

MOUNTAIN TRUST

VOLUNTEER WELCOME PACK

Travel Advice

There are several airline companies that offer routes to Kathmandu, including Jet Airways, Oman Air and Qatar Airways. Jet Airways is the cheapest and pretty good value for money. Return flights are cheaper than buying two separate but if you're not sure when you'd like to depart from Nepal, then it is not too much more expensive so long as you make sure to book your flight as far in advance as possible. Before leaving it would be a good idea to get some dollars (\$30-50) as several hotels in Kathmandu will accept dollars, as well as most international airports (so you can get something during your stopover). There is an exchange desk as soon as you have cleared baggage reclaim so it is useful to get some Nepali Rupees in the airport. Alternatively there are several exchanges and ATMs in Thamel. Nabil Bank will let you take out 30,000NR (£192) but there is a charge of 500NR (£3). Most of the other banks will only let you take out 10,000NR - Standard Charter is the best as it doesn't charge commission but you will still get charged by your bank. So it depends what you feel most comfortable and convenient.

Health Advice (Lonely Planet)

Considering the terrain, potential health risks and high cost of medical evacuation, it is unwise to travel to Nepal without adequate health insurance. You do not officially require any immunisations to enter the country, unless you have come from an area where yellow fever is present – in which case, you must show proof of immunisation.

It is best to seek medical advice at least six weeks before travelling, since some vaccinations require multiple injections over a period of time.

Note that some vaccinations should not be given during pregnancy or to people with allergies.

Vaccinations you might consider:

Diphtheria and 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.

Japanese encephalitis This is a mosquito-borne viral encephalitis that occurs in the Terai and occasionally in the Kathmandu Valley, particularly during the monsoon (August to early October). The vaccine is given as three injections over three to four weeks and is usually boosted at three years. Recommended only for prolonged stays to the Terai (especially the west) or Kathmandu Valley.

Meningococcal meningitis A single-dose vaccine boosted every three to five years is recommended only for individuals at high risk and for residents.

Polio This serious, easily transmitted disease is still found in 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 considered for long-term visitors, particularly if you plan to travel to remote areas. In Nepal the disease is carried by street dogs and monkeys. Vaccination is strongly recommended for children. Pretravel rabies vaccination involves having three injections over 21 to 28 days. 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 (TB) This disease is highly endemic in Nepal, though cases are extremely rare among travellers. Most people in the West are vaccinated during childhood.

Typhoid Drug-resistant typhoid fever is a growing problem in Nepal, particularly in the Terai, and vaccination is recommended. The vaccine is available as a single injection or oral capsules – ask your doctor for advice.

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.

Other Preparations

Visiting Nepal may take you to some very remote areas, so it makes sense to visit the doctor before you travel for a general check-up.

- If you have any pre-existing medical conditions, bring any medication you need from home.
- Ask your physician to give you a written description of your condition and your medications with their generic names in case you have to visit a doctor in Nepal.
- It pays to get a dental check-up well before embarking on a trek.
- Contact-lens wearers should bring plenty of solution and take extra care with hygiene to avoid eye infections.
- Carry backup prescription glasses and sunglasses in case you can't wear your lenses at some point

Read more: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/nepal/health#ixzz46WssUvuE>

Visas

Visas can be purchased on arrival in Kathmandu Airport or at the Nepali Embassy in your own country. For the UK, the Embassy's address is 12A Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QU, United Kingdom. If done in person, it takes 24 hours to be processed (but you can leave and come back the next day! The Visa Section is also only open between 10am-12pm so not terribly convenient but if you're in a rush and don't want to trust your passport to Royal Mail, it's the easiest way. As a volunteer, MT recommends that you purchase a Tourist Visa, as you are not officially 'employed' by the Trust and therefore are not eligible for a Working Visa.

Tourist Visa (Direct Visa Link to Online application) [Nepali Department of Immigration]

3.1. Eligibility and Duration

Tourist Visiting Nepal is eligible for The Tourist Visa on Arrival at the Port of Entry. However, Tourists holding the passport of Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Cameroon, Somalia, Liberia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine are not eligible for on arrival visa at the Port of Entry. It is issued and may be extended at a time or several times, till the visit but not exceeding 150 day in one year from January to December.

3.2. Issuing Authority

Immigration Officer at the Port of Entry, Diplomatic mission and Consuls of Nepal are authorized to issue the Visa. Department of Immigration at Kathmandu and Immigration Office at Pokhara are authorized for the extension of the Visa.

3.3. Application Process

Application for the Visa should be submitted to the Immigration Officer at the Port of Entry or Diplomatic Missions or Consuls of Nepal aboard. Application for extension of the Visa should be submitted to the Department of Immigration in Kathmandu or Immigration Office in Pokhara. This can be done via an online form. For more information, check out <http://www.thelongestwayhome.com/travel-guides/nepal/nepal-visa-information.html>.

3.5. Fee structure:

- a) US \$ 25 for 15 days Visa
- b) US\$ 40 for 30 days Visa
- c) US\$ 100 For 90 days Visa

Transfers

From the airport and to your accommodation in Pokhara (from the public bus stop), the transfer is covered by the Mountain Trust so you will not be expected to pay anything. For the return trip to Kathmandu, you will need to pay for the transfer to the Pokhara bus park which is approximately 400NR.

Accommodation

In Kathmandu: The Trust recommends that volunteers stay at Dream Nepal Hotel to recommend them to our volunteers. It is in the Thamel area of Kathmandu which is the central tourist district, walking distance to Durbar Square and to the Royal Palace Museum. They have a range of rooms available at different prices. The budget room is \$12. Several of our volunteers have stayed there previously and spoken highly of their experiences. Its also very conveniently situated for the buses to Pokhara being only 5 minutes walk away from the bus stop, and just round the corner from several 24hours ATMs. They are also happy to arrange for an airport pickup for you as well as a bus ticket to Pokhara. If you wish to stay here, then please contact them on booking@hoteldreamnepal.com. The total cost of a budget room, an airport pick-up and a bus ticket to Pokhara will be US\$28.

There are several good restaurants close to the hotel. **Gaia** is about 2 minutes around the corner, and serves a large range of dishes, from Thukpa (Tibetan soup) to Dhal Bhatt (the traditional Nepali dish). It is a little expensive but if you want somewhere convenient with good food then it's a good place to go. A bit further away is **Fire and Ice Pizzeria**, or **OR2K** which does a very good range of vegetarian and Mediterranean dishes. If you're missing falafel and hummus, then you are in for a treat!

In Pokhara: Modern and safe accommodation is available at the office. We rent two double bedrooms at a cost of £5 per person per night (payable through our justgiving page). There's a fully equipped kitchen, lounge and western style shower/loo. These rooms are offered on a first come first served basis but can be booked in advance subject to availability. If you'd prefer to stay in a local hotel or hostel, please contact us and we will help you find suitable accommodation for your budget. There is also a homestay option available so let us know if you would like us to arrange one for you.

Climate

There are four distinct seasons: Spring (March-May) is very warm, with temperatures upwards of 25 degrees centigrade. Even during this time, it is sensible to pack warm clothes as temperatures up in mountains do not always reflect those in Pokhara. This is also the time when the rhododendrons blossom. Summer (June-Aug) is the monsoon season and temperatures remain high. It rains everyday and there are often thunderstorms in the evening, but this gives beautifully clear views of the Annapurnas. This is not a good time to go trekking, however, as trails become muddy and difficult to walk. Autumn (Sept-Nov) is much cooler and the most popular season for trekking. The days can be quite warm but the nights get a lot cooler. There is usually very little rain during this time. Winter (Dec-Feb) has a further temperature drop so remember to bring plenty of warm clothes, and definitely some thermals for sleeping.

Pokhara

Pokhara is a large city about 7 hours drive north-east of Kathmandu. The bus is the cheapest way to get there, and costs around 700NR (Nepali Rupees). You can take the plane as well, which only takes half an hour, but is much more expensive (\$118). Domestic flights in Nepal do have a poor safety record so although the bus takes more time, it is a good way to see the countryside and get a taste of Nepal.

Lakeside is the tourist end of town, and is where the MT Office is situated, but if you fancy a bit more 'life' then head towards Pritivi Chowk where there is street food, cloth shops and fruit stalls galore!

There are lots of restaurants, hotels, cafes, and activities to do in Pokhara so even in your free time you'll have plenty to keep you occupied.

Things to do

Relax by the Pool

All Mountain Trust Volunteers have free use of Hotel Barahi's lovely outdoor pool. Just a five minutes stroll from the office (turn right out of the office and follow the path round to Barahi Chowk as if heading back towards Lakeside main drag) and you can bag yourself a lounge for some well-earned R&R! Towels available next to the pool bar where you can also find beer and tasty snacks. The Hotel is owned by the President and Treasurer of Mountain Trust Nepal, Biplab ad Sandhya Poudel.

Language lessons

Bethesda Language School offer lessons at 530NR per hour. The school itself is up in Nadipur which takes approximately 30mins to get to via bus and walking. You can take a bus from Hallam Chowk going to Mahendrapool and then walk for another 10 minutes to the school. The bus costs 25NR each way, and a taxi will cost 500NR each way. Alternately, if there are a group of you, it would cost 100NR to have the teacher come and teach in the office. It might seem like a bit of money, but just being able to speak a little bit of Nepali will really improve your volunteering experience, particularly in rural areas, and mean that the Lakeside shopkeepers don't just see you as another tourist!

Chitwan

There are many lodges in and around the National Park, but if you're looking for one that's slightly off the beaten track with a family feel then look no further than Bamboo Lodge. It has great reviews on Trip Advisor and offer several package trips depending on how long you want to stay. These include a Jungle walk, Tharu cultural dancing, watching the sunset with beer and popcorn, Elephant bathing and an Elephant safari. If you feel that you would prefer not to have a safari on an elephant's back then you can opt to have one in the Jeep. The cost of a 3 night/2 day package is \$120 for volunteers and includes all food and transport.

Rapid Runner (take the first turning on the left after getting onto the main round in front of the office)

Whatever your rafting experience, these guys can organize a trip for you! In October, the rapids become full flowing but you can go throughout the year. If you're new to rafting it might be good to do a short trip so that you get the taste for rafting and are ready to move on to the more challenging ones. It's a really good way to get down to Chitwan too – it really is just you, the raft, the river and the scenery all the way there. All your food is included, and they feed you well – with popcorn, fresh vegetables and salads galore. In the evenings, there is always a ready supply of beer and rum, as well as a roaring camp fire. For sleeping, you can stay in a tent or you can sleep under a small shelter with the guides. It's a good way to get down to Chitwan. In the Monsoon, the rapids are much more exciting but as it is a good start for people who have never rafted before.

World Peace Stupa

From most spots in Pokhara, you can see the World Peace Pagoda sitting on top of the hill on the opposite side of Lakeside. The views from the top will give fantastic panoramic shots both of Pokhara and of the Annapurna Mountain Range. There are two routes which will allow you to reach the Pagoda - one takes you through Damside and towards Pardi Dam where Devi Falls (another Pokhara tourist destination) is situated. You can also take a bus or a taxi. From there, follow signs for the Stupa, and take the path up the stone steps. Alternatively, you can take a boat across from Lakeside (300NR) and walk up up the stone path but this route is quite steep whereas the other is more gentle. There are also several little cafes to have a drink and a snack. Round trip, if walking, is wouldn't be more than 3 hours including a break at the top and enjoying the vista.

Paragliding

There are a large number of paragliding companies in Pokhara but the most trusted are Blue Sky, Sunrise Paragliding or Frontier Adventures, so check out their websites and have a talk to the guides in the office. They all offer tandem paragliding, where a qualified pilot accompanies you, as well as courses if you want to do it solo. The flights depart from Sarangkot but jeeps are often included in the package to take you up the mountain, as well as sometimes to take you back to Lakeside, depending on what flight you want to do.

Sarangkot

Not only is Sarangkot the destination for paragliding, but it also is a great place, on a clear day, to watch the sunrise or sunset over the Annapurnas. You can walk or take a taxi (800NR) to the top and watch the gorgeous changes from black to pink to orange to white (and vice versa for sunset). There are several cafes also if you need an early morning coffee or an evening beer. You can also walk if you head towards Lakeside North and follow signs.

Movie Garden

If you're feeling in need of movie, beer and pizza, then look no further than The Movie Garden. Every night, they have a film starting at 7pm and range from Life of Brian to Pulp Fiction, from Mulan to Gandhi. Everyone is sure to find a movie from them. There is an entry fee of 295NR but for a night of entertainment, it is well worth the £3.

Trekking

There are several routes which are easily accessible from Pokhara, all of varying lengths. If you're look for a quick foray up into the mountains, Ghorepani-Ghandruk is a quick 4-5 day trek which allows for plenty of stunning views. If you want to get a bit closer to the mountains then there is ABC (Annapurna Base Camp) which can take about 8-12 days depending on fitness and walking speeds. You can also do variations of the typical routes if you want to go a little further or shorter. For example on the Ghorepani-Ghandruk trail, instead of staying overnight in Tatopani, you can carry on to Chiule and then come down through Jhinudanda and Landruk the next day. Best to take a map of the route you're planning on doing as these will have walking times already printed. You can always ask directions from locals as most people have pretty English. Wherever you go, there are plenty of hotels and guest houses along the way which offer Wifi and hot showers. If you pay for food in the hotel you also get a discount

on the room rate. The prices are already pretty low (250R for a double room and 500NR for a Dal Bhatt) so as tempting as it might be to bargain, try not to - most of these people had no custom in the months after the Earthquake and business is still slow. If you are travelling alone, then it is advisable to take a guide, just for safety's sake. A guide will have good English and will take care of you on the trek, whilst a porter will carry your rucksack but might not have very good English. You can book either a male or a female guide and pay an all inclusive fee for their services, food and accommodation for the whole trip so you don't need worry about carrying loads of cash around the mountains.

Office

In the office, there is a whiteboard that lists all the names of volunteers. It details what volunteers are working on, their mobile numbers, and any important upcoming events, such as visits to projects . Please update this as necessary and ditto the shared MT calendar on google drive.

There is only one desktop computer in the office, so we suggest that you bring you own laptop or tablet to work on.

Refer to the SHARED NEPAL folder on google drive for all documents and media. Please save any of your own reports / costings / pics etc to this folder and alert the UK team you have done so for download.

List of important numbers

It's really useful to get a Nepali Pay as you go SIM whilst you're in Nepal. You can buy recharge cards from lots of small shops throughout the country. Texts cost 1.00NR (slightly more if not on the same network) and phone calls are 1.99NR, but check with your provider. You can get data but most places around Pokhara have a good WIFI connection.

Here are some useful numbers:

Kisan: (+977)9856028597

Administrative Head of MT – responsible for coordinating projects and volunteers

Bandana: (+977)9846049246

Office Administrator – works in the office in Pokhara

Natasha: (+44)7817646294

Volunteer coordinator in the UK

Amanda: (+977) 9825117483

Teaching English as a foreign language in Pokhara and MT volunteer.

Madhav: (+977)9846522883

Taxi driver – will pick you up from the bus stop in Pokhara and is always happy to run you wherever you need to go