

Overseas Adventure Travel[®]

THE LEADER IN CUSTOMIZED SMALL GROUP ADVENTURES SINCE 1978

Your O.A.T. Adventure Travel Planning Guide[®]



Nepal & the Mystical Himalayas

2026

Overseas Adventure Travel®

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

I am thrilled that you are considering exploring the world with O.A.T. There are so many wonderful destinations to discover, and the itinerary described inside is a perfect way to fulfill a travel dream.

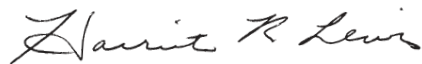
When you join us, you will slip seamlessly into local life as you explore off the beaten path in your small group. Like all our itineraries, this one is designed to give you an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. You will get to know community leaders and try your hand at local trades during your *A Day in the Life* experience, share traditional fare and lively conversation during a Home-Hosted Visit, discuss the Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, and visit sites supported by Grand Circle Foundation. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our FREE Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

To ensure you experience the true culture and feel supported every step of the way, we provide the services of a local Trip Experience Leader from the beginning of your adventure to the end. Along with introducing you to the history and culture of their homeland, these friendly experts will gladly help you out with any special requests to make your trip even more special. You can also rely on the seasoned team at our regional office, who are ready to help 24/7 in case any unexpected circumstances arise.

Plus, you can put your own personal stamp on your trip, like the **87% of our travelers who customize their experience**. Perhaps you will choose to see more of your destination by adding an optional trip extension to your itinerary. You can also arrive a few days early to explore independently and get acclimated, customize your air itinerary, and more.

I hope you find this Travel Planning Guide helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our Travel Counselors at **1-800-955-1925**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis
Chair
Overseas Adventure Travel

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Phewa Lake, Pokhara

Nepal & the Mystical Himalayas

Small Group Adventure

Nepal: Kathmandu, Pokhara, 3-Night Overland Trek, 2-Night River Camp, 2-Night Jungle Safari

Small groups of no more than 16 travelers, guaranteed

16 days starting from \$5,695

including international airfare

Single Supplement: **FREE**

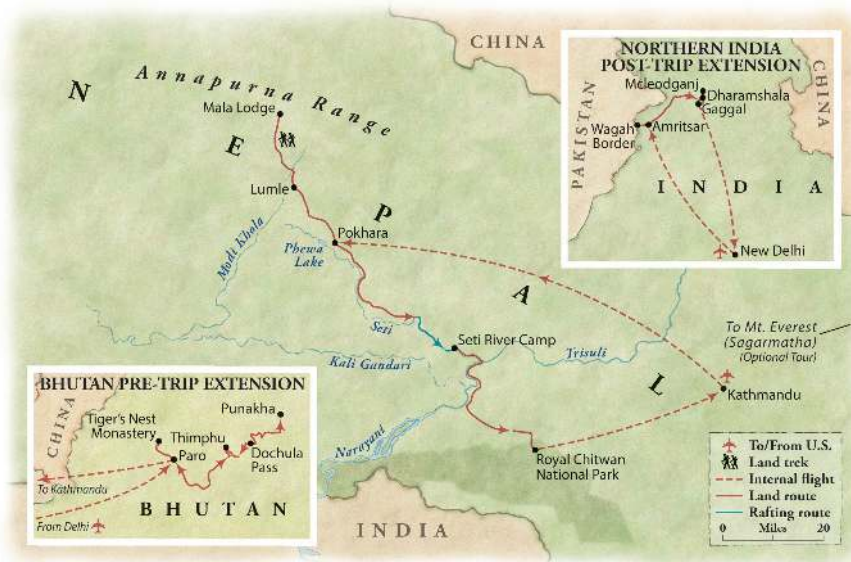
For departure dates & prices, visit www.oattravel.com/nel2026pricing

The mighty Himalayas rise to snowcapped peaks that are the very rooftop of the world. Sinuous green terraces wind along mountain valleys. Prayer flags adorn lively temples that reveal colorful ancient scrolls and exquisite carvings. This is Nepal. With O.A.T., you'll explore the land and meet the people like a local: Trek on stone paths threading pristine hillsides ... float on a river raft through untouched forest ... ride through lush jungle in search of wildlife ... and so much more.

IT'S INCLUDED

- 14 nights accommodations, including 5 nights in lodges while trekking, and 2 nights in a safari-style tented camp while rafting
- International airfare, airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- All land and water transportation, transfers, and two internal flights
- 36 meals—14 breakfasts, 11 lunches, and 11 dinners (including 1 Home-Hosted Dinner)
- 21 small group activities
- Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader, local trekking guides, and porters
- Gratuities for local guides, drivers, lodge and camp staff, and luggage porters
- Use of daypacks and walking sticks (provided only during trekking portion of trip)
- 5% Frequent Traveler Credit toward your next O.A.T. adventure

Prices are accurate as of the date of this publishing and are subject to change.



ITINERARY SUMMARY

DAYS	DESTINATION
1-2	Fly to Dubai, United Arab Emirates
3-5	Fly to Kathmandu, Nepal
6-8	Fly to Pokhara • Annapurna
9-10	Pokhara • Home-Hosted Dinner
11-12	Seti River rafting
13-14	Chitwan
15	Fly to Kathmandu • Fly to Doha, Qatar
16	Return to U.S.

WHAT TO EXPECT

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Moderate

Pacing: 5 locations in 14 days

Physical requirements: Must be able to walk 3-5 miles unassisted and participate in 2-3 hour treks, and must not have health conditions that preclude climbing to high altitudes

Flight Time: Travel time will be 17-22 hours and will most likely have one connection

View all physical requirements at www.oattravel.com/nel

NEPAL: THE O.A.T. DIFFERENCE

Unbeatable Value: Travel at the lowest price and per diems in the industry.

People-to-People Experiences: Visit a local school to see how support from travelers like you via **Grand Circle Foundation** is making a difference in the lives of local children. Then, spend **A Day in the Life** of Majgaon Village for a firsthand look at daily life in the shadow of the Annapurna mountain range, including a community lunch with a group of women who are working to keep the village running while the men are overseas. Plus enjoy a **Home-Hosted Dinner** in the city of Pokhara for a taste of authentic Nepali cuisine and lively cultural exchange.

O.A.T. Exclusives: Participate in a candid conversation about the **Controversial Topic** of Kumari (living child gods). During a meeting with a former Kumari, you'll enjoy an in-depth look at how this ancient spiritual tradition affects the development of the children who are selected to participate in it.

PERSONALIZE YOUR ADVENTURE

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

Bhutan: The Last Shangri-La
PRE-TRIP: 7 nights from **\$3,495**

India's Sacred Cities of the North: Amritsar & Dharamsala
POST-TRIP: 8 nights from **\$2,395**

ARRIVE EARLY

We recommend that you relax after a long flight or explore more in depth before your trip. Prices shown include accommodations and private airport transfer.

- Arrive early in **Delhi** before your Bhutan pre-trip extension from **\$180** per room, per night
- Arrive early in **Kathmandu** before your main adventure from **\$170** per room, per night

Nepal & the Mystical Himalayas

YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

7 nights in *Bhutan: The Last Shangri-La*

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Day 2 Arrive Delhi, India

Day 3 Delhi • Fly to Paro, Bhutan •
Transfer to Thimphu

Day 4 Explore Thimphu

Day 5 Drive over Dochula Pass • Punakha
Dzong (Palace of Great Happiness)

Day 6 Explore Punakha

Day 7 Punakha • Travel to Paro

Day 8 Paro • Tiger's Nest Monastery

Day 9 Paro • Fly to Kathmandu, Nepal

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart the U.S. today on your overnight flight to Doha, Qatar.

Day 2 Doha, Qatar • Arrive in Kathmandu, Nepal

- Destination: Kathmandu

Activity Note: Travelers who took advantage of the option to personalize their trip by arriving early will remain in their current hotel this evening. They will join the rest of the group in the morning of Day 3.

Evening: Arrive in Doha and catch your connecting flight to Kathmandu. Upon arrival very late this evening or early tomorrow, an O.A.T. representative will meet you at the airport and assist with your transfer to your hotel.

Day 3 Kathmandu

- Destination: Kathmandu
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Radisson Kathmandu or similar

Early Morning: Upon arrival in Kathmandu very early this morning, you'll transfer to your hotel. A day room will be available for your use upon arrival.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: You have the freedom to begin exploring Kathmandu at your own pace, or relax at the hotel after your flight. Travelers who took our *Bhutan: The Last Shangri-La* pre-trip extension will arrive to the hotel this morning.

Lunch: On your own.

Afternoon: Late this afternoon, we'll join our Trip Experience Leader and our fellow travelers for a Welcome Briefing.

Dinner: On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations. You may want to try *momo*, a South Asian dumpling popular across much of Asia, including the Himalayan region.

Evening: Free for you to do as you'd like. You might like to glimpse Kathmandu during a nighttime stroll, or retire early after today's transfer.

Day 4 Optional Mount Everest flight

• Kathmandu • Conversation about climbing Mt. Everest

- Destination: Kathmandu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Radisson Kathmandu or similar

Early Morning: You may elect to join us for an optional flight to Everest (weather permitting). This iconic mountain is known in Tibet as *Chomolungma*, which means “Mother of the Universe” or “Goddess Mother of the Earth.” The Nepali name is *Sagarmatha*, or “Goddess of the Sky.” Avid climbers call this mountain “the ultimate climb,” and with its astounding summit height of 29,029 feet above sea level, Mount Everest earns the title of the tallest peak on Earth.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll drive to the Boudhanath Stupa, considered the center of Tibetan Buddhism in Nepal, and one of the most sacred sites of Tibetan Buddhism outside Tibet. This stupa—or large dome-like structure full of Buddhist relics—was built to reflect the shape of a mandala commonly featured in Tibetan art.

Lunch: At a local restaurant near the stupa.

Afternoon: After a brief visit inside the stupa, we'll drive back to our hotel, and you'll have a few hours to do as you please. You might venture out to explore expansive Durbur Square or you may visit Pottery Square where you can see a selection of handmade goods and the process of pottery making. Or, you may choose to relax at the hotel.

Late this afternoon, we'll reconvene in the hotel and meet a local woman who has climbed Mount Everest. She'll share her experiences with us—including the challenges she faced and the emotions she felt when she finally reached the iconic summit.

Dinner: On your own. You may seek out a traditional dish like *pulao*, which is fried rice seasoned with local spices and accompanied by condiments like yogurt.

Evening: You will have free time following dinner to venture into Kathmandu by night or enjoy the company of fellow travelers at the hotel.

Day 5 Meet the Kumari (living goddess) of Patan • Controversial Topic: The restrictive childhood of Nepal's Kumaris • Explore Patan

- Destination: Kathmandu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Radisson Kathmandu or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Drive to Patan (4,429 feet), which sits across the Bagmati River from Kathmandu. Patan was developed on relatively thin layers of deposited clay and gravel in the central part of a dried ancient lake known as Nagdaha. The city was designed in the shape of the Buddhist Dharma-Chakra (Wheel of Righteousness). The four *thurs*, or mounds, located on the

perimeter of Patan are known as the Ashoka Stupas, named for Emperor Ashoka, who visited Kathmandu with his daughter, Charumati, in 250 BC and erected the five stupas. These mounds are joined by more than 1,200 Buddhist and Hindu monuments of various shapes and sizes located throughout the city. Patan is known for its art and artisans: The region has produced the most artists and finest craftsmen in Nepali history, and their devotional artwork gives us fascinating displays of Nepal's fused cultures.

Upon arrival, we'll walk to a local temple where we'll meet the Kumari of Patan—a religious figure unique to Nepal. According to local tradition, the Kumari is a prepubescent girl that is believed to be the manifestation of a living goddess. Kumaris are chosen by Nepal's priesthood according to a rigorous and secretive selection process. During their tenure as Kumari, which generally begins at around 6–8 years old, the girls are revered as living deities who offer their blessings to those who come to seek it—from the lowliest farmer to the nation's president. The goddess is believed to dwell within the Kumari until she begins to menstruate, at which point the goddess vacates the body, and the search for the next Kumari begins.

We'll visit Patan's current Kumari in her home (which also functions as her temple) and receive her blessing, then have the opportunity to speak to her parents for a closer look at the day-to-day life of one of Nepal's most revered religious figures. They'll explain how the life of a Kumari, for all its privileges, is not without its challenges. Nonetheless, her parents are proud that she has been selected for this divine role, as we'll learn during our visit.

In recent years, however, a growing number of human rights activists have begun to regard this tradition as a form of child cruelty

that must be either abolished or seriously reformed. We'll get a personal perspective on this **Controversial Topic** when we arrive at the home of one of Patan's former Kumaris, and have a candid conversation about the difficulties of re-entering society after a childhood spent atop such a high pedestal.

After our conversation concludes, we'll walk to our next destination: Durbar Square, one of the seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Nepal that are preserved within a protected Monument Zone. Upon arrival, we'll set off on a walking tour with our Trip Experience Leader. As Durbar translates to “palace,” the term “Durbar Square” is used to describe any plaza opposite a royal palace. But while there are several Durbar Squares across Nepal, Patan's is renowned for being one of the most picturesque, with its intricately carved architecture, delicate wind chimes, and ornate fountains. We'll end our discoveries where we began: in Durbar Square, where you will be in walking distance of many local restaurants.

Lunch: On your own in Patan. Ask your Trip Experience Leader where you can find traditional dishes like *thukpa*, a simple soup typically made with thick noodles, vegetables, meat, and eggs.

Afternoon: We'll regroup after lunch and visit a vegetable and spice market where you'll truly feel the rhythm of life as we weave through the crowds as the locals do. We'll also have the opportunity to interact with shoppers and vendors to get a full perspective of the typical scene at the market. Then, we'll return to our hotel, where you'll enjoy some free time to relax or set off to explore the city at your own pace. Perhaps you'll visit Mahaguthi Craft with a Conscience, a shop that sells goods crafted by locals living in remote areas of Nepal. Or,

you may journey to Kundalini Sound & Herbal Therapy to learn about healing treatments for the mind and body.

Dinner: At a local restaurant

Evening: Free. Upon arrival, you may choose to retire to your room to pack before we depart Pokhara tomorrow. Or, you may choose to set off on an evening stroll to enjoy the city by night.

Day 6 Fly to Pokhara • Overland trek through Annapurna Valley

- Destination: Majgaon
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Mountain Lodges of Nepal Tomijong or similar

Activity Note: Today's activities include a 2-hour trek through terraced farmland and wooded hillsides.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll check out of our hotel and drive to the airport for our flight to Pokhara, a historic city located at an elevation of 3,080 feet and built around Lake Phewa along the ancient trade route from Tibet to India. From our plane, we may see panoramic views of impressive canyons carved out by the Seti River and defined by the fast rise of the Annapurna mountain range. Pokhara boasts a number of natural phenomena such as a waterfall that plunges and disappears into a hole and a stretch of the Seti River that disappears into a small opening in the canyon wall.

Upon arrival, we meet our trek guide at our regional office for a briefing about our upcoming journey to our lodge.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Pokhara.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll drive out to the lower foothills of the Annapurnas to meet our trekking crew, who will escort us to our lodge. As we walk amidst terraced farmland and wooded hillsides, we'll take in the sweeping views of the Pokhara Valley that surrounds us.

After checking into our lodge, you'll enjoy free time to relax. The lodge, with its beautiful gardens and peaceful atmosphere, offers views of Machhapuchhare, or Fishtail Mountain, a peak whose sacred summit is off-limits to climbers. While this famous peak is less than 22,000 feet high, it is known for its twin peaks and its startling beauty. You may take some time this afternoon to sit back and enjoy the view.

Dinner: At the lodge.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 7 Grand Circle Foundation visit: Tanchok Primary School • A Day in the Life of Majgaon Village

- Destination: Majhgaon
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Mountain Lodges of Nepal Tomijong or similar

Breakfast: At the lodge.

Morning: Following breakfast, we'll walk to Majgaon Village, where we'll enjoy several culturally-enriching people-to-people experiences. Up first is a visit Tanchok Primary School, supported in part by **Grand Circle Foundation** as part of the *World Classroom Initiative*.

Grand Circle Foundation

Tanchok Primary School

Total donated: **\$2,566**

Partner since: **2018**

Upon arrival, we'll be greeted by the school's principal or a head teacher if the principal is unavailable. Our host will be well acquainted with Nepal's education system, and can introduce us to the unique challenges of providing public education in this remote region of the country.

Tanchok Primary School is a small one, with just 24 students aged 3–10, and 4 teachers. As a public school, the children's education is paid for the government, and you'll see how generous donations from travelers like you have been helping to make a difference in the students' lives—for example, Grand Circle Foundation donations helped with the construction of new toilet facilities for the children, completed in 2019.

Our school visit would not be complete without stopping by one of the school's classrooms, where we'll meet some of the young children who study here. We might have the opportunity to help them with their lessons, and get to know about their hopes and dreams for the future. Then we'll join them in the schoolyard for a round of games.

After departing the school, we'll begin our **A Day in the Life** experience in Majgaon Village. Tucked into the shadows of the Annapurna mountain range, Majgaon is a small village with a population of just around 85 people, predominantly from Nepal's Gurung ethnic group. Like many Nepali communities, the men of the village mostly seek their fortune in neighboring countries, where they work for a period of time to earn money to send back to their families at home—therefore, it falls primarily upon the women to keep the village running.

We'll learn about how the village's women are getting on at Majgaon's health post. Here, we'll meet the head nurse to learn about the challenges of providing adequate healthcare in this rural region of Nepal, and how the village provides for women's health issues including birth control and family planning.

Our understanding of women's roles in the community will be further enriched when we meet a village leader who participates in the local chapter of Aama Samuha, or "mothers' group." This group is made up of local women and allies who work to empower Nepal's female population, encouraging awareness and gender equality around social issues such as childcare, education, conflict resolution, and healthcare. The village leader will explain the work her group does and its role in the village.

Then, we'll head out into the village to meet the rest of Majgaon's community. As we wander through the lanes, we'll witness—and maybe have the opportunity to participate in—scenes of daily village life, including wine-making, wicker basket-weaving, flour-milling, and butter-churning.

Our final destination is the home of a local woman, who, along with a few other women from the village, will help us prepare a typical Nepali lunch. Our meal is likely to consist of spinach soup, locally-grown vegetables, lentils, rice, and *roti*—an unleavened round flatbread that is common on the Indian subcontinent.

Lunch: We'll sit down for lunch with our host, the village leader, and other members of Aama Samuha. As we dine, we'll enjoy more opportunities for intimate conversation and cultural exchange between the residents of Majgaon and our small group. You might choose to ask about the kind of progress that groups like Aama Samuha have helped to make over the recent decades, and about the work that they believe still needs to be done.

Afternoon: We'll say our goodbyes to our hosts and return to our lodge. Upon arrival, you'll have a few hours of down time to relax.

Dinner: At the lodge.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 8 Annapurna overland trek • Visit Patalekhhet village • Conversation about Nepal's migrant laborers

- Destination: Majhgaon
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Mountain Lodges of Nepal Tomijong or similar

Activity Note: Today's optional excursion to Tamejong Village will involve walking for nearly 2.5 hours over trails that may be bumpy, uneven, or steep at times and will include walking up many steps.

Breakfast: At the lodge.

Morning: We'll depart our lodge on foot, bound for Patalekhhet, a small village which seems to naturally rise out of the terraced rice fields. These green "steps" that cascade down the hillside are a testament to the care and dedication of the people that live and work on the land. Upon entering this ancient village, we have the chance to interact with the villagers as they move through their day of feeding the animals, farming, and caring for their children.

Then, we'll meet with a local woman to discuss a sensitive subject in Nepal: migrant workers. Nepal is one of Asia's poorest countries, and in many communities, there is not enough work available to make ends meet. To provide additional income for their family, more than 2 million Nepali people—about 10% of the population, predominantly male—seek work in other countries. The local woman we'll meet

with today is married to one of these workers. She'll detail her experience—including the challenges she faces when money is tight, and how she copes when her husband is away.

Lunch: We'll return to our lodge for lunch.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries. You may choose to relax at the lodge where you have the option to get a massage or rest in your room. Or perhaps you'll join your Trip Experience Leader on a walk to Tamejong Village where you can get another perspective on living in this region from the locals who live here.

Dinner: At the lodge.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 9 Return to Pokhara • Home-Hosted Dinner • Conversation about marriage in Nepal

- Destination: Pokhara
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Mount Kailash Resort or similar

Activity Note: Today's activities include a 2-hour walk.

Breakfast: At the lodge.

Morning: Following breakfast, we'll trek back to the main road, where we'll catch our bus bound for Pokhara.

Set in a valley where Asia's ancient civilizations crept down from the highlands of Tibet and the Indo-Gangetic Plain, Pokhara marks an important stop along an age-old trade route. The mountains around this tropical valley shoot up starkly toward the sky, leaping upwards of 26,000 feet and disappearing into the misty shroud that drapes about their shoulders. As

lofty symbols of man's highest hopes and the source of eternal inspiration, these peaks are considered sacred to Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and followers of Tibet's indigenous Bon traditions alike. Machapuchare, the fishtail crown at the center of the Annapurnas, is off-limits to climbers because of its association with the gods.

Upon arrival in Pokhara, we'll check in to our hotel.

Lunch: At the hotel.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations. Perhaps you'd like to discover traditional art at The Batik Workshop. There, you'll learn about Batik, a traditional process for dying patterns into cloth, during a hands-on course led by an expert instructor.

Dinner: We'll split into smaller groups and drive to the homes of local families for a **Home-Hosted Dinner**. Our host families hail from a range of middle class backgrounds, offering a variety of perspectives on daily life in Pokhara. As is traditional in Nepali culture, our hosts live with multiple generations of family together under one roof, broadening our perspective of life in Nepal even further.

After introducing ourselves, we'll have the opportunity to help prepare the evening meal. Our hosts will choose the menu, but it may include Nepali staples like rice and lentils, as well as local herbs, vegetables, and spices to give our meal an authentic Nepali flavor. Perhaps we'll enjoy a taste of *dal bhat*, one of Nepal's national dishes, consisting of curried chicken served over lentils and rice.

Evening: We'll return to the hotel after dinner, and you have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish.

Day 10 Pokhara • Optional Heli-tour to Annapurna base camp • Phewa Lake canoe excursion

- Destination: Pokhara
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Mount Kailash Resort or similar

Activity Note: Today's optional helicopter tour is weather-dependent and may be canceled on short notice depending on local conditions.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Enjoy a couple of hours of leisure time this morning. Or—weather permitting—you may choose to join an optional helicopter tour to Annapurna Base Camp. Surrounded on all sides by 26,000-foot peaks, the views from the helicopter are some of the most coveted in the world.

We'll re-group with our Trip Experience Leader later this morning for a briefing on river rafting in preparation for our excursion tomorrow. Then, we'll walk to the shore of Phewa Lake, a lovely gem set at 2,917 feet, framed by the Sarangkot and Kaskikot hills. As we canoe across the crystalline waters, we may spot fish zipping below us or local bird species flying overhead, and weather permitting, we may have the opportunity to see the majestic Annapurna Mountains.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Enjoy a few hours of free time to relax at the hotel or set off to explore on your own. Perhaps you'll visit the International Mountain Museum. Learn about the geology, flora, fauna, and human activity of the Himalayas, including Mount Everest, here.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 11 Overland to Seti River • Seti River rafting

- Destination: Seti Valley
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Seti River Camp

Activity Note: For our rafting experience, we'll split up into smaller groups as our rafts can only hold up to 6 passengers. During our rafting adventure, we may face a few sections of Class II rapids, where there may be some rough water with waves up to three or four feet, and perhaps some rocks and drops that require maneuvering by our expert guides.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll board our bus bound for the Seti River, where we'll begin the rafting journey that will take us to the camp where we'll spend the next two nights. Located at an elevation of 2,500 feet, this animated river runs through Pokhara and displays some visually fascinating feats—at one point it appears to be only two meters wide, while its massive volume of water continues to flow, hidden by immense depths. Upon arrival at our rafting launch site, we'll receive instructions from our river guides before boarding our American-made raft. An experienced crew will navigate while we observe villagers we may encounter along the river banks: women washing clothes, men fishing with sticks and cloth nets, and children swimming and playing.

Lunch: We'll pause our rafting journey for a prepared picnic lunch on the banks of the river.

Afternoon: We'll continue following smooth, easy waters. Around mid-afternoon, we land on the banks of the river to settle into our safari-style camp surrounded by forest. Our

luggage will be waiting for us upon arrival. We'll enjoy Welcome Drinks and a briefing from the camp manager before taking some time to relax.

Prior to dinner, we'll reconvene for a conversation about this region with our Trip Experience Leader, which will give us insight into the local culture, social issues, and traditions here.

Dinner: At the camp.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 12 Explore local village

- Destination: Seti Valley
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Seti River Camp

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Our guides will lead us on a hike to a nearby village. This is a chance to see and experience daily life in this valley for yourself. The Kahare Village is home to around 150 members of the Gurung hill tribe who primarily work as farmers. We'll explore the village, passing over a suspension bridge to take in views of the surrounding scenery, and we'll see locals going about their daily routines. We'll also chat with villagers to learn more about daily life here.

We'll walk back to our camp, and enjoy free time before lunch.

Lunch: At the camp.

Afternoon: On your own. You may choose to take a leisurely walk along the riverbanks, take a dip in the water, or relax in your room with a good book you brought along.

Dinner: At the camp.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 13 Seti River Rafting • Explore Chitwan National Park on foot

- Destination: Chitwan
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Kasara Resort or similar

Breakfast: At camp.

Morning: After breakfast, we'll begin the final leg of our rafting journey. Savor the images of rushing water, lush jungle foliage, and villagers along the banks. Our rafts and experienced Nepalese crew expertly navigate five sections of Class II rapids and one patch of Class III rapids as we travel to our end point.

After bidding farewell to our faithful rafting guides, we'll drive to Chitwan. Upon arrival, we'll check in to our lodge and meet for a quick briefing.

Chitwan National Park (800 feet) is the oldest national park in Nepal and lies in the subtropical inner Terai lowlands of South-Central Nepal. Designated as a World Heritage Site in 1984, the park covers an area with a unique ecosystem of significant value to the world. It contains the Churiya hills and the flood plains of the Rapti, Reu, and Narayani rivers. Formerly, the Chitwan Valley was well known for big-game hunting and until 1950 was exclusively managed as a hunting reserve for the iron-fisted Prime Ministers of the Rana dynasty, which controlled Nepal for almost a century. In 1963, the area south of the Rapti River was designated as a rhinoceros sanctuary. In 1970, His late Majesty King Mahendra approved the creation of Royal Chitwan National Park.

Lunch: At the lodge.

Afternoon: We'll depart by Jeep and drive to the edge of the park. From here, we'll explore the buffer zone surrounding Chitwan National Park on foot alongside a naturalist guide. We'll venture to where the Sal forest of the Chitwan jungle meets the wide valley of the Rapti River. Broad grasslands sweep north to the Mahabharata range and virgin jungle extends south to the Churia hills. For centuries, the dense jungle covering the foothills of the Himalayas formed an impenetrable barrier for Nepal, keeping it a hidden and mysterious land.

Once we conclude our discoveries, we'll board our Jeep and drive back to the lodge. Enjoy some time to freshen up before gathering for a presentation on Chitwan, its history, and its flora and fauna.

Or, depending on your departure date, we'll be treated to a traditional Tharu dance. But first, we'll get to try the dance for ourselves when the troupe gives us a lesson. The Tharu people are an indigenous group who will share their history, customs, and traditions through typical dances. After the lesson, they'll perform for us, and you'll have the chance to join in if you wish.

Dinner: At the lodge.

Evening: Free for your own interests. Perhaps you'll take in the stars in this remote location. Or return to your room to relax.

Day 14 Jeep safari in Chitwan National Park • Rapti River canoe excursion

- Destination: Chitwan
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Kasara Resort or similar

Activity Note: Our Jeep safari through Chitwan is not offered on August–September departures, and may be unavailable on select October departures, depending on weather conditions. During these months, we will instead take a Jeep safari through the community forest area.

Early Morning: We'll rise early this morning to witness the local birdlife at their most active time of day. We'll enjoy a Jeep safari drive through Chitwan National Park where more than 43 species of mammals, more than 450 species of birds, and more than 45 species of amphibians and reptiles live. From the back of the open Jeep, we'll explore the diverse ecosystems of the park, traversing its jungles, marshlands, and grasslands in search of animals such as one-horned rhinos and spotted deer. We'll also have the opportunity to visit a crocodile breeding center.

Breakfast: A boxed breakfast will be served in the park.

Morning: After our boxed breakfast, we'll continue our Jeep safari, visiting watering holes where we'll keep our eyes peeled for any wildlife. Then we'll stop for tea before further exploring Chitwan aboard our Jeeps.

Lunch: At the lodge.

Afternoon: Enjoy a couple of hours of free time before we board our Jeeps and drive to the buffer zone surrounding Chitwan National Park with a local guide. From here, we'll set off on a canoe ride. During our explorations, our guide will point out the distinct wildlife that lives along the Rapti River, including local bird species and crocodiles that may be lounging along the river banks.

Dinner: At the lodge.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations. You might take a refreshing couple of hours at the spa and massage at Kasara Resort. The massages are based in traditional Himalayan healing methods.

Day 15 Conversation with a rhino attack survivor • Fly to Kathmandu • Pashupatinath • Explore Kathmandu • Fly to Doha, Qatar

- Destination: Kathmandu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Radisson Kathmandu or similar

Breakfast: At the lodge.

Morning: Today we'll visit a home in a local village for a conversation about the rising occurrence of animal attacks in the villages located along the border of Chitwan National Park. While the park has been wildly successful at bolstering the population of several endangered species, its boundaries have shrunk in recent years due to climate change, human encroachment, and other detrimental factors. As resources within the park's borders have begun to dwindle, many of its wild animals—including rhinoceroses, tigers, and other potentially dangerous creatures—have begun to search for food in the forests and farmlands frequented by local villagers, resulting in death, serious injury, and the destruction of vital property for the unlucky people who cross their paths. We'll meet with a local woman who survived a rhinoceros attack for a first-hand perspective on this issue—including how authorities are responding.

After our conversation we'll walk back to our lodge and check out shortly thereafter. Then we'll drive to the airport and catch a flight back to the bustling city of Kathmandu, located at an elevation of 4,265 feet.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Kathmandu.

Afternoon: Next, we'll drive to Pashupatinath, the most sacred temple of the Hindu god, Shiva, who is also known as Pashupati. In the company of our Trip Experience Leader, we'll explore

this pagoda-style temple, boasting gold-gilded copper rooftops and silver-crowned doorways. After our discoveries here, we'll drive to our hotel where we'll check in and have a couple of hours of free time.

Dinner: Enjoy a Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: Travelers whose adventure is ending will make their way to the airport late this evening to prepare for their flight to Doha, Qatar—the first stop on their journey home. Travelers who are continuing on to our post-trip extension have the freedom to spend the remainder of the evening as they please.

Day 16 Return to U.S. or begin post-trip extension

- Destination: Doha
- Included Meals: Breakfast

Early Morning: Following a brief layover in Doha, travelers returning to the U.S. will fly to the U.S. this morning.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Travelers who reserved our optional *India's Sacred Cities of the North: Amritsar & Dharamsala* post-trip extension are free to make their own discoveries this morning. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations. Perhaps you'd like to wander the colorful, narrow streets of Thamel, a commercial hub lined with shops and vendors. Talk with store owners as you peruse wares, handicrafts, clothing, and more.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: Travelers who reserved our post-trip extension will catch a flight to Delhi this afternoon to begin the next leg of their journey.

END YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

8 nights in *India's Sacred Cities of the North: Amritsar & Dharamsala*

Day 1 Fly from Kathmandu to Delhi

Day 2 Delhi • Gandhi Smriti • Qutab Minar

Day 3 Fly to Amritsar • Evening visit to the Golden Temple

Day 4 Amritsar • Visit Golden Temple • Wagah Border ceremony

Day 5 Overland to Dharamsala • Visit Norbulingka

Day 6 Dharamsala • Explore McLeod Ganj • Kora walk & Tsuglagkhang Complex visit • Conversation about freedom of religion in Tibet with a monk

Day 7 Dharamsala • Village visit and Home-Hosted Lunch

Day 8 Fly to Delhi

Day 9 Fly to Doha, Qatar • Return to U.S.

OPTIONAL TOURS

During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with your Trip Experience Leader. He or she will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and Discover credit cards. We also accept Visa and MasterCard debit cards, but it must be a debit card that allows you to sign for purchases.

In order to correctly process these charges, there can be a delay of 2–3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2–3 months following your return.

Please note: Optional tour prices are listed in U.S. dollar estimates determined at the time of publication and are subject to change. Optional tours may vary.

Mount Everest flight

(Day 4 \$280 per person)

At dawn, you may elect to enjoy an optional flight to Everest (weather permitting), known in Tibet as *Sagarmatha* or “Goddess of the Sky.” Avid climbers call this mountain “the ultimate climb,” and with its astounding summit height of 29,029 feet above sea level, Mount Everest earns the title of the tallest peak on Earth. Rising majestically out of the Himalayan range, its snowy peak and intricate geography offer us breathtaking views from the air.

This optional tour only operates if weather permits.

Please note: This optional tour must be reserved prior to your trip’s departure. A minimum of 5 travelers must reserve in order for the tour to operate. This optional tour is weather-dependent and may be canceled on short notice.

Heli-tour to Annapurna Base Camp

(Day 10 \$490 per person)

Travel by helicopter among the Himalaya’s iconic, 26,000-foot peaks, eventually reaching Annapurna Base Camp, a coveted destination for mountaineers around the world. We’ll land there, at an elevation of 13,550 feet above sea level, before returning to Pokhara via a route that takes trekkers up to a week.

PRE-TRIP

Bhutan: The Last Shangri-La

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » Airfare from Delhi to Paro, and from Paro to Kathmandu
- » 7 nights accommodations
- » 18 meals—6 breakfasts, 6 lunches, and 6 dinners
- » 5 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- » All transfers

PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Become one of the privileged few to venture to the remote kingdom of Bhutan, which cautiously controls tourism to protect its legacy as one of the world's top ten biodiversity hotspots. Experience a magical, mystical world of elaborate temple-fortresses, ancient customs, and mind-boggling Himalayan scenery.

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Afternoon/Evening: Depart the U.S. on your flight to Delhi.

Day 2 Arrive Delhi, India

- Destination: Delhi
- Accommodations: Lemon Tree Premier Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Travelers who took advantage of the option to personalize their pre-trip extension by arriving early in Delhi will remain in their current hotel this evening. They will join the rest of the group on the morning of Day 3.

Afternoon: Upon arrival, an O.A.T. representative will meet you at the airport and assist with your transfer to your hotel.

Dinner: On your own. You may seek out a restaurant that serves traditional dishes like *rogan josh*, a hearty curry made with lamb.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish.

Day 3 Delhi • Fly to Paro, Bhutan • Transfer to Thimphu

- Destination: Thimphu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: City Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Depending on your departure date, you may depart the hotel early this morning around 4am to catch your flight to Paro.

Breakfast: If you are departing on an early flight, a boxed breakfast will be served. If your flight is later in the morning, breakfast is at the hotel.

Morning: Depending on your departure date, you'll depart the hotel sometime this morning to drive to the airport. From here, you'll catch a flight to Paro, located at an elevation of 7,300 feet. In clear weather, the flight to Bhutan provides a wonderful view of Himalayan scenery. It is a fascinating journey, culminating in an exciting descent past forested hills into the kingdom.

Your Bhutanese Trip Experience Leader will meet you on arrival at Paro airport. Then we'll drive to Thimphu, the modern capital town of Bhutan, located at an elevation of 7,600 feet. Upon arrival, we'll check in to our hotel.

Lunch: At our hotel in Thimphu.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll embark on a orientation walk around the hotel, led by our Trip Experience Leader. From there, enjoy some time to relax before we gather for a Welcome Briefing.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 4 Explore Thimphu

- Destination: Thimphu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: City Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Brimming with traditional Bhutanese art, architecture, and culture, this tiny capital of Bhutan is nothing less than Shangri-La. As we spend the day exploring, notice the touches of modernity, each one introduced thoughtfully and gradually to protect the environment. This morning's tour is sure to provide insight into Bhutan's unique culture.

We'll drive to the Memorial Chorten. Built in 1974 in memory of King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, the "Father of Modern Bhutan," this multi-storied monument displays numerous paintings and statues that provide a rare insight into Buddhist philosophy. We'll spend some time here exploring the memorial to gain a unique perspective on Buddhism and this memorial. Then, we'll drive to Buddha Dordenma where we'll view one of the largest seated bronze Buddhas in the world. We'll also have the opportunity to visit the shrine located inside the Buddha.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Next, we'll drive to visit the Textile Museum, which offers us rare glimpses into Bhutan's finest textiles through demonstrations of production techniques such as weaving, dyeing, and spinning. During our visit, we'll have the chance to speak with some of the weavers who work here to learn more about their process. Then, we'll drive to a factory that produces handmade paper. This visit gives us an opportunity to speak with the workers here who will provide insight into their profession and the artistry behind it.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 5 Drive over Dochula Pass • Punakha Dzong (Palace of Great Happiness)

- Destination: Punakha
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: The Four Boutique Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll begin our journey to Punakha. Midway, we'll pause at the 10,000-foot Dochula Pass, one of Bhutan's most famous views. Weather permitting, we can see the craggy peaks of Bhutan's northern Himalayan border with Tibet. Then, we continue on to a local restaurant in Punakha.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Punakha.

Afternoon: Next, we'll take short walk to a small bazaar near the restaurant. Here, we'll feel the rhythm of life as we see locals going about their daily routines and vendors selling a variety of goods. Then, we'll drive to visit the Punakha Dzong (Palace of Great Happiness), built at the junction of the Phochu and Mochu rivers in 1637 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. This majestic *dzong* served as both the religious and the administrative center of Bhutan in the past. It measures some 600 by 240 feet and has a six-story, gold-domed tower. Inside are courtyards and religious statuary that hint at the depth of history and spiritual tradition here. Our guide will facilitate a conversation with a local monk at the *dzong*, which will illuminate our understanding of this long-established, intricate culture.

After our visit, we'll drive to our hotel where we'll check in and enjoy some free time to get settled in.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: Spend the evening as you please—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 6 Explore Punakha

- Destination: Punakha
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: The Four Boutique Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll drive to a base point where we'll begin a hike to Chhimi Lhakhang Monastery. Situated on a hillock below the village of Metshina, the temple was built by Lama Drukpa Kuenley (also known as the Divine Madman) and is believed to enable conception to childless women who visit it and receive a blessing. Once we reach the monastery, we'll explore the property, including the nearby farmhouse, and meet some of the locals that live here who will shed some light on their typical routines and the local culture.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Then, we'll set off for our next destination: Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang nunnery. During our time here, we'll interact with some of the nuns to learn about their daily lives. We'll learn about the influences that inspired these women to become nuns, and we'll discover what their lives were like before choosing this life path. After, we'll return to the hotel where you'll have a couple hours of free time.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. You may choose to stay in at the hotel, or perhaps you'll call a taxi to Khuru, a quiet and traditional town where you can enjoy a change of scenery. Here, you may stop by a bar to grab a drink and see locals going about their evening routines.

Day 7 Punakha • Travel to Paro

- Destination: Paro
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Metta Resort or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We depart for Paro by bus, driving over the Dochula Pass. Here, we'll stop to enjoy panoramic views of the snow-clad Himalayas before continuing on to Paro.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Paro.

Afternoon: Then, we'll visit the ancient Paro Rinpung Dzong. We'll explore this 17th-century site, and we may even have the chance to speak with a local monk. Then, we'll drive to the sacred Kyichu Lhakhang. The temple was reportedly built in AD 659 by King Sontsen Gampo of Tibet. According to legend, it pins the left foot of an ogress so large that she covers Bhutan and most of eastern Tibet.

Next, we'll transfer to our hotel where we'll check in and have some free time.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish.

Day 8 Paro • Tiger's Nest Monastery

- Destination: Paro
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Metta Resort or similar

Activity Note: The hike to Tiger's Nest Monastery includes some very steep paths. About an hour into our hike, we'll pause at a café, where travelers have the choice to continue hiking up to the monastery, or they can return to the base of the cliff and meet up with the rest of the group for lunch later.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll drive to a base point from which we'll hike for about 2.5 hours to the Tiger's Nest (Taktsang) Monastery viewpoint. When we arrive, we'll have some time to explore the site's main temples. Perched seemingly impossibly on a cliff 3,000 feet above the valley floor, Taktsang is a place of

pilgrimage for locals—and for visitors like us, a hike to the viewpoint opposite the monastery is thrilling and mystical. Legend has it that Guru Rinpoche flew to the site of the monastery on the back of a tigress from Tibet, and meditated there for three months—thus bringing Buddhism to Bhutan. The main building of the temple was destroyed by fire in April 1998 but has now been restored to its original splendor and glory. It is possible to take the initial section of the hike by horseback—but only for the brave.

Lunch: At a café.

Afternoon: Shortly after, we'll drive back to the hotel. Enjoy a couple of hours of free time to make independent discoveries

Dinner: Enjoy a Farewell Dinner at the hotel.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 9 Paro • Fly to Kathmandu, Nepal

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Early Morning: Arise early this morning, check out of our hotel, and transfer to the airport. A boxed breakfast will be provided.

Morning: Arrive at the airport in Paro for our flight to Kathmandu. Upon arrival, your Nepali Trip Experience Leader will meet you at the airport to assist with your transfer to your hotel to begin your discovery of *Nepal & the Mystical Himalayas*.

POST-TRIP

India's Sacred Cities of the North: Amritsar & Dharamsala

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- | | |
|--|---|
| » Airfare from Delhi to Amritsar and Dharamsala to Delhi | » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader |
| » 8 nights accommodations | » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters |
| » 15 meals—8 breakfasts, 5 lunches, and 2 dinners | » All transfers |
| » 9 small group activities | |

POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Journey to two of Northern India's holiest cities, beginning in Amritsar, home to the fabled Golden Temple that is central to the Sikh faith. Then, venture to the foothills of the Indian Himalayas to explore Dharamsala, refuge of the Tibetan Government in Exile and the venerated Dalai Lama—the leader of Tibetan Buddhism.

Day 1 Fly from Kathmandu to Delhi

- Destination: Delhi
- Accommodations: The LaLiT New Delhi

Evening: Upon arrival in Delhi, you'll be assisted with your transfer to your hotel to check in and receive your room assignment. Then, the remainder of the evening is yours.

Day 2 Delhi • Gandhi Smriti • Qutab Minar

- Destination: Delhi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: The LaLiT New Delhi

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Our Trip Experience Leader will lead a Welcome Briefing to start our day.

Next, we'll embark on an orientation walk to get acquainted with the neighborhood surrounding our hotel. After our walk concludes, we'll depart for Gandhi Smriti, the

former home of a friend of Mahatma Gandhi, and the location of his assassination in 1948. Today, the house is a museum dedicated to preserving Gandhi's memory. During our visit, you'll have the opportunity to learn more about his remarkable life through audio/visual presentations and conversations with the volunteers.

After our visit concludes, we'll begin making our way to Qutab Minar, the tallest brick minaret in the world, stopping for lunch en route.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: We'll continue our drive to Qutab Minar.

Now five stories tall, rising 240 feet, and boasting a 397-step spiral staircase, Qutab Minar was originally only a single story when it was built in 1192. It had grown to four stories by 1369, when it was struck by lightning,

destroying its top floor. Undeterred, the ruling shah replaced the damaged story and added a fifth that remains today. It is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as well as a popular destination for Indian travelers.

After our visit ends, we'll return to our hotel where the remainder of the afternoon is yours.

Dinner: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader would be happy to offer restaurant recommendations.

Evening: Free to do as you please. Perhaps you'll enjoy a relaxing evening in to write in your travel journal.

Day 3 Fly to Amritsar • Evening visit to the Golden Temple

- Destination: Amritsar
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Ramada Amritsar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We check out of our hotel and make the drive to the airport to catch our flight to Amritsar, Punjab's largest city and home to Sikhism's holiest shrine, the Golden Temple.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Amritsar.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll walk to our hotel. After checking in and receiving our room assignments, you are free to relax at the hotel or explore on your own this afternoon.

Later, we'll make our way to the Golden Temple for the first of two visits. As the sun begins to set, the Golden Temple and the stark-white complex that surrounds it will illuminate, offering a beautiful introduction to this holy site.

Dinner: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can offer suggestions for where to find Punjabi delights like *kulchas*, bread baked in a tandoor and stuffed with butter-drenched vegetables.

Evening: You may wish to relax in the hotel or perhaps take in another view of the illuminated Golden Temple from across the water.

Day 4 Amritsar • Visit Golden Temple • Wagah Border ceremony

- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Ramada Amritsar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll depart on a walking tour to witness daily life around Amritsar's resplendent Golden Temple, spiritual center of the Sikh faith. Actually part of a larger complex known as Harmandir Sahib, the glittering Golden Temple has been the epicenter of Sikh worship since its creation—which dates back to the founding of Amritsar itself.

In 1577, Ram Das, the fourth Sikh guru, ordered the excavation of a sacred pool he called Amrita Saras, or the Pool of Nectar (from which the city's name is derived). As the pool became known for its healing powers, the city of Amritsar sprung up around it. Later, Arjun, the fifth guru, built the lovely Golden Temple in the center of this famous pool, seamlessly blending Hindu and Arabic architectural styles.

We'll also get a glimpse of the centuries-old Sikh temple tradition of offering daily Guru-Ka-Langar—a free community meal for up to 10,000 people, perhaps helping to make roti bread in the kitchen. We may even have the opportunity to sample some local dishes like *halwa*, a simple, sugary treat with the texture of fudge.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: We'll make our way back to the hotel after lunch, and you'll enjoy free time to explore independently. You may wish to visit Jaliyanwala Bagh, a memorial garden a half-mile from the Golden Temple, which pays tribute to the fallen peaceful protesters massacred by the British in 1919 on Punjabi New Year.

Later, we'll drive to the border of India and Pakistan to witness the famous Wagah ceremony, a highly stylized performance featuring synchronized speed marching and military posturing. The enthusiastic ceremony, which was begun in 1959 between the conflicted countries of India and Pakistan, begins before the final closing of international gates and lowering of both countries' flags. After the ceremony concludes, we'll begin our return trip to the hotel.

Dinner: On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions, including where to find dishes like crispy batter-fried fish tikka.

Evening: You might choose to relax at your hotel this evening in preparation for tomorrow's travels.

Day 5 Overland to Dharamsala • Visit Norbulingka

- Destination: Dharamsala
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Pride Surya Mountain Resort

Activity Note: Your transfer to Dharamsala includes approximately four hours of driving time.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We journey overland to Dharamsala, a town perched above the lovely Kangra Valley and framed by the scenic Dhauladhar range. As we'll learn during our stay here, Dharamsala

is divided into two distinct parts, which vary greatly in both altitude and atmosphere. The town's cloistered upper region houses McLeod Ganj—home to the Tibetan Government in Exile as well as the Dalai Lama—while the lower town is largely filled with hotels, schools, markets, and administrative offices.

Upon arrival in Dharamsala, we'll head to Norbulingka, an institute dedicated to the preservation of Tibetan arts and culture.

Lunch: At a restaurant on the Nobulingka campus, which specializes in fresh vegetarian cuisine.

Afternoon: Then, we enjoy a visit to an artisan workshop in Norbulingka, where we'll witness traditional Tibetan paintings and woodworking and interact with the artists. We'll also visit an on-site museum which features dolls clad in meticulously crafted traditional Tibetan costumes.

We'll drive to our hotel, where you'll have some free time to settle in or explore independently. You might choose to mingle with the locals as you explore the nearby market, where stalls are laden with metalwork, woven blankets, and icons of Tibetan Buddhism.

Then, our Trip Experience Leader will lead us on a short walk around the hotel to get acclimated with the area, including local restaurant options.

Dinner: On your own around. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions, including the best *momos* (dumplings), steamed or fried.

Evening: You are free to explore the environs surrounding the Dalai Lama's palace tonight or to simply enjoy a quiet evening at the hotel.

Day 6 Dharamsala • Explore McLeod Ganj • Kora walk & Tsuglagkhang Complex visit • Conversation about freedom of religion in Tibet with a monk

- Destination: Dharamsala
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Pride Surya Mountain Resort

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll begin making our way on foot to the heart of Dharamsala's popular upper town to explore McLeod Ganj. Although the lively district was named for Donald McLeod, the former British lieutenant governor of Punjab, the area is now renowned for its large Tibetan population. This influx of Tibetan residents began in 1959, when the then 24-year-old Dalai Lama escaped to India as the Chinese army overtook Lhasa. After searching India for a quiet mountain retreat, the Dalai Lama came across Dharamsala, where he and his followers finally settled in 1960. Today, the Dalai Lama—along with an estimated 15,000 Tibetans—has turned the small district of McLeod Ganj into a “Little Lhasa,” as well as the headquarters of the Tibetan Government in Exile.

Then, we visit Namgyal Gompa, a 15th-century Buddhist monastery known for its ancient frescoes, manuscripts, and a three-story statue of Maitreya Buddha. Here we may witness monks debating the topics of the day, using handclaps to make their points clear. After our visit concludes, we'll walk back to the hotel together.

Lunch: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can offer suggestions, perhaps including a Tibetan noodle restaurant.

Afternoon: After enjoying some free time, we'll reconvene and join the locals in making a *kora* (a ritual clockwise circuit) around the outside of the Tsuglagkhang Complex and meet some elderly Tibetan exiles at an old-age home.

Later, we'll make our way to a local restaurant. Upon arrival, we'll meet a Tibetan monk for an enlightening conversation about freedom of religion in Tibet under Chinese rule.

Dinner: After our conversation concludes, we'll enjoy dinner in the local restaurant.

Evening: The streets of Dharamsala are quiet at night and you may just enjoy a stroll in the fresh air, or perhaps you'll relax at the hotel.

Day 7 Dharamsala • Village visit and Home-Hosted Lunch

- Destination: Dharamsala
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Pride Surya Mountain Resort

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We depart for a local market located near our hotel. We will have some free time to peruse the fruit and vegetable stalls, and perhaps Tibetan handcrafts, before departing for a nearby village.

Upon arrival, we'll make our way to the home of a local family for lunch.

Lunch: We'll savor a **Home-Hosted Lunch** with the family, featuring regional cuisine and lively cultural conversation.

Afternoon: We'll take a walk around the family's village to discover what life is like for them and their neighbors, and to witness the daily rhythms of their culture.

Enjoy free time to explore until dinner. Perhaps you'll visit the fragrant environs of the family-owned Dharamsala Tea Garden & Factory, which has been producing the same blend of tea since the end of the 19th century.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You may wish to relax in your room or finish packing for our transfer to Delhi tomorrow.

Day 8 Fly to Delhi

- Destination: Delhi
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Lemon Tree Premier Hotel

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We drive to the airport to check in for our flight to Delhi.

Lunch: On your own. You might wish to pick something up at the airport to enjoy during our flight.

Afternoon: When we arrive in Delhi, we'll make our way to our airport hotel.

The remainder of the afternoon is yours to relax or make your final discoveries in India.

Dinner: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader would be happy to offer suggestions.

Evening: The evening is yours to prepare for your flight home, which departs very early tomorrow morning.

Day 9 Fly to Doha, Qatar • Return to U.S.

Early Morning: Our small group will head to the airport for your flight to Doha, Qatar. Upon arrival in Doha, you'll catch your connecting flight to the U.S.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Your Passport

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- Must have the required number of blank pages (details below)
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable

Need to Renew Your Passport?

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit the U.S. Department of State’s official website at **www.travel.state.gov** for information on obtaining a new passport or renewing your existing passport. The U.S. Department of State allows for passport renewal by mail or, for applicable citizens, renewal online. We advise you review the process and requirements for online passport renewal on the official website.

You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

Recommended Blank Pages

Please confirm that your passport has enough blank pages for this adventure.

- **Main trip only:** If you are taking only the main trip, you will need 4 blank passport pages.
- **Pre-trip extension to Bhutan:** You will need 2 more pages for a total of 6.
- **Post trip extension to India:** You will need 2 more pages for a total of 6.
- **Stopover in Dubai:** If you are not taking the Bhutan extension, no additional pages are needed. If you are taking the Bhutan extension, you will need an additional page.

Visas Required

We’ll be sending you a detailed Visa Packet with instructions, application forms, and fees about 90 days prior to your departure. In the meantime, we’re providing the information below as a guideline on what to expect. This info is for U.S. citizens only. All visas and fees are subject to change.

- **Nepal: Visa required. We recommended you obtain this in advance.** A 15-day visa should suffice. You will also need to bring 2 passport-sized photos with you to Nepal in order to apply for a local trekking permit.

- **United Arab Emirates: A visa for U.A.E. will be required for travelers on the Stopover in Dubai, regardless of extensions, or travelers who booked their own flights with a layover in Dubai.** We recommend you get this visa this onsite. Currently the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) allows U.S. citizens to get a tourist visa free of charge on arrival in Dubai. *Please note that if you are taking the pre-trip extension to Bhutan with O.A.T.'s air, then your flights pass through India, not U.A.E.*
- **India: Visa required if you are taking the Bhutan pre-trip extension or the optional post-trip extension. This visa must be obtained in advance.** It must be at least a double-entry visa, and multiple-entry is even better.
- **Bhutan (optional pre-trip extension): Visa required.** We recommend you get this visa onsite. We will need a photocopy or scan of your passport at least 60 days prior to your departure. You will receive detailed instructions on how to do this in your Visa Packet. If we don't receive your passport copy on time, the Bhutan government may not approve your visa. You must travel with the same passport you use for the scan, and that passport needs to match your reservation. If you renew or change your passport, **do so before taking the scan and call us immediately** with the new passport number, dates, etc.

Traveling Without a U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about visa requirements. We recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at **1-800-556-9990** or **www.pvsinternational.org**.

Traveling With a Minor?

Some governments may require certain documentation for minors to enter and depart the country or to obtain a visa (if applicable). For further detail on the required documentation, please contact your local embassy or consulate.

Travel Protection Required:

For new bookings starting 1/1/25, Overseas Adventure Travel requires all travelers purchase travel protection with Medical Evacuation coverage of at least \$200,000 and Medical Expense coverage of at least \$50,000, due to the remote nature of your adventure.

O.A.T. Travel Protection:

If you **purchase your Travel Protection Plan** through O.A.T., no further action will be needed, as the Medical Evacuation coverage and Medical Expense coverage meets these requirements.

Your Own Travel Protection:

If you purchase your own travel protection, we recommend you review the plan to ensure Medical Evacuation coverage of at least \$200,000 and Medical Expense coverage of at least \$50,000 is included. Once you confirm your plan meets the requirements, you will need to email the following information to **TravelCoverage@oattravel.com**:

- Traveler Name(s)
- Reservation Number
- Trip Protection Provider
- Policy Number
- Date of Purchase
- Copy of your Policy Documents

You can also contact our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814** to review this policy. You will be required to provide proof of coverage by 60 days prior to departure at the latest.

Emergency Photocopies of Key Documents

We recommend you carry color photocopies of key documents including the photo page of your passport plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards (front and back), and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel protection plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

If you plan to email this information to yourself, please keep in mind that email is not always secure; consider using password protection or encryption. Also email is not always available worldwide. As an alternative, you could load these documents onto a flash drive instead, which can do double-duty as a place to backup photos during your trip.

Overseas Taxes & Fees

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency).

RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

Is This Adventure Right for You?

Please review the information below prior to departing on this adventure. We reserve the right for our Trip Experience Leaders to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their condition would adversely affect the health, safety, or enjoyment of themselves or of other travelers.

PACING

- 5 locations in 14 days
- Multiple early departures
- Briskly paced, with no more than 2 nights in most locations, with 2 days rafting and 3 days hiking
- Expect delays in regional air service

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids
- Must be able to walk 3-5 miles unassisted and participate in 2-3 hour treks
- Must not have health conditions that preclude climbing to high altitudes
- Our activities on Day 8 include a 3.5-hour uphill hike of three miles and a 140-step uphill hike that will last around two hours
- We reserve the right for Trip Experience Leaders to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience
- You may encounter animals on this trip. We make every effort to keep these encounters safe, however animals may behave unpredictably or dangerously at times. Please use caution when interacting with animals on this trip: Keep a safe distance, stay alert, and respect the animals

ALTITUDE

- Elevations up to 5,000 feet

CLIMATE

- Prepare for humidity and heat in excess of 90°F during the day, during summer, and as low as 50°F at night
- Temperatures drop to about 50-60°F between October-March, and buses and hotels are not heated

TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Travel over city streets, rugged paths, and unpaved roads
- Trek through foothills that can be steep and slippery
- Raft down a river with Class II–III rapids
- Agility and balance required in most situations
- Travel by 18-passenger minibus, canoe, and river raft
- **Please note:** *Nepal is still recovering from the 2015 earthquake, so you will likely encounter rough roads and other infrastructure issues that may affect travel times.*

ACCOMMODATIONS & FACILITIES

- Accommodations include a riverside camp with permanent tents, attached bathrooms, and solar-heated showers; basic but comfortable lodges; and modest hotels
- Electricity is unavailable at the riverside camp and may be unavailable in other accommodations due to solar power; and heat and hot water may be limited

CULTURAL INSIGHT

- We may see people living in poverty, which could be distressing for some travelers

Steps to Take Before Your Trip

Before you leave on this adventure, we recommend the following:

- Check with the CDC for their recommendations for the countries you'll be visiting. You can contact them online at **www.cdc.gov/travel** or by phone at **1-800-232-4636**.
- Have a medical checkup with your doctor at least 6 weeks before your trip.
- Pick up any necessary medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Have a dental and/or eye checkup. (Recommended, but less urgent)

No Vaccines Required

Recommended Vaccines

At the time of writing there were no required vaccines for this trip. The CDC recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine vaccinations and on basic travel vaccines like Hepatitis A and Typhoid, but these are suggestions only. However, this could change in future so we encourage you to check with the CDC yourself before meeting with your doctor.

Medication Suggestions

- An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness

- Pain medication in the unlikely event of an injury in a remote location
- Altitude sickness medication (if you are taking the extension to Bhutan). Also for the extension in Bhutan: Motion sickness medication if you are susceptible on winding roads.
- At time of writing, the CDC did recommend discussing anti-malaria medication with your doctor for Nepal. The CDC specifically recommended anti-malarial medication for stays in Nepal at altitudes below 2,000 meters. On our main trip, some of the locations we visit are below 2,000 meters (Pokhara, the Seti River camp, Chitwan, etc.). Check with the CDC and your doctor first because these medications can have strong side effects.

Traveling with Medications

- **Pack medications in your carry-on bag** to avoid loss and to have them handy.
- **Keep medicines in their original, labeled containers** for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- **Bring copies of your prescriptions**, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.

We recommend checking with the State Department for medication restrictions by country: **travel.state.gov** (Go to “Find International Travel Information”, select “Country Information”, then enter the country into the search bar; if you don’t see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Health” section, then you can presume major U.S. brands should be OK).

At time of writing, the State Department noted that for the U.A.E. there are restrictions on medications, especially anything with codeine, dextromethorphan (like Robitussin), psychotropic drugs like Prozac or Valium, or anything narcotic. Generally, you are allowed to bring a personal supply of these medications as long as you bring a prescription EXCEPT for narcotics, which require special documentation. If you have questions about a specific medication, check the list of controlled medications at www.uaeinteract.com/travel/drug.asp or contact the embassy.

Staying Healthy on Your Trip

Jet Lag Tips

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane.
- Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before—and during—your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane.

- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don't push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

Allergies

If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, we advise you to notify us at least 30 days prior to your departure. Please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

Water

- Tap water is not safe to drink. Bottled water or treated drinking water is readily available. Inspect each bottle before you buy it to make sure the cap is sealed properly.
- Carry a bottle in your daypack at all times.
- Bottled drinks and juices, and hot drinks that have been boiled, are safe to drink.
- Carry a handkerchief to dry the tops of bottled drinks before and after opening.

Food

- We've carefully chosen the restaurants for your group meals.
- Be very careful with food sold from vendors on the street, and with uncooked fruit and other foods. Fruit that you peel yourself is usually safe.

Insects

Besides mosquitoes, you may also encounter a variety of biting insects like gnats and midges. We recommend that you bring and use an insect repellent, preferably containing DEET at 30-35% strength. You may also wish to consider an anti-itch or "after bite" gel. In addition to insects, there are also leeches, which tend to be more active after it rains. But never fear—they are harmless, and are easy to remove with a dab of salt.

Electricity Supply

A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays. There is no electricity in your room at the Seti River tented camp and electricity is unreliable in Annapurna and Chitwan. These places run on solar-powered generators, with very limited access to electricity. In Annapurana and Chitwan, you will be able to charge camera or phone batteries, but that is about it. And at the Seti River camp, you won't be able to charge anything. Travelers dependent on electricity supply for health reasons (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) are strongly advised to consider a different O.A.T. adventure.

Altitude Illness (optional extensions)

If you are taking one or both of the optional extensions, you will probably feel some effects from the high altitudes. (This is less of an issue on the main trip as we stay below 6,000 feet.) Even if you've been to high elevations previously, you could have a different reaction this time. For most people, the symptoms are mild, and will pass in a day or so. The most common symptoms of altitude sickness are lightheadedness, shortness of breath, headache, nausea, sleeplessness, and loss of appetite. You should take it easy, avoid smoking and alcohol, and drink plenty of fluids. We suggest taking a rest of a couple hours when you first arrive to acclimate yourself. Some people take a prescription medication starting when they arrive or one day before. Don't take sleeping medications, as they suppress respiration. Even though you may experience a decreased appetite, force yourself to eat soups and other light foods.

If these 'normal' altitude symptoms become unmanageable, it is critical that you inform your Trip Experience Leader. Please let the Trip Experience Leader know if you experience any of the following: serious difficulty breathing, mental confusion, a severe and unremitting headache, continued difficulty breathing after a period of rest, or poor physical coordination (ataxia).

MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

Top Three Tips

- **Bring a reserve of U.S. cash**—small bills in good condition—because ATMs and places that accept credit cards are far more limited than in the U.S. A cash reserve is especially important for the optional extension; you should assume that you will not be able to use a credit card or ATM card at all in Bhutan. In places where credit cards are accepted, you may be charged an additional 3–5% bank surcharge.
- **Traveler's checks are not accepted** in India, Bhutan, and Nepal.
- **U.S. dollars may be accepted in Nepal and Bhutan, but are less frequently accepted on the extension or Stopover.** Plan to exchange money into local currency in India and the UAE.

Local Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to an online converter tool like www.xe.com/currencyconverter, your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

Nepal: Nepalese rupee (Rs)

Bhutan: Bhutanese Ngultrum (Nu.)

India: Indian Rupee (₹)

United Arab Emirates: UAE Dirham (Dh)

How to Exchange Money

Since many places on the main trip will accept U.S. dollars, we recommend that you bring a cash reserve of U.S. bills in good condition, preferably in small denominations.

For those places that will not accept U.S. dollars, you can exchange money into local currency at banks, most hotels, and money exchange offices. Your other option is to withdraw local currency from an ATM and your bank at home will convert the amount into U.S. dollars. However, ATMs may not be as readily available on this adventure, so we strongly suggest that you plan to exchange U.S. dollars.

ATMs

When using the ATM, keep in mind that it may only accept cards from local banks, and may not allow cash advances on credit cards; you might need to try more than one ATM or more than one card. Many banks will charge a set fee or a percentage fee each time you use a foreign ATM. We recommend that you check with your bank before you depart. Don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

In most countries, ATMs are widely available in major cities. If you are in a rural location, it will likely be harder to find an ATM. If you are visiting a country that has different expectation for ATMs, they will be listed below.

Nepal: ATM's are available in large towns or cities, such as Kathmandu and Pokhara, but are not available in rural Nepal.

Bhutan: ATMs are very limited. We recommend that you bring enough cash (U.S. dollars and/or Indian rupees) to cover your basic expenses while in Bhutan as you cannot rely on ATMs alone.

India: ATMs are readily available in cities and large towns in India but are more limited in small villages and the National Parks.

United Arab Emirates: ATMs are plentiful in Dubai.

Credit & Debit Cards

While traveling, most countries and major cities will accept credit cards. We suggest that you bring one or two, especially if you are planning a large purchase (artwork, jewelry). We also suggest that you bring more than one brand of card (i.e. Visa, MasterCard, American Express) if possible, as not all are accepted around the world. If you are visiting a country that does not commonly accept credit cards, they will be listed below.

Nepal: Credit and debit cards are somewhat accepted in larger cities such as Kathmandu for major purchases but will be rarely accepted in the countryside.

Bhutan: Credit and debit cards are rarely accepted—most vendors are still cash only. Be forewarned that you might not be able to use any credit cards while in Bhutan. It is best to bring a cash reserve to cover your basic expenses (in U.S. dollars and/or Indian rupees). Also note that goods and services in Bhutan are substantially more expensive than in India.

India: Credit and debit cards are accepted everywhere in India.

United Arab Emirates: Credit and debit cards are widely accepted for major purchases and in shops associated with the tourist trade, but may not be accepted in smaller shops or restaurants.

Notify Card Providers of Upcoming Travel

Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. Some banks or credit card companies will also let you do this online.

You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don't assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1 800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!

Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. But for those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines:

- **O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your Trip Experience Leader at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$8–\$12 USD (or equivalent in local currency) per person for each day their Trip Experience Leader is with them. *Please note that these tips can only be in cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Trip Experience Leader during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*
- **Kathmandu, Pokhara & Chitwan hotel staff:** \$1–2 per room, per night
- **Waiters:** If you are dining on your own, a 10% service charge will be included as part of your bill in Nepal. Tipping in restaurants is generally not a part of Bhutanese culture. In the UAE many establishments add a 10% service charge.
- **Taxi drivers:** If you are taking a taxi by yourself, keep in mind that tipping is not common practice, but many people simply let the driver keep the change by rounding up the fare to the next whole number. It is better to negotiate the price with a taxi driver before you get in. You can discuss approximate fares with your Trip Experience Leader.
- **Included in Your Trip Price:** Gratuities are included for local guides, drivers, lodge and camp staff, and luggage porters on your main trip, extensions, and all optional tours.

Please note: Tips are quoted in U.S. dollars for budgeting purposes; tips can be converted and paid in local currency (this is usually preferred) or in U.S. dollars. Please do not use personal or traveler’s checks for tips.

AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

Land Only Travelers & Customized Air

Quick Definitions

- **Land Only:** You will be booking your own international flights. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Air-Inclusive:** You booked international air with us. Airport transfers are included as long as you didn't customize your trip's dates (see next bullet).
- **Arrive Early or Stopover (select adventures only):** If you chose one of these Customization options and purchased air through O.A.T, accommodations and airport transfers are included. However, if you chose one of our Customization options, but did not purchase air through O.A.T., accommodations are included, but airport transfers are not. If you chose one of our customization options, and purchase air through O.A.T. but not the accommodations, the airport transfers are not included. We have included transfer options below.
- **Customization on Your Own:** If you have not purchased air through O.A.T. and decided to arrive early, stay longer, or stop in a connecting city on your own, you are responsible for airport transfers and accommodations. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at www.oattravel.com/myplanner under "My Reservations" to help you with selecting a hotel for your additional time.

Air Inclusive Travelers

If you have purchased international air with us, there are some points that may be helpful for you to know.

- **Flying with a Travel Companion:** If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.
- **Selecting Your Seats:** If your airline allows pre-assigned seats, you will be able to select and view them directly from the airline's website after booking. Some airlines will not allow seat confirmation until your reservation is ticketed 45-30 days prior to departure, and/or they may charge a nominal fee. You may locate your itinerary on an airline's website utilizing the Record Locator Number found on the Air Itinerary in your My Planner.

Airport Transfers Can Be Purchased

For eligible flights, airport transfers may be purchased separately as an optional add-on, subject to availability. To be eligible, your flight(s) must meet the following requirements:

- You must fly into or fly home from the same airport as O.A.T. travelers who purchased included airfare.
- Your flight(s) must arrive/depart on the same day that the group arrives or departs.
- If you are arriving early, you must have arranged the hotels through our Arrive Early personalization option

Airport transfers can be purchased up to 45 days prior to your departure; they are not available for purchase onsite. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**.

If you don't meet the requirements above, you'll need to make your own transfer arrangements. We suggest the Rome to Rio website as a handy resource: **www.rome2rio.com**

Optional Tours

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your adventure by tailoring it to your tastes and needs. And if you decide not to join an optional tour? Then you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own—it's about options, not obligations.

What You Need to Know

- All optional tours are subject to change and availability.
- Optional tours that are reserved with your Trip Experience Leader can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard, Visa, and Discover credit cards; we can also take MasterCard or Visa debit cards as long as the card allows you to sign for purchases. (You won't be able to enter a PIN.)
- To ensure that you are charged in U.S. dollars, your payment will be processed by our U.S. headquarters in Boston. This process can take up to three months, so we ask that you only use a card that will still be valid three months after your trip is over. The charge may appear on your credit card statement as being from Boston, MA or may be labeled as "OPT Boston".
- Your Trip Experience Leader will give you details on the optional tours while you're on the trip. But if you'd like to look over descriptions of them earlier, you can do so at any time by referring to your Day-to-Day Itinerary (available online by signing into My Planner at **www.oattravel.com/myplanner**).

Optional Tours: Reserve Before You Go

We strongly recommend that you reserve the following optional tours in advance. Unless otherwise noted, the deadline to do so is 45 days prior to your departure. Occasionally, space will be available for booking onsite, but this not guaranteed. Optional tours with O.A.T. can only be purchased with a credit card (Visa or MasterCard) or a debit card with credit card functionality. Because our headquarters are in Boston, charges may appear to be from Boston or might be labeled as "OPT Boston" (depending on your credit card company).

Heli-tour to Annapurna Base Camp

Travel by helicopter among the Himalaya's iconic, 26,000-foot peaks, eventually reaching Annapurna Base Camp, a coveted destination for mountaineers around the world. We'll land there, at an elevation of 13,550 feet above sea level, before returning to Pokhara via a route that takes trekkers up to a week.

Please note: *This optional tour must be reserved prior to your trip's departure. A minimum of 5 travelers must reserve in order for the tour to operate. This optional tour is weather-dependent and may be canceled on short notice.*

This optional tour is offered during the main trip. The cost is \$490 per person.

Communicating with Home from Abroad

To ensure you are available during your trip to friends and relatives at home, you will receive two copies of your hotel list, including phone numbers, with your Final Documents. One copy is for you to bring, and one to leave behind with friends or relatives in case they need to contact you during the trip.

Cell Phones

If you want to use your cell phone on the trip, check with your phone provider to see if your phone and service will work outside of the U.S. It may turn out to be cheaper to rent an international phone or buy a SIM card onsite. If you want to use a local SIM, just make certain your phone can accept one.

Calling Apps

Another option is to use a smartphone app like Skype, WhatsApp, or FaceTime. These services are usually less expensive than making a traditional call, but you'll need a Wi-Fi connection and the calls may count towards your phone plan's data allowance. Many smartphones—and some tablets or laptops—come with one of these apps pre-installed or you can download them for free from the appropriate apps store.

Calling Cards and 1-800 Numbers

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, a prepaid calling card can be useful because it circumvents unexpected charges from the hotel. Calling cards purchased locally are typically the best (less expensive, more likely to work with the local phones, etc.).

One reminder: Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

How to Call Overseas

When calling overseas from the U.S., dial 011 for international exchange, then the country code (indicated by a plus sign: +), and then the number. Note that foreign phone numbers may not have the same number of digits as U.S. numbers; even within a country the number of digits can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

Nepal: +977

India: +91

Bhutan: +975

United Arab Emirates: +971

PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

Luggage Limits

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One check bag and one carry-on per person.
Weight restrictions	Checked bags are limited to 44 lbs total ; carry-on bags are limited to 11 lbs total .
Size Restrictions	Standard airline size: checked luggage should not exceed 62 linear inches (length+ width + depth) and carry-on should not exceed 45 linear inches
Luggage Type	Duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Please do not bring a hard-sided (clamshell) suitcase.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Pre-Trip to Bhutan: Weight limit is the same as the main trip. Standard size for checked luggage; carry-on dimensions are restricted to 17.5 x 13.5 x 8 inches. All other extensions: Same as main trip.	

REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS

Luggage rules: Luggage rules and limits are set by governmental and airline policy. Enforcement of the rules may include spot checks or may be inconsistent. However one thing is the same across the board: If you are found to have oversized or overweight luggage, you will be subject to additional fees, to be assessed by—and paid to—the airline in question.

A small duffel bag is a necessity for certain portions of your adventure: You will need to bring a small duffel bag for 2-3 nights at a time for use during the trekking and rafting portion of the tour when you will not have access to your suitcase/main luggage. This small duffel bag should be limited to approximately 24" x 12" x 10" and we strongly recommend a bag made from a durable, waterproof material, such as ripstop nylon. Please bring a luggage tag and lock for this bag as well.

Notes about luggage for the Bhutan extension:

- **Size:** Frequently the aircraft for our flight to Bhutan is a small plane with no room for American-sized carry-ons. Unfortunately, there is no way to predict which aircraft will be used. (The airline doesn't tell us in advance.) But as long as you follow the airline's own rule of using a smaller bag, you will be fine no matter what aircraft is used. Of course, this means that you might bring the small bag and then have a larger plane after all. But the point is to be prepared no matter what. You are allowed to bring a personal item, such as a lady's purse, an overcoat, an umbrella, or a walking stick in addition to your carry-on.
- **Weight:** The airline is generally strict about enforcing weight limitations. If you are caught bringing excess baggage it will cost you at least \$4 for each additional kilogram (2.2 pounds). There are no "left luggage" facilities for you to leave extra luggage behind during your extension.

TIP: Our regional staff suggests that travelers on the extension to Bhutan bring their coat/jacket *and wear their sturdiest shoes* on the flight from India to Bhutan. That way you have these items even if your checked luggage is lost or delayed, but they don't take up room in your small carry-on.

Don't Forget:

- **These luggage limits may change.** If the airline(s) notify us of any changes, we will include an update in your Final Documents booklet.
- It's a good idea to reconfirm baggage restrictions and fees directly with the airline a week or so prior to departure. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our website in the FAQ section.
- **Baggage fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines.
- The luggage limits above are based on your regional flights, which may be less than your international flights. Even if your international airline offers a larger weight limit, you will need to pack according to the lower restrictions.

Your Luggage

- **Checked Luggage:** One duffel bag or suitcase. Look for one with heavy nylon fabric, wrap-around handles, built-in wheels, and a heavy duty lockable zipper. Please do not bring a rigid (plastic shell) suitcase.
- **Carry-on Bag:** You are allowed one carry-on bag per person. We suggest a tote or small backpack that can be used as both a carry-on bag for your flight and to carry your daily necessities—water bottle, camera, etc—during your daily activities.
- **A small duffel bag:** This small duffel bag should be limited to approximately 24" x 12" x 10" and we strongly recommend a bag made from a durable, waterproof material, such as ripstop nylon.
- You will need it for 3 nights while trekking in Annapurna. (You'll leave your suitcase or large duffel bag at the hotel in Pokhara, trek to the lodge in Annapurna, stay for 3 nights, and then return to Pokhara where you will retrieve your luggage.)
- You'll also want the bag for 2 nights when you'll raft to the Seti River Camp. Your main luggage will be transported ahead and you'll retrieve it in Chitwan.
- **TIP:** Some previous travelers have suggested re-purposing your carry-on for this use; others have packed an empty bag into their suitcase. Please bring an additional luggage tag and lock for this small bag.
- During these portions of your adventure, luggage porters will be available to transport your duffel bags.
- **Locks:** For flights that originate in the U.S., you can either use a TSA-approved lock or leave your luggage unlocked. Outside of the U.S. we strongly recommend locking your luggage as a theft-prevention measure.

Clothing Suggestions: Functional Tips

- **Sturdy comfortable shoes with great support are a must.** Any footwear you bring should be "broken in" before you leave home.

Style Hints & Dress Codes

- **Clothing should be functional and casual.** This is an active adventure with hiking, trekking, and rafting activities.
- **Your dress should be somewhat conservative in order to be respectful of the local culture.** Sleeveless tops for ladies are acceptable in the larger cities, like Kathmandu, but are not appropriate in the small villages or less sophisticated cities and communities, or in temples. Shorts above the knee (on men or women) and skirts above the knee are considered inappropriate, and will draw unwanted attention. Shorts of any length are usually not allowed in public places in Bhutan.

- **Leather not allowed in some temples.** Since the cow is a sacred animal in the Hindu religion, many Nepalese do not wear leather. It is OK for you to wear leather on the street, and small leather items (belts and wallets) will usually be allowed in Hindu temples. However, temple attendants may ask that you leave large leather items—such as handbags—at the entrance, so consider bringing a cloth or canvas bag instead.

Recommended Packing Lists

We have included suggestions from Trip Experience Leaders and former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. Each traveler's packing list may be different depending on the climate you are used to. We recommend using www.weather.com and consulting the “Climate” chapter of this handbook.

And don't forget a reusable water bottle—you'll need it to take advantage of any refills we offer as we are working to eliminate single-use plastic bottles on all of our trips.

Recommended Clothing

- ☐ **Shirts:** A mixture of short- and long-sleeved shirts. No matter what time of year, you'll want a few of both. In winter, you'll still want a couple short sleeves for Chitwan National Park. In summer, you'll still want a few long sleeves for cool nights in the mountains.
- ☐ **Trousers and/or jeans:** Comfortable and loose-fitting so you can easily hike, raft, or be active.
- ☐ **Shoes and socks:** Comfortable, sturdy, highly supportive walking shoes—lightweight hiking boots are recommended. Also recommended is a pair of water-tolerant footwear in case of snow, rain, or for rafting. If you are taking one or both of the extensions, we suggest you bring extra socks to be used as “temple socks,” because wearing shoes of any type are not allowed inside the temples.
- ☐ **Light cotton or wool sweater.** During colder times of year, this is useful for layering. During hotter times of year this can still be useful because the air-conditioning on the bus can be cold.
- ☐ **Wide-brim hat or visor for sun protection** (or wait until after the trek and use the hat/scarf provided)
- ☐ **Some sort of rain gear**—a raincoat, a waterproof jacket, an umbrella, etc. A rain poncho will be provided during the trekking and rafting parts of our adventure, but not in Kathmandu, Chitwan National Park, or on the extensions.
- ☐ **Underwear and sleepwear**

- ☐ Female travelers should also consider sports bras, especially for days with long overland transfers—the roads can be bumpy.
- ☐ For the extension to Bhutan—a warm jacket or coat. This is a year-round item because nighttime temperatures can be in the 40s even in summer.

Seasonal Clothing Recommendations

For winter (December–February)

- ☐ For 95% of the trip, you'll want long, warm jeans or trousers, and not shorts. (One possible exception is in Chitwan National Park, where it can still be warm even in winter.)
- ☐ You'll mostly want long-sleeved shirts, but might want a couple short sleeves for Chitwan.
- ☐ Snow is common this time of year, so factor that into your footwear choice.
- ☐ Warm outer gear is a must. This means a winter coat, hat, and gloves.
- ☐ Bring clothing you can layer (sweater, fleece, jacket, etc.); thermal or long underwear adds warmth without bulk and doesn't take up much room in your luggage.
- ☐ Warm sleepwear is recommended. Hotels in Nepal and Bhutan have very limited heating.
- ☐ During the rafting, the river water will be cold; you'll need more than just a swimsuit.

For spring (March–May)

- ☐ Spring is especially tricky to define. March is a shoulder month that can have both winter and spring weather; May is a transitional month from spring to summer.
- ☐ It will be cool in the mountains and warm in Chitwan. You'll want a mix of long jeans/trousers and walking shorts, plus a mix of long- and short-sleeved shirts.
- ☐ Snow can occur as late as April in the mountains, so factor that into your footwear choice.
- ☐ Some warm clothing is still a must, but it doesn't need to be as heavy-duty as for winter.
- ☐ Layers (sweater, fleece, jacket, etc.) are key for this season, so you can adjust to the varied weather.
- ☐ Warm sleepwear, or a layer you can add to your sleepwear, is recommended for the mountain trek.
- ☐ A swimsuit will become more useful as spring progresses

For summer (June–September)

- ☐ Summer is hot and muggy, so the best choices are walking shorts and/or lightweight trousers. But you'll still want a pair or two of long jeans/trousers for the mountains or for the optional extensions.
- ☐ To be respectful of local culture, we suggest a longer cut of shorts (to the knee). Shorts of any length are usually not allowed in public places in Bhutan.
- ☐ For female travelers: Our female Trip Experience Leaders suggest that a skirt (to the knee or longer) is a great choice for hot days. There is no need to wear a skirt all the time; jeans/trousers/walking shorts are fine too, and are usually a better choice on our most active days. But a skirt allows for air movement and is a nice alternative to shorts.
- ☐ A swimsuit is recommended for hotel pools and rafting.
- ☐ This season is the rainiest; good rain gear and/or an umbrella is useful.
- ☐ We recommend that you bring anti-leech socks/stockings for the river trekking portion of your trip if you're departing August–September (a type of waterproof stocking with a drawstring to tighten around your leg)
- ☐ Late September may be closer to fall than summer.

For fall (October–November)

- ☐ As the season progresses, you'll want to lean more towards long sleeves and long trousers, but still keep a few lighter things for Chitwan, where it will be warm.
- ☐ Snow can occur as early as late October in the mountains, so factor that into your footwear choice.
- ☐ Like spring, layers (sweater, fleece, jacket, etc.) are key for this season, so you can adjust to the varied weather. As the season progresses, the more warm layers become useful.
- ☐ During the rafting, the river water will be cold; you'll need more than just a swimsuit.
- ☐ Warm sleepwear is recommended. Hotels in Nepal and Bhutan have very limited heating.
- ☐ November is a transitional month into winter.
- ☐ If you are taking the pre-trip extension, keep in mind that Bhutan will be cooler than Nepal.

Provided Items

- ☐ For the trekking in the Annapurna mountains: We will be providing a trekking daypack, a water bottle, a walking stick, and a rain poncho; these are for your use during the trek only. We will also provide a sun hat or a sun scarf that you may keep.
- ☐ For the river rafting: We will be providing a “splash jacket” and pants for your use during the rafting only. These items are not waterproof. If you prefer to bring your own waterproof clothing and waterproof foot wear, you are welcome to do so. But it is not a requirement. If you are traveling from October–March, the water will be cold during these months.

Essential Items

- ☐ Overnight bag for 2–3 nights during the trekking and river rafting portions of your adventure (see luggage section for details)
- ☐ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, deodorant, etc. Our hotels will provide the basics like soap and shampoo, but if you are sensitive to fragrances or new products, you may wish to bring your preferred brands. Most hotels do not provide a washcloth, so you may wish to pack one.
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Sunscreen, SPF 30 or stronger
- ☐ Insect repellent with DEET. It’s not just for mosquito season; you may also encounter a variety of other biting insects like gnats and midges.
- ☐ Pocket-size tissues—most public restrooms will be out of toilet paper. (And out of soap, so bring some anti-bacterial hand lotion too.)
- ☐ Packets of moist towelettes can be useful for cleaning hands when no soap is available or to refresh yourself on hot and muggy days.
- ☐ Flashlight or headlamp. A working flashlight or headlamp is highly recommended by our Trip Experience Leaders as power outages are common in Nepal. Plus the lighting in some lodges will not be as bright as you are used to, and may not be enough to read by.
- ☐ Electrical converter & plug adapter: see “A Word About Electricity” for more details
- ☐ Camera gear with extra batteries or battery charger. It is very handy to have a waterproof camera or waterproof camera bag for river rafting.
- ☐ Optional: **Bhutan extension:** Ear plugs – Noise pollution (such as barking dogs) is common in Bhutan. Past travelers have suggested bringing ear plugs for sleeping

Medicines

- ☐ Your own prescription medicines
- ☐ Travel first aid kit: Band-Aids, headache and pain relief, laxatives and anti-diarrhea tablets, something for upset stomach. Maybe a cold remedy, moleskin foot pads, antibiotic cream, or allergy medication.
- ☐ Knee brace (in case of emergency)
- ☐ An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- ☐ Optional: Pain medication for rare emergency purposes
- ☐ Optional: Altitude sickness medication (if you are taking the Bhutan extension). Also for the extension in Bhutan: Motion sickness medication if you are susceptible on winding roads.
- ☐ Optional: Anti-malarial medication—discuss with your doctor first

Notice - Packing for Nepal

Packing for this trip is different than for other O.A.T. adventures. This is a far more active adventure than most, it visits a region that can have both extreme hot temperatures and extreme cold, plus some items are provided for specific portions of the trip. To help you navigate, we have broken up our packing checklists into different sections.

The “general clothing recommendations” section covers items you’ll want to bring no matter what time of year. The “seasonal clothing recommendations” covers items that are specific to a particular season. **When reading this section, keep in mind that seasons are not precise.** That is why we list all of the seasons—in case you are traveling during a shoulder month (like March, which can have winter and spring weather in the same month). The “provided items” list tells you what will be provided and when.

As usual, we also provide “essential items”, “medicines”, and “optional gear” sections. You are not required to bring everything on these lists. The goal is to remind you of things that are often forgotten or tell you about something that might be useful.

And the number one rule of packing for Nepal? Double-check the weather before you depart. Go online for a 10-day or 14-day forecast for a few different places on your itinerary about a week or so before you leave. That will give you enough time to make corrections or adjustments if needed.

Electricity Abroad

When traveling overseas, the voltage is usually different and the plugs might not be the same shape.

Voltage

Electricity in Nepal and Bhutan is 220–230 volts. In the U.S. it is 110 volts. Most of the things a traveler will want to plug in—battery chargers, smartphones, tablets or computers—can run off both 110 and 220–240. But you should check the item or the owner’s guide first to confirm this before you plug it in. If you have something that needs 110 volts—like a shaver or a hairdryer—you can bring a transformer to change the current. (But transformers tend to burn out, so it might be better to leave whatever it is at home.)

Plugs

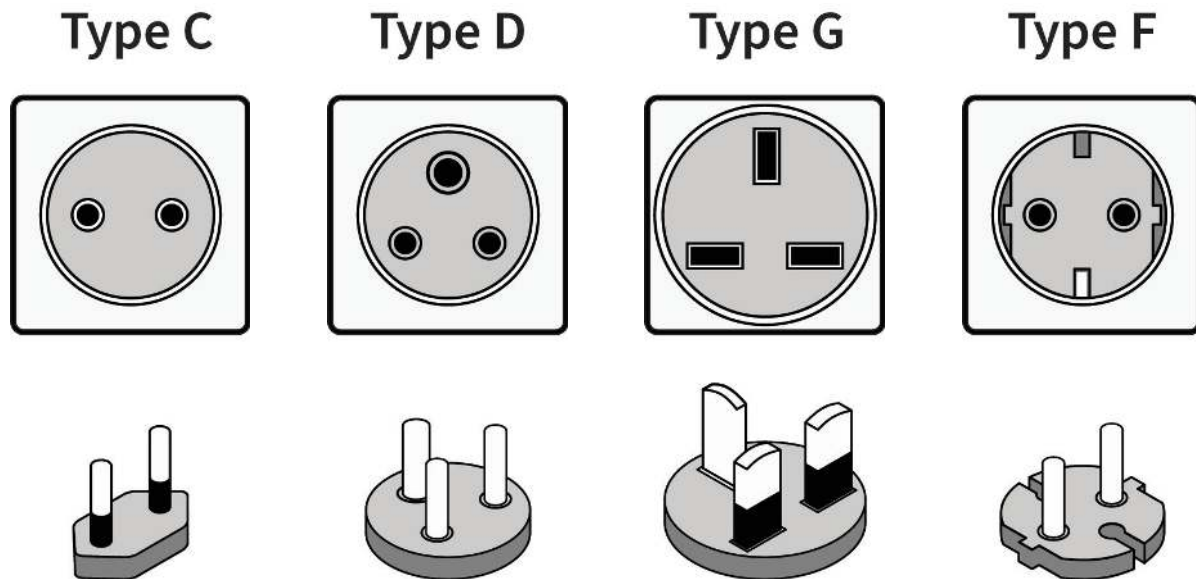
The shape of plugs will vary from country to country, and sometimes even within a country depending on when that building was built. To plug something from the U.S. into a local socket you’ll need an adapter that fits between the plug and the socket. Because there are many different types of plugs in this region, it may be easier to purchase an all-in-one, universal adapter/converter combo. Versatile and lightweight, these can usually be found at your local electronics goods or hardware stores. Sometimes you can buy them at large retailers too, like Target or Walmart. If you forget to bring an adapter, you might also find them for sale at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Standard U.S. plugs are Type A and Type B. Here is the list of plugs for the countries on this trip:

Nepal: C or D

Bhutan: C, D, or G. Sometimes F but this is rare

India: C or D



Availability

A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays. There is no electricity in your room at the Seti River tented camp and electricity is unreliable in Annapurna and Chitwan. These places run on solar-powered generators, with very limited access to electricity. In Annapurana and Chitwan, you will be able to charge camera or phone batteries, but that is about it. And at the Seti River camp, you won't be able to charge anything. Travelers dependent on electricity supply for health reasons (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) are strongly advised to consider a different O.A.T. adventure.

CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

Nepal: Nepal's weather is generally predictable and pleasant. There are two seasons—the dry season from October to May and the rainy, monsoon season from June to September. About 80 percent of the rain falls during the rainy period, so the remainder of the year is relatively dry. Spring and autumn are the most pleasant seasons; winter temperatures drop to freezing with a high level of snowfall in the mountains. Late spring and summer temperatures range from 83° in the hill regions to more than 104° in the Terai.

Bhutan: Bhutan has a wide range of climactic conditions, with areas at lower elevations—including Punakha and Wangdi—having cool, dry winters and hot, wet summers. Areas at higher elevations, such as Thimphu and Paro, are colder in comparison. For example, in winter (November–March) places like Paro are below freezing while Punakha is generally in the 40–60 ° F range. Areas like Gangtey may even drop below 0° F during the winter months. Summertime highs rarely get above the 70s, except in Punakha, which can be hotter. As far as precipitation, expect snow in the winter and rain spring through autumn, with the strongest rains in summer. *Please note: If traveling during the winter, keep in mind that local hotels and restaurants do not have central heat. Hotel rooms will have an electric heater, but public spaces (i.e. lobbies) and restaurants will be cold.*

Northern India (Amritsar & Dharamsala): This part of India has four distinct seasons—winter (December–March); summer (April–June); monsoon (July–September); and a short autumn or post-monsoon (October–November). Winter is cold, especially up in the mountains, where snow and sleet are common. Summer turns up the heat. The average high in Amritsar can be in the 90s or 100s, while some heat waves can spike as high as 118° F. Monsoon season is hot and wet with rainfall almost every day. Autumn is generally pleasant with some rain, but more moderate temperatures.

Dubai: Dubai has a typical desert climate. During the day, temperatures range from hot in the winter (high 70s–high 80s) to very hot in the summer (high 90s–100+). At night, the temperatures drop sharply; usually it is at least 20 degrees cooler. The city gets very little rain—less than 4 inches each year.

Climate Averages & Online Forecast

The following charts reflect the **average** climate as opposed to exact weather conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. An extreme heat wave or cold snap could fall outside these ranges. As your departure approaches, we encourage you to use **www.weather.com** for a more accurate forecast of the locations you visit.

Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	KATHMANDU, NEPAL			POKHARA, NEPAL		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	60 to 40	97 to 65	0.7	68 to 47	26	0.4
FEB	63 to 44	96 to 58	0.6	70 to 51	33	1.0
MAR	70 to 50	94 to 50	1.2	79 to 56	47	1.7
APR	77 to 57	90 to 48	1.5	68 to 48	52	4.3
MAY	79 to 63	92 to 59	4.0	69 to 52	71	7.1
JUN	80 to 69	93 to 70	7.9	73 to 57	73	7.1
JUL	79 to 70	96 to 80	14.8	70 to 59	85	20.9
AUG	79 to 70	95 to 79	12.8	69 to 58	86	21.4
SEP	78 to 67	97 to 78	7.4	69 to 55	80	4.5
OCT	74 to 59	97 to 73	2.2	82 to 60	38	0.1
NOV	68 to 49	97 to 71	0.1	75 to 56	45	--
DEC	61 to 42	98 to 68	0.4	70 to 49	34	--

MONTH	BHARATPUR (CHITWAN PARK), NEPAL			THIMPHU, BHUTAN		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	65 to 47	43	1.9	54 to 27	--	0.6
FEB	68 to 50	48	5.3	58 to 33	--	1.6
MAR	76 to 54	36	1.2	62 to 39	--	0.9
APR	80 to 59	41	3.4	68 to 45	--	2.3
MAY	80 to 63	63	6.9	73 to 56	--	4.8
JUN	83 to 68	69	9.3	76 to 59	--	9.6
JUL	80 to 69	83	17.7	66 to 56	--	14.5
AUG	79 to 68	83	17.8	77 to 60	--	13.5
SEP	79 to 65	81	7.3	74 to 59	--	6.0
OCT	77 to 59	60	1.5	71 to 51	--	1.5
NOV	72 to 55	65	0.2	64 to 41	--	0.3
DEC	67 to 49	54	0.1	58 to 30	--	0.1

MONTH	AMRITSAR, INDIA			DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	68 to 40	75	1.0	73 to 58	76 to 52	0.4
FEB	72 to 45	65	1.0	74 to 59	76 to 54	1.6
MAR	83 to 53	58	0.8	80 to 63	73 to 50	0.4
APR	95 to 63	43	0.6	88 to 69	67 to 46	0.4
MAY	104 to 72	37	0.6	97 to 76	59 to 41	0.4
JUN	106 to 79	45	1.6	100 to 80	66 to 46	0.4
JUL	97 to 80	67	5.5	103 to 85	65 to 49	0.4
AUG	94 to 79	75	5.2	103 to 86	66 to 49	0.4
SEP	97 to 73	73	2.2	100 to 81	72 to 50	0.4
OCT	94 to 60	67	0.2	93 to 74	74 to 50	0.4
NOV	83 to 47	70	0.1	86 to 67	75 to 50	0.4
DEC	72 to 41	79	0.5	77 to 61	78 to 53	0.8

ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

O.A.T. Trip Experience Leaders: A World of Difference

During your adventure, you'll be accompanied by one of our local, Trip Experience Leaders. All are fluent in English and possess the skills, certification, and experience necessary to ensure an enriching adventure. As locals of the regions you'll explore with them, our Trip Experience Leaders provide the kind of firsthand knowledge and insight that make local history, culture, and wildlife come alive. Coupled with their unbridled enthusiasm, caring personalities, and ability to bring diverse groups of travelers together, our Trip Experience Leaders ensure that your experience with O.A.T. is one you'll remember for a lifetime.

Nepalese Culture

Nepal is predominantly rural, with very few cities outside Kathmandu and many isolated communities where tribal traditions have remained largely unchanged for centuries. Even so, the nation has always been a cultural and commercial crossroads and as a result, the people are known for their tolerance of many faiths and ethnicities. There are approximately 50 Nepalese ethnicities, some indigenous to Nepal (such as the Tharu and Tamang people); others arriving via ancient migrations such as the Brahmin-Chhetri, Magars and Newars. Patient and resilient, the Nepalese people have weathered many difficulties—natural, social, and political. Yet they are patriotic and very proud of the fact that their country has never been colonized, and see this as a key differentiator between themselves and their much larger neighbor, India.

Nepal is a predominantly Hindu country and part of that legacy has been the caste system that categorizes people into a strict social hierarchy of four main classes: *brahmin* (the uppermost and “purest,” priestly caste), *kshatriya* (warriors or nobility), *vaishya* (merchant caste) and *shudra* (artisan, servant, or laborer caste). The lowest echelons of society live outside the caste system, the *dalit* or “untouchables.” Within each caste, there are more specific *thar* subdivisions that specify kinship and vocation or employment.

It is illegal to discriminate against anyone on the basis of caste, but in practice, most Nepalis accept social stratification as the natural order. They may not exactly know what your caste is, but will defer to those who are older, educated, from prominent families, English speakers, or members of a respected profession. Nepalis may often inquire about your background along these lines, but most Westerners will automatically be treated with a high degree of respect.) You may notice that in Kathmandu, where the castes and foreigners mix more frequently, social interactions are looser.

Nepalis tend to be deeply loyal to their family and friends. In times of need, they cannot rely on the government for assistance and so extended families, even members of the entire village community, will come together to help each other. In remote areas, this can be a matter of survival, and basic assets are often shared communally. Because of this interdependence, Nepalis are very social, warm, and inclusive—traits that will make you feel very welcome.

What to Expect

Nepal is uniquely beautiful and spiritual destination. However, it is also a destination that it very rigorous and physically challenging. Here are a few notes from our regional staff on what to expect. While many of these notes were covered under “Is This Adventure Right for You?”, they are worth repeating.

Weather

- Not being prepared for the weather is one of the top comments from former travelers. The Climate chapter of the Handbook can help you, but you’ll also want to double-check the current weather forecast online a week or so before you depart.
- The hottest months are from April –September. Temperatures can go up to 100 degrees.
- From October–March cold winter weather can cause discomfort indoors as well as outdoors. Outside of Kathmandu, most hotels in Nepal lack central heating, and will be cold. Bhutan will also be cold during these months, especially at higher elevations; like in Nepal, the hotels in Bhutan have very limited heating.
- The rainiest months are June through September, which is Nepal’s monsoon season.

Trekking

- You must be able to walk 5 miles unassisted each day and participate in 3 –5 hours of walking at a time, including climbing several steep steps without handrails. We will travel over some rugged paths as well as bumpy, unpaved, dusty roads.

Accommodations

- The accommodation while trekking, rafting, and on jungle safari is very basic and no air-conditioning or heating is available. Sometimes even access to hot water is limited.
- There is no electricity in your room at the Seti River tented camp so you may want to consider bringing a flashlight or headlamp. The electricity at your accommodations in Annapurna and Chitwan can be unreliable. These places run on solar-powered generator, with very limited access to electricity. You will be able to charge camera or phone batteries, but that is about it. And at the Seti River camp, you won’t be able to charge anything.

Pollution

- Kathmandu city is very polluted and dusty to due lot of road work and other types of construction. Please bring your own face mask if you are not used to dust and pollution or are sensitive to air quality.

Flights in Nepal

Domestic air travel in Nepal, and to and from India or Bhutan, is frequently subject to flight delays and schedule changes on short notice. Your Trip Experience Leader will do everything possible to keep your trip running smoothly, but your own acceptance that some unpredictability is part of the adventure of traveling in a developing country will help!

Elephant Rides

We do not offer elephant rides as part of our itinerary, as elephant rides offered in certain parts of Nepal subject these gentle giants to inhumane treatment, which O.A.T. does not condone.

Language

Linguistically speaking, Nepal is very interesting — and complex. There are about 129 known Nepalese languages. They exist mainly in oral form, but only 19 of them have more than 100,000 speakers. The official language is Nepali (formerly called Khas-Kura and Ghorkali), and about 77% of the people speak it as a first or second language. Even so, an estimated 35% of the population has at least some familiarity with English, especially in Kathmandu and other cities, and among people with higher educations. English is the language of business here, and colloquially, Nepalese English is known as Nenglish.

Your attire is a key part of your non-verbal presentation. Your clothing should show a respect for local tradition. This means you should dress in a relatively modest style. Avoid revealing or tight-fitting outfits.

Our Vehicles & Road Conditions

In Nepal we usually travel in 19- to 30-seat buses. During our time in Kathmandu, these buses have air-conditioning and heat; out in the countryside they do not have air-conditioning. The vehicles we use on one day, for our transfer from Chitwan to the airport, are jeeps or local buses that are not air-conditioned. Nepal's roads are generally in good condition but they traverse very mountainous terrain and they can be bumpy or occasionally dusty. Some travelers find an inflatable seat cushion to be valuable on the longer drives. There are no toilet facilities on the bus; however, we make convenience stops on a regular basis. However, please note that toilet facilities in small villages may be Asian-style (squat toilets) and may lack running water.

The extensive road-building program underway in Bhutan can result in sections of the roads being closed. The roads also tend to be somewhat bumpy near sections of road construction. Your Trip Experience Leader will explain the fascinating development of the roads here in this mountain kingdom, where the very first road was constructed as recently as 1960!

Cultural Differences in Nepal

Be prepared to be confronted with a different standard of living. While poverty and poor sanitation can be distressing, please don't let that keep you from experiencing the amazing culture or rich natural heritage of Nepal.

Road Conditions in Bhutan

Bhutan is a hilly and mountainous country due to its location in the foothills and lower mountains of the Himalayas. Roads are winding with sharp hairpin bends (think up and down mountains, along valleys, and through high mountain passes). For safety reasons they may be limited to one lane only and/or have a strict speed limit of just 50 km per hour (about 30 miles an hour)—even on paved roads in good condition and even in cities. Expect that driving from Point A to Point B will take longer than it would in the U.S. and bring motion sickness medication if you are susceptible on winding roads.

A Note about India

Adventurous travelers will find India a spiritually fulfilling destination, rich with natural wonder. However, poverty, persistent begging, pollution, and poor sanitation can be distressing. In some of the small villages where we stop during our days of touring, we must make do with Asian squat-style toilets. (We'll have Western-style toilets in all our hotels and at the restaurants we use for included meals. So squat toilets will be the exception rather than rule, but in some places they are unavoidable.) Some hotels and businesses may not have elevators, so be prepared to climb stairs.

The Finer Points

Don't let the fine points of Indian etiquette worry you; locals know that visitors can't be expected to know every detail. Much of what is considered polite in India is similar to what's polite in the U.S. But as a matter of interest, we've put together a list of "finer points" that might surprise you:

- When someone hands you something, it is polite to accept it with the right hand. If you are eating with your hands, you should use your right hand to take food or to put it in your mouth. (But being a "lefty" is fine and eating left-handed with cutlery is OK too.)
- Indians are generally quiet when they eat, discussing amongst themselves before the food is served or after it is eaten.
- Kissing couples are frowned upon, but discreet displays of affection are allowed, and friends of the same gender may walk hand-in-hand or arm-and-arm.
- Your attire is a key part of your non-verbal presentation. Your clothing should show a respect for local tradition. This means you should dress in a relatively modest style. Avoid revealing or tight-fitting outfits.

Traffic

Traffic is horrific throughout India. Exercise extreme caution when attempting to cross any street. Traffic drives on the left here. Both past travelers and tour leaders alike recommend you hire either a taxi or an auto-rickshaw (at a nominal fee) for short-distance transport. In some destinations (as you will soon see), you would be wise to utilize a transport service just to cross the street.

Photography in Dubai

In Dubai, do not take photos of government buildings, bridges, airports, train stations, or oil pipelines. This could result in the confiscation of your camera or arrest. Also please be aware that many locals will not want their photo taken as it is against their religion. It is best to ask for permission before taking a close up or portrait.

Taking Photographs

When taking photos of people in most countries, be polite and ask permission to take a close-up. In many countries, you should not be taking photos of children or older women without permission. Do not take photographs of military personnel, military compounds, or other official institutions/personnel (such as police). This may result in the confiscation of your camera.

Please obey any signs regarding photos at museum or sites; the no-flash rule protects the fragile artifacts and artwork from damage by repeated exposure to light. Occasionally, there may also be a small fee levied by the museum or site for the privilege of taking photos.

Safety & Security

As you travel, exercise the same caution and awareness that you would in a large American city. Carry a one-day supply of cash, and your passport, in a travel pouch. Don't leave valuables unattended in your hotel room – use a room safe as needed. In any sort of puzzling street situation, try to keep one hand on your wallet or money belt.

Nepalese Cuisine

Nepalese cuisine borrows from the culinary canon of its neighbors India, Tibet and China. But since the country only opened its borders in 1950, chefs had to rely on locally produced ingredients to create their unique, hybrid gastronomy. Nepali food is quite healthy, with very little fat and a variety of vegetables and lean meat. The food is often hearty and slightly spicy—just what you need to survive long, cold winters. Common ingredients include lentils, potatoes, rice, tomatoes, cumin, coriander, chilies, garlic, and peppers. Western food will be very limited, so come prepared to try some new dishes.

First and foremost among them will be ***dal bhat***, the national dish. It is really not just one item but a set meal consisting of a starch (usually rice but sometimes potato or corn meal), a lentil soup, a curry (of chicken, meat, or vegetable), and a vast array of pickles, yogurts, chutneys, and other condiments. You will also find many dishes like these:

- **Gorkhali lamb:** An intensely flavorful dish that starts by searing chunks of lamb in a chili paste, then slow cooking it in a mild curry sauce with potatoes and onions.
- **Sel roti:** A simple snack found from a street vendor. These are like a cross between a doughnut and a bagel, a deep fried ring of rice dough that is sweet and crispy on the outside, soft and puffy on the inside. They are usually served with yogurt dipping sauce.
- **Chatamari:** (a.k.a. “Nepali Pizza”) is a rice flour crepe topped with minced meat, eggs, and onions.

- **Momos:** These popular pillows of flavor are Tibetan-inspired dumplings filled with meat and vegetables (or occasionally, *paneer* or *chhurpi* cheese or potato).
- **Thukpa:** This iconic noodle soup is usually made with carefully seasoned yak, goat, lamb, or chicken, though there are vegetarian versions. *Thukpa* goes great with *momos*.

In the Kathmandu Valley, you can sample **Newari** cuisine, the most celebrated style of Nepali cooking. It takes advantage of the bounty of the valley's rich, alluvial soil with a variety of fish, fowl, meat and produce. The Newars are known for feasting, and if you arrive on the holiday of Indra Jatra, you may be able to sample the local *thon* as it flows freely from the mouth of a giant mask of the Lord Shiva. This is a potent, fermented rice liquor, but it's available year-round, so your toasting opportunities are unlimited. The feast will include dishes like these:

- **Wo** or **bari:** These light Newari pancakes are what you start the feast with and are made with a ground lentil batter, and filled with vegetables or chicken or meat. The most beloved Newari meat is buffalo, which is leaner and more flavorful than beef.
- **Chhwela:** A spiced grilled buffalo meat
- **Kachila:** A minced raw buffalo meat.
- **Daaykula:** A buffalo meat boiled with fried spices.
- **Jeri** (also known as **jalebi**): This sweet never fails. A deep-fried, pretzel-shaped yellow-orange dough ring dipped in saffron syrup.
- **Doodh Peda:** Is a fudge-like milk confection flavored with cardamom and pistachios.
- **Laddu:** Sugary balls of semolina baked with butter, cardamom, cashews and grated coconut. You can wash it all down with a *dahi* (yogurt) based *lassi* smoothie.

Bhutanese Cuisine

Bhutan may be tiny and landlocked, but its pantry is quite varied thanks to biomes that range from sub-tropical to alpine and from lowlands to highlands. In the south you can feast on bananas and oranges, while the northern highlands yield an array of tubers and plenty of dairy products. (Most Bhutanese dairy is based on yak's milk, but cow's milk products are also available.) People do eat meat here, mostly pork, yak, lamb, poultry, water buffalo, and beef; and the streams and lakes contribute a variety of freshwater fish and shellfish, especially trout.

If there is one common denominator, it's that Bhutanese food is big on chilies, which are a national passion. (But don't worry if you're not a fan of fire. The chefs at the restaurants where we dine always tone down the heat for foreign guests.) Other dishes to look for:

- **Ema datshi:** This national dish is a spicy stew with green chilies and vegetables such as green beans, potatoes (**kewa**), and mushrooms (**shamu**) simmered in cheese.
- **Phaksha paa:** Stir-fried pork with radish and spinach.
- **Phak sha phin tshoem:** Pork with rice noodles.

- **Sikam paa:** A favorite for pork lovers is this crispy pork belly.
- **Sha huentsu:** Stewed beef with spinach.
- **Bja sha maroo:** This savory dish consists of chicken in garlic, ginger and butter sauce. Your main dish will almost always be accompanied by rice, but in addition to white rice try the nutty-flavored red rice that Bhutanese prefer.
- **Khule** (buckwheat pancakes) and **puta** (buckwheat noodles): These replace any dish that is not accompanied by rice.
- **Momos:** These Tibetan dumplings that are the rage now on both sides of the Pacific, are also popular in Bhutan. There is also a buckwheat dough version called **hoentay**.
- **Goen hogay:** A traditional cucumber salad with chili flakes, tomato, cilantro, onions, and a crumble of **datshi** cheese, drizzled with oil.

Indian Cuisine

Considering India's varied geography, climate, religions, and outside influences, it's no wonder that the subcontinent's cuisine is one of the world's most diverse. India has 31 recognized regional cuisines, but there are common threads.

Indian cuisine is known for intense flavors, with many dishes built upon a foundation of spices such as cumin, cardamom, turmeric, coriander, cinnamon, nutmeg, saffron, and rose petal essence. A popular spice mix is **garam masala**, which varies from chef to chef. Rice is a staple; as are pulses, the edible seeds of legumes like lentils, chickpeas, and beans. A well-known pulse is **dal**, a lentil porridge that can be eaten by itself, or used as a thickener. Lest you think Indian cuisine is all about curry, note that the word "curry" is a British invention used to describe *all* Indian cuisine. In India, curry is simply a dish with sauce.

Northern Indian cuisine is dominant in many states including Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi (home to Jaipur, Delhi, Agra, and Lucknow), and is the most prevalent Indian cuisine outside India. It has a strong Mughal influence that uses dairy staples like **ghee** (clarified butter), **paneer** (a mild cheese), and yogurt. Try some of these delicious dishes:

- **Rogan josh:** A yogurt-based lamb stew fragrant with chilies.
- **Saag paneer:** A creamy spinach and cheese.
- **Korma:** Chicken or lamb simmered in coconut milk or yogurt with cumin, coriander, and cashews or almonds.
- **Butter Chicken:** This dish originated in Delhi and is made from flavorful stew of chicken chunks in a tomato-yogurt gravy.
- **Samosas:** This famous street food dish is made from fried pastry triangles filled with potatoes, onions, meats, and spices **chana masala** (chickpea stew); or **nagori halwa** (sweet puffed bread with a buttery paste).

Southern India is where you will find quick vegetarian food to go that is simply called “Meals Ready.” Look for dishes like these:

- **Sambar:** This dish includes a selection of vegetables including tamarind-flavored peas.
- **Rasam:** A fiery tomato-lentil soup and yogurt. It is served in a round stainless-steel tray called a thali, or on a banana leaf.
- **Dosa:** A signature dish in Southern India that is a crepe-like pancake filled with dozens of vegetables, meats, and seasonings.
- **Meen curry:** A fish curry with coconut milk.
- **Pazham pori:** Banana fritters.

In western India, the state of **Gujarat** is famed for vegetarian and seafood dishes. You will find dishes like these:

- Gujarati **thali** plate: This multi-course feast typically includes one or two steamed or fried snacks; a green vegetable; a tuber or squash **shaak** curry; **kathol** (braised beans, chickpea or peas); one or more yogurt dishes; and many side dishes, with rice and an array of chutneys and condiments.
- **Vindaloo:** A Portuguese-inspired dish whose main ingredient is meat, poultry or seafood marinated in garlic, wine, vinegar, and chilies.

Eastern India is known for sweets like these:

- **Lassi:** If you visit **Varanasi** try a smooth, cool puree of yogurt, fruit, sugar and cream.
- **Nimish:** Frothy, creamy pudding flavored with saffron, cardamom, and rose water.
- **Rasgulla:** This sweet treat is made from semolina and cheese curd balls simmered in a sugary syrup.
- **Dachori:** This savory side is made from a crispy fried bread stuffed with bean paste and spices.

Emirati Cuisine

Emirati cuisine part of Eastern Arabia and as such, has similarities to the cuisines of its neighboring countries, Oman and Saudi Arabia, as well as the Middle East and parts of Asia. Dishes are usually simple, cooked in one pot, as stews, with saffron, cardamom, turmeric, and thyme as the spices of choice to add flavor. Easily grown vegetables like cucumbers and tomatoes, *loomi* (dried lemons), dates, and chicken or small fowl are common ingredients. Less commonly found is camel meat, served rarely, during special occasions. Dishes to try include:

- **Balaleat:** a breakfast dish made of vermicelli and eggs, seasoned with cardamom, cinnamon, saffron, and orange blooms and topped with pistachios.

- **Harees:** similar to haleem, wheat and salt are boiled together in a pot for hours until the mixture is almost porridge-like. Meat and spices (cinnamon, salt, and pepper) are added and the combination is cooked for another couple of hours.
- **Thareed:** a stew of meat (chicken, lamb, or goat) and vegetables served on top of *rigag* (thin flatbread)
- **Machboos:** Meat boiled in stock and spices. Once cooked through, the meat is removed, and the rice is boiled in the stock. Everything is then mixed with vegetables, including tomatoes, peppers, onions, etc. The mixture is all cooked together for another two hours.
- **Luqaimat:** A dessert dish of crunchy dumplings soaked either in honey or *dibbs* (date syrup)

Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your adventure. There is no requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. O.A.T. is not responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.

Returns

If you discover an issue with an item, you should contact the vendor directly and expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. We recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Keep in mind, local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up or that you are guaranteed a refund.

Crafts & Souvenirs

Nepal

Popular buys include locally made textile objects such as lopsided topis (caps), knitted mittens and socks, and cotton scroll paintings called mandala or thanka. Contemporary Nepalese art, saranghi (a small, four-stringed viola played with a horse-hair bow), papier mâché dance masks, Buddhist statuettes and filigree ornaments, woodcarvings, bamboo flutes and other folk objects are also popular.

Bargaining: Bargaining is normal in Nepal when dealing with street vendors and smaller shops, though larger stores will have fixed prices.

Bhutan

Popular Bhutan souvenirs include postage stamps, lovely hand-woven fabrics, carved masks, woven baskets, thangkhas, wooden bowls, handmade paper and finely crafted metal objects. In Bhutan, the buying and selling of antiques is strictly forbidden.

Bargaining: Bargaining is a common practice in Bhutan, especially with street vendors and in smaller shops. Larger stores will have fixed prices.

India

One simple way to find nice souvenirs at fair prices is to look at where an item was made—different cities are known for specific crafts. (And even if your itinerary doesn't take you to these exact cities, you can usually find these items on sale in other parts of India.)

- Delhi is a great location for buying silk carpets and Kashmir handicrafts.
- Phulkari, a stylized geometric embroidery, is popular in Amritsar and the Punjab region, commonly found on scarves, shawls, and other types of clothing.
- In Dharamshala, you'll find Tibetan-style items such as prayer flags, singing bowls, and Buddhist icons.

Bargaining: Bargaining is the norm in India, where anything sold by a street vendor and almost anything in a smaller shop has a flexible price. However, larger stores will have fixed prices.

United Arab Emirates

While shopping in Dubai mostly centers on international luxury brands, other popular souvenirs include camel milk chocolate, Persian rugs, *oudh* (a fragrance oil from agarwood resin), *bakhoor* (an incense alternative of burnable agarwood chips), Arabic *attars* (planet-based perfume oil), pashmina shawls, gold jewelry, dates, Arabic coffee pot, spices, hookah or shisha pipes, lanterns, brass lamps, and Khanjar (traditional daggers). Most spices, carpets, and crafts items can be found at the older souks (open-air markets).

U.S. Customs Regulations & Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, www.cbp.gov has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the export duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the import duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.
- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

Nepal

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 56,827 square miles
- **Capital:** Kathmandu
- **Languages:** Nepali is the official language; Maithali, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Tamang, Newar, Magar, and Awadhi are also spoken.
- **Ethnicity:** Chhettri 16.6%, Brahman-Hill 12.2%, Magar 7.1%, Tharu 6.6%, Tamang 5.8%, Newar 5%, Kami 4.8%, Muslim 4.4%, Yadav 4%, Rai 2.3%, Gurung 2%, Damai/Dholii 1.8%, Thakuri 1.6%, Limbu 1.5%, Sarki 1.4%, Teli 1.4%, Chamar/Harijan/Ram 1.3%, Koiri/Kushwaha 1.2%, other 19%
- **Location:** Nepal is bordered by China and India.
- **Geography:** Nepal is typically thought of as mountainous. But it is actually home to widely diverse landscapes and ecosystems. There are three geographic areas or belts running from west to east: mountain, hill, and plains.
- **Population:** 31,551,305
- **Religions:** Hindu 81.3%, Buddhist 9%, Muslim 4.4%, Kirant 3.1%, Christian 1.4%, other 0.5%, unspecified 0.2%
- **Time Zone:** Nepal is on Standard Time, 9.75 hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 3:45pm in Kathmandu.

National Holidays: Nepal

Nepal celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Martyr's Memorial Day, Nepali New Year, Maghe Sankranti, and Buddha Day. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

2/19 Democracy Day

3/8 International Women's Day

4/21 Loktantra Diwas

5/1 Labour Day

5/28 Republic Day

9/20 Constitution Day

Nepal: A Brief History

Nepal's heart has always remained the Kathmandu Valley, where its recorded history begins. It starts with the Kirati people, who arrived from the east during the 7th or 8th century BC as sheep farmers, and ended up as kings. Though other groups had long been settled in the region, the

Kiratis held power for 16 centuries. They practiced Hinduism, which is still the dominant religion, but around 563 BC, a prince was born in the southern town of Lumbini. He renounced his status, preached a new philosophy, and became the Buddha. Buddhism gained a following here, but lost favor by 200 AD when the Licchavis of northern India overthrew the Kiratis, and reinstated Hinduism and its caste system. With them, a golden age of Nepali art and architecture began.

The Licchavi era ended by 879 AD when the Thakuri dynasty arose. Several hundred years later, the Thakuri King Arideva founded the Malla Dynasty, which heralded another creative burst of Nepali cultural expression. The Malla era's prosperity made Kathmandu shiny prize, but what attracted Prithvi Narayan Shah, the ruler of the western city-state of Gorkha, was the dream of a unified kingdom. After 27 years of fighting he overtook the Kathmandu Valley in 1768. For the next 24 years, the Gurkha Shahs held power with an army that seemingly could not be conquered. The Shahs maintained Nepal's independence, at a cost: in 1792, faced with defeat by Chinese troops, they agreed to pay tribute to the Chinese emperor—and did so until 1912.

As Britain gained power in India in the early 1800s, Nepal was forced to sign the 1816 Sugauli Treaty, which surrendered Sikkim and other lands. Some of it was returned to Nepal after they helped the British subdue the 1857 Indian Mutiny. And so the Shah dynasty maintained power until 1846, when Jung Bahadur convinced them to destroy their political enemies in what came to be known as the Kot Massacre. While the Shahs were reduced to figureheads, Jung named himself Rana and prime minister for life—and decreed that his noble title would be hereditary. Through both World Wars, the Rana-Shahs lived lavishly while the Nepalese barely survived in horrid conditions. Nepal's borders closed, and the country faded from world view.

After Britain withdrew from India in 1947, opposition toward the Ranas grew. The Shah King Tribhuvan fled to India, and worked with the Nepali Congress Party to form a new government. The next Shah King Mahendra dissolved the cabinet and wrested control of the government in 1960. Corruption continued with Mahendra's son, Birendra, who ushered in the Panchayat system, which allowed for minimal local representation but abolished all political parties, leaving real power with the monarchy. It wasn't until a 1991 election that the Nepali Congress Party and the Communist Party of Nepal shared most of the votes. Still, Nepal's citizens remained unsettled, staging a general strike in 1992. Capitalizing on the unrest, in 1996 the Communist Party of Nepal (also called "the Maoists") declared a "people's war."

In 2001, in a shocking power play that could've been torn from the pages of Shakespeare, nine members of the royal family were massacred at a family party. It was blamed on the popular Crown Prince Dipendra, who supposedly shot himself and lingered in a coma before being declared king, and then dying. But the story has huge gaps and the investigation was minimal. The right-handed Dipendra was shot in the left side of the head—with two bullets—making suicide seem unlikely. More suspicious was the fact that Dipendra's uncle (and the murdered king's brother), Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, was left unharmed, along with his entire family. Gyanendra became king and absolute ruler, dissolving the parliament in 2005.

After a year of mass strikes and demonstrations, he grudgingly restored the parliament, and on December 24th, 2007, Nepal was formally declared a federal republic by the interim government—a seven-party coalition, including the Maoists. In subsequent elections the Maoists

won a majority, giving them the leverage completely abolish the monarchy. On June 11, 2008, the King left the palace, signaling the end of the royal Shah lineage. The first President of Nepal, Ram Baran Yadav, was sworn in on July 23, 2008.

In 2014, a coalition government of Maoist and National Congress Party members was formed, and almost immediately it faced major challenges in the form of multiple natural disasters, and an ensuing humanitarian crisis. The silver lining was that the crisis spurred the swift approval of a new constitution in 2015 which made Nepal a secular, federal-style republic. In 2017, Nepal held its first successful national elections in two decades, a resounding victory for a communist coalition. Today, Nepal is the world's only fully democratic, multi-party nation ruled by a communist party. Bidya Devi Bhandari became Nepal's first female president in 2015. Bidya Devi Bhandari was succeeded by Ram Chandra Poudel in March 2023.

Bhutan

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 14,824 square miles
- **Capital:** Thimphu
- **Languages:** Dzongkha is the official language; various Tibetan and Nepalese dialects are also spoken.
- **Ethnicity:** Ngalo (also known as Bhote) 50%, ethnic Nepalese 35% (includes Lhotsampas – one of several Nepalese ethnic groups), indigenous or migrant tribes 15%
- **Location:** Bhutan is bordered by China (the Tibet Autonomous Region) and India.
- **Geography:** Bhutan lies between the Tibet Autonomous Region to the north and the Indian states of Sikkim, West Bengal, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to the west and south. The Himalayas dominate the north of the country, and blizzards generated in the north each winter often drift southward into the central highlands. The highlands are the most populous part of the nation; and are characterised by their many rivers, isolated valleys, and the expansive forests that cover seventy percent of the nation.
- **Population:** 741,919
- **Religion:** Lamaistic Buddhist 75.3%, Indian- and Nepalese-influenced Hinduism 22.1%, other 2.6%
- **Time Zone:** Bhutan is on Bhutan Time, eleven hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 5pm in Thimphu.

National Holidays: Bhutan

In addition to the holidays listed below, Bhutan celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/02 Nyilo

02/05 Crown Prince Birthday

02/21 King's Birthday

05/02 King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck's Birthday

05/09 Shabdrung Kuchoe

06/02 King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's Coronation

06/21 Buddha's Parinirvana

08/05 King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck's Death Anniversary

11/01 King Jigme Khesar Namgyel's Coronation

12/17 National Day

Bhutan: A Brief History

In a land steeped in mystique, it's perhaps no surprise that Bhutan's history has not been learned through any straightforward narrative of chronological facts. The country was closed to the rest of the world until the 1950s, and what is known about its past has largely been recorded in folklore, songs, and religious scriptures that blend fantastical events with empirical ones. Little is known about Bhutan's ancient origins, but archaeological findings suggest that it was inhabited as early as 2000 BC by nomadic herders. It is believed that early inhabitants followed the animistic Bon religion. Buddhism may have arrived here around the second century AD, but scriptures which might have described the religion's early development have been lost.

For most Bhutanese, Bhutan's history begins with Padmasambhava, known as Guru Rinpoche. He is credited with bringing Buddhism from Tibet in 747 AD, and Bhutanese regard him as the second Buddha. Guru Rinpoche is said to have meditated in caves, transformed into many beings, performed miracles, and fought demons. He also built temples and monasteries, including the Taktshang monastery ("Tiger's Nest") built on a cliff above Paro Valley. Buddhism spread further in the 9th century, when Tibetan monks escaping turmoil fled to Bhutan.

Until the 1600s, Bhutan was a patchwork of warring fiefdoms. They were unified when the Tibetan lama and military leader Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal arrived in 1616 and declared himself religious ruler. His dual system of government split control between a spiritual leader and an administrative one, a policy that exists in modified form to this day. Through fortification and military consolidation, he built impressive *dzongs* or fortresses. Under Shabdrung, the southern valleys unified as *Druk Yul* (Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon), which is what the Bhutanese call their nation today. Shabdrung used cultural symbols and military force to define a national identity, including the initiation of sacred dances performed in annual *tsechu* festivals.

Shabdrung's death in 1705 was followed by 200 years of conflict and instability that lasted until 1907, when Ugyen Wangchuck was elected hereditary ruler of Bhutan, thereby beginning the Wangchuck Dynasty. In 1910, Ugyen signed the Treaty of Punakha with Britain, stating that

British India would not interfere in Bhutan's internal affairs, and Bhutan would accept Britain's advice in foreign affairs. When Ugyen died in 1926, his son Jigme Wangchuck became king, but Bhutan's isolation continued. This began to change with the third king, Jigme Dorji, in 1952.

As China annexed Tibet in the 1950s, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (who had been educated in India and England) realized that Bhutan's isolationism was no longer tenable. He took steps to better integrate Bhutan into the world community, including land reform, the abolition of serfdom, and the establishment of a National Assembly. Bhutan was formally admitted to the United Nations in 1971, and when the king died in 1972, his 16-year-old son Jigme Singye Wangchuck assumed the throne. His coronation in 1974 was the first time the international press was allowed to enter Bhutan. The first group of tourists arrived later that year, and ever since, Bhutan has carefully managed tourism to preserve its natural and cultural heritage.

Jigme Singye Wangchuck continued the policy of controlled economic development with particular focus on cultural and environmental preservation. Among his goals was the improvement of what he termed "Gross National Happiness," an index that measures wellbeing and quality of life along with monetary factors. He emphasized education, decentralization of governance, the development of hydroelectricity and tourism, and rural development. Jigme Singye Wangchuck abdicated in December 2005 so his son Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck could assume the throne. This was in advance of a new constitution that would take effect in 2008, making Bhutan a full parliamentary democracy. His idea was that Bhutan's leader should have prior hands-on experience to safely guide the nation during its momentous transition.

In October 2011, the young king married student Jetsun Pema. In February 2016, the country rejoiced with the birth of the new heir, Gyalsey (Prince) Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck; and a second son was welcomed in 2020. His first daughter was born in 2023. King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck is known as "the People's King," and he has emphasized *Kidu*, a Bhutanese tradition which makes it a sacred duty to look tend the people's welfare through direct actions of kindness, relief, and mercy. He has regular audiences with ordinary citizens; has enacted land reforms to improve life for peasants; and has launched programs for young people supporting education, business, and civil service.

India

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 1,269,219 square miles
- **Capital:** New Delhi
- **Languages:** Hindi is the official language; English is also spoken.
- **Ethnicity:** Indo-Aryan 72%, Dravidian 25%, Other 3%
- **Location:** India is bordered by Burma, Pakistan, the Arabian Sea, and the Bay of Bengal, as well as Bangladesh and Nepal.

- **Geography:** India consists of plateau and rolling plains, desert to the west, and the Himalaya Mountains in the north.
- **Population:** 1,251,695,584
- **Religion:** Hindu 79.8%, Muslim 14.2%, Christian 2.3%, Sikh 1.7%, other and unspecified 2%
- **Time Zone:** India is on Indian Standard Time and does not observe Daylight Saving Time. As a result, the time in India will either be 9.5 hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Time (in summer) or 10.5 hours ahead (in winter).

National Holidays: India

In addition to the holidays listed below, India celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Maha Shivaratri and Diwali. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/14 Maha Sankranti with Pongal

01/26 Republic Day

Feb or March Maha Shivratri (moves each year; see note above)

March Holi (moves each year)

August Raksha Bandhan (moves each year)

08/15 Independence Day

Aug or Sept Janmashtami Festival (moves each year)

10/02 Mahatma Gandhi Jayanti

Oct or Nov Diwali (moves each year)

Oct or Nov Chath Puja (moves each year)

Nov Guru Nanak Jayanti Day (moves each year)

12/25 Christmas Day

India: A Brief History

India has a history as sprawling as the subcontinent it inhabits. Humans first arrived here from Africa between 55,000 and 73,000 years ago. But the cradle of Indian civilization emerged in the Indus Valley around 4,500 BC. It evolved into the urban Harappan culture, which was the equal of those in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Harappan cities had brick homes, plumbing, sophisticated drainage systems, art, a system of weights and measures, and metallurgy.

Harappan civilization declined around 1500 B.C. One widely held theory ascribed its fall to invasion from the north and west of Aryan tribes, but evidence for this is scant, and Aryans may have already existed within India. They were not a racial group but Indo-Iranian people who identified along linguistic and religious lines. Aryans developed the Sanskrit literary tradition; the Vedic philosophies that are the basis of Hinduism; and the caste system. In the 7th century BC, Aryan culture spread to 16 northern kingdoms, which became the Nanda dynasty, and witnessed the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism.

By 321 BC, most of the north united under the Maurya Dynasty; and by the reign of the third Mauryan king, Asoka, almost the entire subcontinent was united. Asoka was a Buddhist whose Edicts set moral codes that all religions could embrace, even as he spread Buddhism throughout

Asia. After his death in 232 BC, the empire again split into small states. In AD 320, the Gupta dynasty reunited India, ushering in a golden age of science, literature and the arts—a time when Hinduism flourished and Buddhism all but disappeared from the subcontinent.

Over the next thousand years, India was repeatedly invaded by Huns. By the 11th century, Afghan Muslims established a sultanate in Delhi. But in 1526, Babur, a descendent of Genghis Khan, seized the throne. Thus began the Mughal Empire, the Islamic dynasty of Mongol origin that held sway until the 1800s. During the Mughal era, Indian culture was as brilliant as any in the world. The Mughals built lavish palaces, mosques, and mausoleums, including the Taj Mahal, constructed under Shah Jahan. The arts and sciences flourished, as did shipbuilding and trade.

The Mughal grip began to loosen with the rise of European colonialism, starting with the 1498 discovery by Vasco de Gama of an ocean route to India. By 1751, the French had forcibly taken much of India, followed by the British. The British East India Company became the dominant political force by using Indian soldiers to assert its will over the government and commercial rivals. In 1857, Indian soldiers ended the monopoly of the British East India Company, but then Britain overtook the Indian government, initiating the era of the British Raj. The British built railways, canals, irrigation works, schools, and factories. They employed thousands in the civil service, and introduced democracy. But the greatest beneficiary of this was the British ruling class, while most of India remained impoverished and landless peasants.

Indian resentment reached a pitch by the First World War. Led by Mohandas Gandhi, nationalists gained control of Congress and began a campaign of non-cooperation with the British. When World War II began, Congress agreed to serve with the British only upon the condition of India's postwar independence. Britain rejected the proposal, but 2.5 million Indians did fight against the Japanese, and India was granted independence in 1947. The new nation erupted into rioting between Hindus and Muslims, and Gandhi's attempts to create unity were cut short when he was killed in 1948. This led to a fragile peace between the religious groups.

Under the rule of Jawaharlal Nehru, India undertook a policy of non-alignment, seeking to maintain peaceful relations with all major superpowers. After Nehru's death, his daughter, Indira Gandhi, was elected prime minister. Though she boosted the economy, she also declared an "Emergency" period to suspend civil liberties. The press was censored, critics were imprisoned, and forced sterilizations were enacted against the poor. In 1977, Gandhi was removed from office and jailed, but she was re-elected in 1980. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984. She was succeeded by her son Rajiv Gandhi, who was assassinated in 1991.

The Nehru-Gandhi heirs continued to hold high offices even as their Congress Party teetered. In 2014, it suffered a resounding defeat by the Bharatiya Janata Party of the charismatic Narendra Modi. As Prime Minister, Modi introduced sweeping economic reforms, mounted a nationwide sanitation campaign, and liberalized rules on foreign investment, to mixed results. He was re-elected in 2019, and again in 2024, and continues to receive high approval ratings.

United Arab Emirates

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 32,278 square miles
- **Capital:** Abu Dhabi
- **Languages:** Arabic (official), Persian, English, Hindi, Urdu
- **Ethnicity:** Emirati 19%, other Arab and Iranian 23%, South Asian 50%, other expatriates (includes Westerners and East Asians) 8%
- **Location:** Middle East, bordering the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf, between Oman and Saudi Arabia
- **Geography:** Made up of seven districts known as emirates, the United Arab Emirates (or U.A.E.) is primarily desert or semi-desert, except along the coastline. On the Persian Gulf side of the coast are salt pans and few natural harbors, like the port at Abu Dhabi. On the Gulf of Oman side, the Western Al Hajar Mountains form a crescent between the coast and the inland desert sands.
- **Population:** 5,779,760
- **Religions:** Muslim (Islam; official) 76%, Christian 9%, other 15% (primarily Hindu and Buddhist; less than 5% of the population consists of Parsi, Baha'i, Druze, Sikh, Ahmadi, Ismaili, Dawoodi Bohra Muslim, and Jewish)
- **Time Zone:** UAE is on Gulf Standard Time and does not observe Daylight Saving Time. As a result, the time in UAE will either be 8 hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Time (in summer) or 9 hours ahead (in winter).

National Holidays: United Arab Emirates

In addition to the holidays listed below, United Arab Emirates celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Ramadan. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

May or June Eid al-Fitr (moves each year; see note)

July or Aug Arafat Hajj Day (moves each year)

July or Aug Feast of the Sacrifice (moves each year)

12/01 Commemoration Day

12/02 National Day

United Arab Emirates: A Brief History

Proof of human habitation in the Arabian Peninsula is estimated to have started as early as the Paleolithic Age, with the Bedouin communities, who survived the area through fishing and gathering. Habitation progressed into the Bronze Age, around 5,000 to 3,100 BCE, with the Hafit

period. Not much is known of the people who lived in the Arabian Peninsula, but archeological finds of stone arrows, axe heads, and beehive shaped burial tombs showcase a distinct culture developing.

From 2,600 to 2,000 BCE, the Umm al-Nar civilization reigned, with evidence of trade with Sumerian kingdoms and Indus Valley civilization. Following the Umm al-Nar civilization came the Wadi Suq civilization, dated from 2,000 to 1,300 BCE, which also showed evidence of trade. It is theorized that it was during this civilization, as their technology advanced, that animals were domesticated, allowing their settlements to move inland.

The civilization in the Arabian Peninsula continued to grow and develop, with little notable change until Islam arrived in 630 AD. As prophets brought the Prophet Muhammad's message throughout the Arabian Peninsula and the surrounding areas of South East Asia and Western Africa, trade routes followed. The solidification of trade routes across such a region attracted the attention of the Europeans, who pin-pointed the Arabian Peninsula as the perfect trade location, due to its position between Europe and the Far East (India and China in particular).

The Portuguese arrived first in 1498, after successfully travelling around the Cape of Good Hope. In 1515, the Portuguese had forcibly established control in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Oman and by 1560 had taken over most of the trading ports as well as the pepper and spice trade from the indigenous peoples.

In retaliation, the Ya'rubid dynasty, rulers of Oman from 1624 to 1724, rose up in 1633 and forced the Portuguese from Julfar, Dibba, Sohar, and Muscat by 1650. The removal of the Portuguese only opened the way for other European countries, as the Dutch and the British slipped in.

The Dutch built themselves up into a dominant navel power in thanks to their silk trade deal with Abbas I of Persia, also known as Abbas the Great, the 5th King of Iran. However, due to battle with the British and the French, by 1750, Dutch power in the region had dwindled.

Meanwhile, the British locked down on their trade in the Arabian Peninsula, interested in protecting their connection to India and keeping other European countries from interfering. This led them into conflict with Al Qawasim, an Arab dynasty with control over Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah, in the late 1700s and early 1800s. An attempt at peace was made between the British and Al Qawasim, only for the signed peace treaty to break down in 1815. It wasn't until after the British defeated the Qawasims and signed exclusive peace agreements with the individual emirates (or land owned by an Arab ruler called an emir) of the Arabian Peninsula that everything started looking up for the British. While the peace agreements didn't stop fighting between the tribes of the Trucial States (as the British had taken to calling the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula), the signed agreements made it so the Trucial States could not give land or have relations with other countries without the consent of the British. In return, the British would protect the Trucial States from outside interference.

This agreement remained for over a century, until 1968, when the British announced their withdrawal from the area by 1971 due to their domestic economic crisis and political pressure.

The rulers of six of the Emirates (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Umm al-Quwain, Fujairah, and Ajman) came to an agreement and on December 2nd 1971, the country known today as the United Arab Emirates was formed. The seventh Emirate, Ra's al-Khaimah, joined the union in February 1972. Ever since, the constitutional monarchy of United Arab Emirates has been a site of trade, travel, tourism, and finance, sitting high as with the seventh-highest GDP per capita thanks to their abundance of natural resources.

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading

Nepal

The Soul of the Rhino (2008) and ***Bones of the Tiger*** (2010) by Hemanta Mishra (Memoir/Nature). Mishra tells of his work to save two of Royal Chitwan National Park's most endangered animals—the Asian rhino and the tiger.

Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy by Manjushree Thapa (2005, History) A clear first-person account of the political turmoil that rocked Nepal in the early 2000s—helpful as background reading on Nepal's recent history.

High Adventure by Sir Edmund Hillary (2003, Exploration). A classic of 20th-century mountaineering from the adventurer himself. Originally written after the famous climb, when the details and the danger were still fresh. Look for the 50th anniversary edition, which includes a new preface by the author.

Touching My Father's Soul by Jamling Tenzing Norgay (2001, Adventure/Memoir) A touching and thoughtful biography written by the son of Tenzing Norgay, the Sherpa guide who reached the summit of Everest with Sir Edmund Hillary.

The Violet Shyness of Their Eyes by Bavara J. Scott (1993, Travel Narrative). A sudden mid-life crisis in 1990 prompted high school social studies teacher Scott to leave Portland, Oregon, for a stint teaching English in Nepal. The brief entries in this diary interweave her experiences in Nepalese society, including the inferior status of Nepali women.

Bhutan

A Field Guide to Happiness: What I Learned in Bhutan about Living, Loving, and Waking Up by Linda Leaming (2014, Memoir) An American arrives in Bhutan to teach English, promptly loses her luggage, and realizes she has to lose quite a bit more baggage in order to slow down, breathe, fall in love, and embrace a new vision of the good life.

Radio Shangri-La by Lisa Napoli (2011, Memoir) Follows a radio journalist as she uproots her life and moves from glamorous L.A. to serene Bhutan. May be easier to find as an e-book or online.

Treasures of the Thunder Dragon: A Portrait of Bhutan by Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck (2006, Memoir) A personal memoir written by Her Majesty the Queen Mother that weaves her own story with the history, folklore, and religious traditions of Bhutan. Recently updated with a new edition.

The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa by Sarah Harding (2003, Religion). A translation of the teachings of Pema Lingpa (1450–1521), an important figure in Bhutanese religious history. The book is also full of historical information about Bhutan and the court of King Trisong Detsen.

Buddhist Scriptures edited by Edward Conze and Thomas Wyatt (1959, Religion). A collection of Buddhist texts that reflect the Hinayana and the Mahayana traditions, as well as other developments in Buddhism. Includes several brief selections from one of the most famous biographies of the Buddha, the Buddhacharita.

India

The White Tiger, A Novel by Aravind Adiga (2008, Fiction). Adiga explores urban India through the tale of Balram Halwa, a village pauper-turned-driver-turned-entrepreneur. Filled with black humor, it's a murderous and marvelous story of hard-fought success. Winner of the 2008 Booker Prize.

India after Gandhi: the History of the World's Largest Democracy by Ramachandra Guha (2007, History). This scholarly work picks up where many other history books leave off, the rise of post-independence India, but still finds plenty of material to work with (it is over 700 pages long).

Taj Mahal, Passion and Genius at the Heart of the Moghul Empire by Diana and Michael Preston (2007, History/Architecture). A complete, but easy-to-read, telling of the story behind the building of the Taj Mahal. It also offers a useful background on the Moghul Dynasty.

The Little Book of Hindu Deities by Sanjay Patel (2006, Mythology/Region). Get your Hindu gods and goddesses straight with this beguiling "who's who." Filled with bold artwork (the author was an animator for Pixar studios), this book offers the colorful background to much of the art and lore you will encounter on your trip.

Heat and Dust by Ruth Praver-Jhabvala (1975, Fiction). The parallel stories of a young Englishwoman backpacking through India in the 1970s, and her great-aunt Olivia, a bored colonial wife in the 1920s. Consider also the 1983 Merchant-Ivory film version starring Julie Christie and Greta Scaachi.

United Arab Emirates

Temporary People by Deepak Unnikrishnan (2017, Fiction). Unnikrishnan explores magical realism in twenty-eight short stories on the lives of "guest workers" in the United Arab Emirates. Guest workers, or migrant workers, are peoples, usually from developing countries, with temporary work visas. In the United Arab Emirates, guest workers make up an estimated 80% of the population and 90% of the workforce. It wasn't until June 2017 that the United Arab Emirates adopted a bill to allow guest workers the same rights as domestic workers under the country's labor laws.

Keepers of the Golden Shore: A History of the United Arab Emirates by Michael Quentin Morton (2016, History). Starting with the ancient days as desert tribes, *Keepers of the Golden Shore* highlights how the United Arab Emirates became one of the richest countries in the world.

Dubai: Gilded Cages by Syed Ameer Ali (2010, Nonfiction). *Dubai: Gilded Cages* analyses the history of Dubai, from a solitary emirate to a global hub, deep diving into the socio-economic disparity for Western ex-patriots, native Emirates, and "guest workers".

The Sand Fish by Maha Gargash (2009, Fiction) The story of Noora, a young woman in an arranged marriage as she struggles with the cultural expectations set on her as a woman in the United Arab Emirates. Set in the 1950s, before the country was united, and written by an Emirati writer.

City of Gold: Dubai and the Dream of Capitalism by Jim Krane (2009, History). The rise of the city from a historical and economic viewpoint, focusing on the history from founding to the modern era, the accomplishments of the ruling leader of Dubai, and the cultural-economic differences.

Suggested Films & Videos

Nepal

Even When I Fall (2017, Documentary) Exposes the child trafficking that lands up to 10,000 children a year in traveling Indian circuses.

The Sari Soldiers (2017, Documentary) The lives of six women are explored, revealing their important roles in Nepal's civil war.

Sherpa (2015, Documentary) This award-winning film explores the hardships and dangers faced by the Sherpa guides whose work is crucial to so many Himalayan mountaineering expeditions.

Living Goddess (2007, Documentary). A well-received documentary about the lives of three Kumaris (girls believed to be living goddesses by the Nepalese).

Himalaya (1999, Drama/Adventure). Also released under the title *Caravan*. A scenic film that combines an age-old story with an obstacle that is very Nepalese: the Himalayan Mountains. Should the villagers wait to start their all-important caravan until the auspicious day, as is their tradition? Or should they set off early to take advantage of the weather? Shot in Nepal by a former National Geographic photographer.

Bhutan

Travellers and Magicians (2003, Fantasy) The first feature film shot entirely in Bhutan, this movie features an unusual story-within-a-story plot about a young man on a journey from his village to Bhutan's capital in the company of a monk. While traveling, the monk recounts a folk tale that ultimately reflects back on the young man's life. In Dzongkha with English subtitles.

The Cup (1999, Comedy) An endearing story about World Cup soccer fever in a remote Himalayan monastery, and a young monk's secret plots to see the finals.

Little Buddha (1994, Drama) Shot in the U.S., Nepal, and Bhutan by the director of *The Last Emperor*, Bernardo Bertolucci, this film follows the story of an American child who just might be the reincarnation of a learned Buddhist monk.

India

A Suitable Boy (2020, Comedy/Drama) Based on the classic novel by Vikram Seth, this miniseries is the first BBC period drama to feature a nonwhite cast. It concerns the efforts of Mrs. Rupa Mehra to find a husband for her daughter, Lata. With more than 100 colorful characters, the story is often compared to a Charles Dickens novel. Available on streaming services such as Acorn.

Lion (2016, Drama) A young man living with his adopted parents in Australia travels back to India to find a long lost family, and himself.

Slumdog Millionaire (2008, Comedy/Drama). Jamal, who grew up in the slums of Mumbai, is close to winning the Indian version of Who Wants to Be a Millionaire. But how does a young man from such a background know the answers to questions that stumped more educated contestants? At turns sad, funny, romantic, and gritty, *Slumdog* won 8 Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

A Passage to India (1984, Drama). An Indian doctor is accused of a shocking crime by an Englishwoman in 1920s India. Will he be found guilty or acquitted? Directed by David Lean with an all-star cast.

Gandhi (1982, Biopic). A biopic about India's famous leader that won numerous awards, including the Oscars for Best Actor (Ben Kingsley) and Best Director (Richard Attenborough). This film begins with his early years in South Africa, and traces his development as a instead.

United Arab Emirates

Bilal: A New Breed of Hero (2015, Action/Adventure). A computer-animated movie about Bilal, a follower of the Islamic prophet, Muhammad. The movie follows Bilal from his childhood as a slave in Mecca to an inspirational hero, fighting for equality and inclusiveness. The story is based off of real events and follows multiple heroes from Arabian history. Due to the depictions of violence, while animated, this is movie is not recommended for children.

From A to B (2015, Adventure/Comedy). Days before the birth of his first child, Omar reaches out to his childhood friends, Jay and Ramy, wanting to drive from Abu Dhabi to Beirut, in memory of their fourth friend, Hadi's twenty-fifth birthday. Along the way, the trio run into many obstacles as they traverse through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria.

City of Life (2009, Drama/Romance). Follow the individual stories of a privileged young Arab man and his street-smart friend, an Indian taxi driver, and a Romanian flight attendant as they struggle through hardships and experience joy in the city of Dubai.

Useful Websites

Overseas Adventure Travel Frequently Asked Questions

www.oattravel.com/faq

International Health Information/CDC (Centers for Disease Control)

www.cdc.gov/travel

Electricity & Plugs

[www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/
plugs-and-sockets](http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets)

Foreign Exchange Rates

www.xe.com/currencyconverter
www.oanda.com/converter/classic

ATM Locators

www.mastercard.com/atm
www.visa.com/atmlocator

World Weather

www.intellicast.com
www.weather.com
www.wunderground.com

Basic Travel Phrases (80 languages)

www.travlang.com/languages

Packing Tips

www.travelite.org

U.S. Customs & Border Protection

www.cbp.gov/travel

Transportation Security

Administration (TSA)

www.tsa.gov

National Passport Information Center

www.travel.state.gov

Holidays Worldwide

www.timeanddate.com/holidays

Useful Apps

Flight Stats

Track departures, arrivals, and flight status

LoungeBuddy

Get access to premium airport lounges around the world

Timeshifter

Personalized tips for avoiding jetlag, based on neuroscience and your own data

GoogleMaps or Maps.me

Maps and directions anywhere in the world

Triposo

City guides, walking maps, and more – and it works offline

Rome2rio

Where to go, what to see, and what to do in more than 160 countries

Flush or Sit or Squat

Find a clean toilet anywhere

Uber or Bolt or Grab

Ride sharing around the world

Visa Plus and Mastercard Cirrus

ATM locations

Shows the location of the nearest ATM in your network

TunnelBear

Provides a secure VPN (virtual private network) that will encrypt your browsing data when you use a public WiFi network

What's App or Skype or Signal

WiFi calling anywhere in the world

Duolingo or FLuentU or Babbel

Learn dozens of foreign languages

Google Translate

Fast and simple translations

XE

Currency conversions

SizeGuide

Clothing and shoe sizes in all countries

Best Units Converter

Converts currency, mileage, weights, and many other units of measurement

Tourlina

For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

Happy Cow

Locate vegan and vegetarian eateries in 195 countries

Eatwith

Dine with locals all over the world

Meetup

Connects you with locals who share your interests

Skyview

Identifies constellations and heavenly bodies

Travello

Find travel friends on the road

ALIX for One

Created by and for women, it identifies solo-friendly dining spots in major international cities

TripWhistle

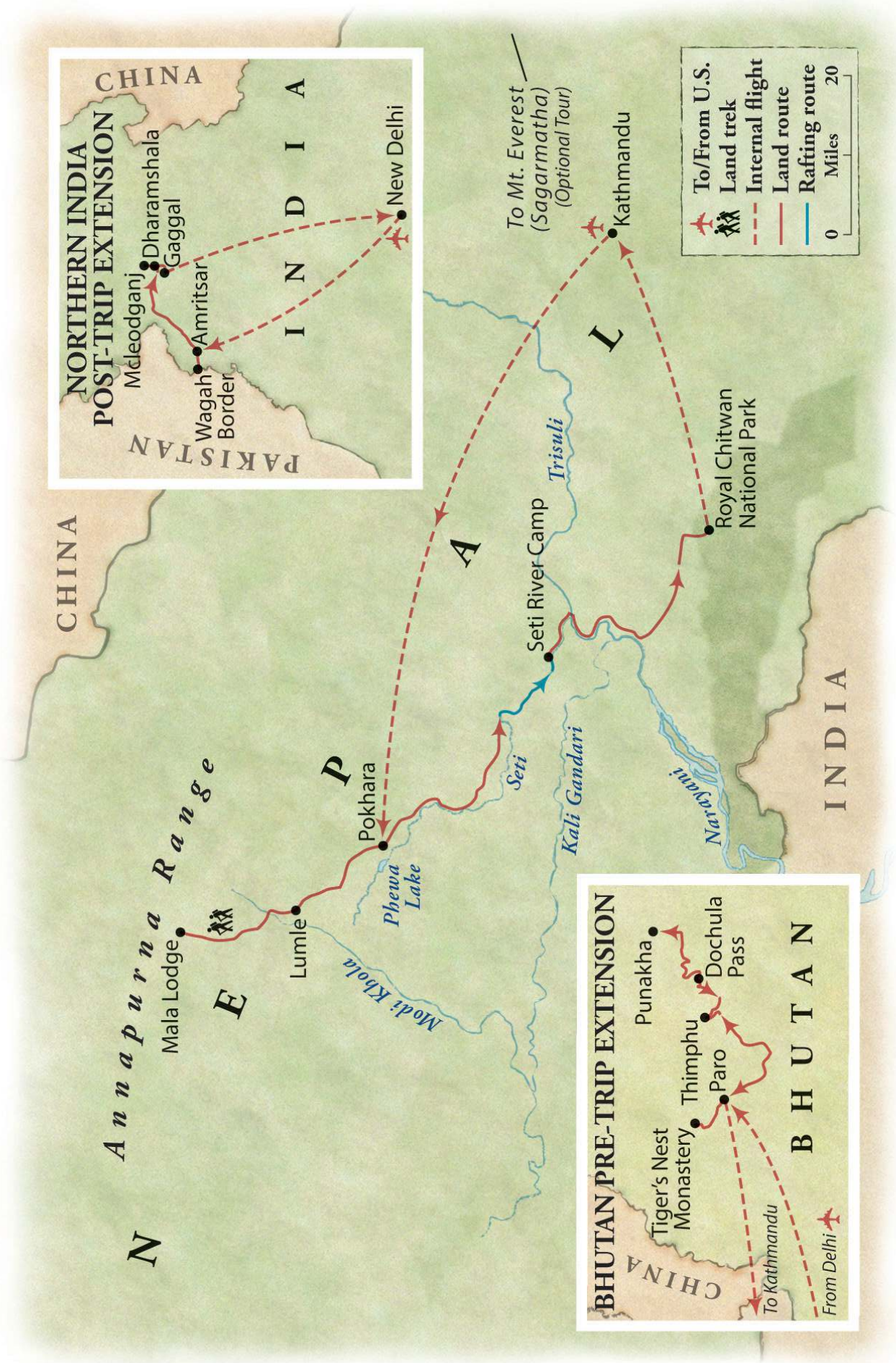
Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

GeoSure

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

Chirpey

For women only, connect with other women, find out what's safe, meet up, and more



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5-time traveler from Pinellas Park, FL



Submitted by Martin Schwartzman,
30-time traveler from Woodbury, NY



Submitted by Paul Stark, 17-time traveler
from Edina, MN



Submitted by David Fong, 16-time traveler
from Foster City, CA



Submitted by Steven dos Remedios,
23-time traveler from Oakland, CA



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