



## The Responsible Travel Guide

### **BEFORE EMBARKING ON YOUR TRIP**

Be as informed as possible about Nepal before you arrive. We suggest that you read up on Nepal, and there are literally hundreds of titles to choose from at any good book store. Whatever you end up doing on your holiday, by learning about the religion and culture before you go, you will find that the welcome will be warmer and the experience richer for your knowledge. Even speaking a few words of the local language will have a dramatic effect on your interaction with your hosts.

### **CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS & ETIQUETTE**

When traveling in Nepal, like many parts of Asia, there are norms of behaviour which you should adhere to. Things are done differently in Nepal, and in your dealings with local people you should accept these differences and not try to change them for your own benefit or comfort. In particular, westerners can often be frustrated by the slow pace at which things are done. You will see that patience and courtesy are virtues which will open many doors.

### **Here are a few tips on the customs of Nepal:**

- **Body Parts**

In Asia, the head of a person is a symbolic high point, and the feet the low point. You should not touch either of these body parts as it is either intrusive or disrespectful. Do not put your feet on chairs or pat someone on the head. Remember that it is polite to take off your shoes when entering someone's house or a temple or religious site. Dress standards are modest in Nepal. To guide you on what is and is not acceptable, take a look at what the men and women in the local community are wearing. As a general guide, shorts should be knee length and the midriff should be covered.

- **Public Displays of Affection**

Please try to remember that public displays of affection with the opposite sex in Nepal is considered offensive. Kissing is definitely something you should avoid on the street. Even holding hands is frowned upon, but interestingly you will see that friends of the same sex often hold hands and this is quite normal.

- Saving Face

Personal dignity is very important to the Nepali people. Try not to criticize or pass judgment, and keep in mind that your concept of right and wrong will undoubtedly be very different from theirs. Do not raise your voice in anger, and do not point with your finger or foot. This will be taken as a personal insult. If you wish to summon someone's attention, Nepalis generally use a subtle downward waving motion.

- Hospitality

Wherever you are in Nepal, local people will often come up and talk to you, asking all sorts of questions like 'where are you from', 'where are you going' and 'what is your name'. In some areas, these questions may become a little repetitive, as all the children in the village ask you the same questions. Please remember that they are inquisitive, and are probably practicing their English on you. By taking the time to respond, you will learn about their daily lives, and their culture and attitude to life. You may even be invited to join them for a cup of tea. An offer of hospitality should be welcomed as it offers a chance for you to reciprocate their hospitality by displaying your interest in their culture and way of life. You may even find that 'popping in for a cup of tea' may involve the whole family (sometimes three or four generations!), and will invariably be a great laugh for everyone. Above all, remember that a smile has the same meaning wherever you are in the world.

- On the Trek

Please do not give money, pens, or sweets to the local people in the villages we visit, as it promotes a 'begging culture' in the local communities. With sweets - local people may not have access to dentists, nor be able to afford them. If you wish to donate some money to a worthy cause, your group leader may be able to suggest local projects that Himalayan Frontiers is involved with. It is always considered proper to make a donation at the end of a visit to a pagoda or temple - most have a contributions box for this purpose.

It is important to stick to the trail, and to keep an eye on what you are walking on. There are many fragile and delicate flowers and plants beside the trail. Moss and lichens in cloud forest may be several hundred years old. Please refrain from picking flowers, however innocuous it may seem as the eco-system is always in a fine balance.

At eating times, if you choose to eat with your hands as many local people do, remember that you should only eat with your right hand for hygiene reasons, and if a communal bowl and utensil is supplied, do not use your own utensils to scoop food onto your plate.

- Cameras

The key with photography is to ask permission before taking a portrait of someone, and respect their wishes if they refuse. Remember that unless you send a copy of the photograph to them, they will never see the result. Do not offer to pay for a snapshot as this will only encourage a begging mentality in the future. You should be aware that some ethnic groups believe that being captured on film can also capture some of their spirit, and taking these images away can amount to having their spirit stolen. In short, be sensitive to people's wishes. The same principles apply for videography.

- Bartering

Shopping in Nepal can be great fun. In the major cities, and certainly in Kathmandu, you will want to purchase some goods. Haggling the price is part and parcel of the shopping experience, and if done well, is a gratifying experience for both purchaser and seller alike. Have an idea about the price you should be paying for the item by looking at similar goods in other shops. Be polite, patient, but firm in your bargaining. This way you will earn the respect of the vendor. Do not bargain a price to an agreed level then walk away without purchasing the item.

## **HYGIENE**

Good hygiene and a preventative attitude will go a long way to ensuring you get the most from your trip with Himalayan Frontiers. We take food hygiene very seriously, and would advise you to exercise caution in eating food which is not cooked by our chefs, and always wash your own hands before meal times. Standards of hygiene in Nepal can often be very low, and the risk of food contamination high. We exercise a high standard of hygiene, whether our chefs cook in camp or at a tea-house. This way, we can ensure that our group will have the minimum impact on the environment and the highest levels of hygiene.

## **THE ENVIRONMENT**

With travelers seeking out ever more natural wonders around the world, it is paramount that we act responsibly, and protect these habitats for future generations. The environment in Nepal is particularly fragile, due in part to the inhospitable nature of much of the terrain, and the consequent pressures this creates on land space. Nepal's population is also burgeoning at an alarming rate, adding to these woes.

### **Pollution control**

There is sparse education on environmental awareness and pollution in Nepal. You may find the level of litter quite shocking, particularly in urban areas. Our policy here is to lead by example, not to lecture on the rights and wrongs of refuse disposal and recycling.

On all of our camping treks, all non bio-degradable rubbish is carried out with us, and disposed of appropriately. Please bear this in mind when packing for your trip. Plastic water bottles are a particular problem in Nepal, so we encourage the use of water filters, iodine and purification tablets to minimize waste.

We always ensure our camping trek lavatories are sited appropriately, away from fresh waterways. Burying or carrying out of used toilet paper is a must. All tampons and sanitary pads should be carried out of the area and disposed of appropriately. We ask you to check that any soaps or detergents you bring with you are biodegradable, and to be aware that your movements are effecting your surroundings.

Please do not wash yourself or your clothes in a river or lake, even though you are likely to see local people do exactly that. Ask your group leader for a bowl of water and wash at least 50m from the nearest water source. Please avoid using showers on tea-house treks as the heat to warm your water will undoubtedly come from wood from the local forest.

### **Campfires**

Given the fragile state of Nepal's woodland and the very live concern of deforestation for agriculture, Himalayan Frontiers do not generally have campfires on camping trips. There may however be the occasion when a campfire is appropriate, and your group leader will communicate this to you. When making a campfire, please listen to the instructions of the group leader for collecting firewood and positioning of the fire. Please do not remove partially submerged wood, as numerous organisms live in this sort of habitat, including snakes and spiders. Never throw rubbish or plastics onto the fire, and be careful where you put your feet when on a collection run. In the morning, the fireplace will need to be cleaned up and left in the same condition that the site was found.


### **Wildlife**

Be respectful to wildlife, even to the infuriating mosquito. Buddhism is practiced by millions of Nepalis, so even for a blood-sucking pest, death should not come before its time. Avoid reaching out to touch wild creatures, as apart from the danger of being bitten or stung, the animals may have fleas, ticks, or other parasites and diseases. Do not feed wild animals for obvious reasons, but particularly because it can lead to future aggressive behaviour. Be sure that you never come between mother and offspring, even if you want to make that special photo, as this can bring about unpredictable behaviour and will cause the animals stress. Keep a safe distance from the animals and to get good wildlife photographs, remain as quiet as possible and ask your guide/group leader for information on particular species to get an insight into their habitat and behaviour patterns. We recommend the use of a zoom lens to minimize the effect of your presence in the company of wild animals.

Deforestation in Nepal is a very live issue, particularly given the current population pressures. On all our treks, we cook our food on kerosene cookers, and unless there is a unique reason, we completely avoid using wood as a fuel.

## **SHOPPING**

Travel represents to many the perfect chance to buy new and exciting souvenirs. We encourage people to buy from local community cooperatives wherever possible, so that more of your money goes straight to those involved in making the goods.



Remember that there are a number of internationally banned substances which are illegal to purchase. If you are in any doubt as to the status of any product you wish to purchase, please refer to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora ([www.cites.org/](http://www.cites.org/)), and ask for advice. Bear in mind for example that many traditional medicines can contain small traces of banned substances, and are therefore illegal to purchase.

### **EATING OUT**

One of the special delights of Nepal is its cuisine. There is of course western food available in most areas of Nepal, usually at something of a premium. The local dishes however are cheap and delicious, providing a balanced and healthy diet – by buying local produce, your money will more directly support the locals. You will also get a better taste of Nepal.

### **DRUGS**

Himalayan Frontiers will not tolerate the possession or use of Illegal drugs on any of its trips. In circumstances where travellers are found to be in breach of this code, the group leader has the right to expel the individual(s) from the trip.

### **DEVELOPMENT & PROGRESS**

Many people are struck by the beauty and peacefulness of the way of life in the hill communities in Nepal. However, a very large proportion of the Nepali people are subsistence farmers and on the bread-line. Poverty is rife and life can be (and often is) very harsh. Some believe that the commercialization and development of the hill communities destroys their unspoilt nature. But place yourselves in their shoes for just a moment, and you will readily understand why progress is cosseted and a more comfortable existence sought.

### **DONATING MONEY**

If you feel that you would like to contribute to a good cause (of which there are many in Nepal), please ask your group leader for information on the most effective way to make a donation. You will see poverty at close quarters, but you should resist the temptation to hand money to beggars or the poor, as this will only create long term problems with dependency and resentment. It is also not unknown that some children have been maimed or disfigured to assist begging.

If you wish to make a difference and give something back after you have returned from your trip, we recommend that you research on the internet and consult with the Nepal Embassy in London for up to date information on projects and schemes dedicated to the health and welfare of Nepal and its environment. You may be aware of the tireless efforts of Edmund Hillary, particularly in the Khumbu region of Nepal, and you may like to make a donation to the Himalayan Trust.