Some of these bars serve **good steak** and other **western food** also. Good places **to meet people**.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES FOR MORE INFO ON NEPAL

www.catmando.com

www.nepal.com

www.info-nepal.com

www.nepaltravelinfo.com

www.nepalinformation.com

www.nepallink.com

www.viewnepal.com

www.travel-nepal.com
