

Understand Nepal

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As Nepal recovers from civil war and devastating earthquakes, what's next for the troubled Himalayan nation?

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Intrigue, revolution, murder and war have defined Nepal's past – and that's just the last 20 years.

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From Newars to Sherpas, Nepal is a colourful patchwork of Himalayan peoples.

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The Nepal Himalaya is where Tibetan Buddhism, Indian Hinduism and shamanism meet and blend seamlessly.

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Home to tigers and rhinos, yaks and yetis, Nepal offers an incredible geographic range, from jungle plains to the world's highest peaks.

Nepal Today

Over the last few decades, Nepal has endured economic hardship, a Maoist uprising that turned into a civil war, the collapse of a centuries-old monarchy, and the creation of a democratic federal republic. However, Nepal's greatest crisis of modern times was a result of geology rather than politics; the massive earthquakes that hit Nepal on 25 April and 12 May 2015 killed more than 8500 people, causing devastation across central parts of the country.

Best in Print

The Snow Leopard (Peter Matthiessen) Classic and profound account of a trek to Dolpo.

Arresting God in Kathmandu (Samrat Upadhyay) Nine short stories from the first Nepali writer to be published in English.

Snake Lake (Jeff Greenwald) Memoir of family loss set against Nepal's political revolution.

Little Princes (Conor Grennan) Moving and inspiring account of volunteering in a Nepali orphanage.

While the Gods Were Sleeping (Elizabeth Enslin) Part memoir, part-anthropological account of the author's time living as a wife in a Brahman family in western Nepal.

Kathmandu (Thomas Bell) Impressionistic historical portrait of Kathmandu from the British journalist, published in India and available in Kathmandu.

Best in Film

Himalaya (1999; Eric Valli) Stunningly shot in Dolpo; also released as *Caravan*.

Everest (1998; David Breashears) Imax film shot during the disastrous 1997 climbing season.

Destruction and Reconstruction

The tremors that shook the Kathmandu Valley in April and May 2015 saw destruction on a level that had not been seen for almost a century. Temples and palaces crumbled to dust, houses toppled, roads buckled and landslides and avalanches wiped whole villages off the map. The economic cost of the disaster has been estimated at US\$10 billion, nearly half of Nepal's gross domestic product, but the human cost is even more tragic; thousands of families lost loved ones and hundreds of thousands were left homeless.

Nepal's greatest challenge over the coming years will be to rebuild lives and livelihoods. Across the country, thousands of homes and businesses need to be stabilised and repaired, and many more homes need to be built to accommodate the homeless. The tourist industry, which employs 4% of the population but indirectly supports millions more, was particularly badly hit following the disaster and bookings have collapsed in many areas. With tourism contributing nearly 10% of GDP, this is income that Nepal can ill afford to lose.

Money has flooded into Nepal from international donors since the disaster, but the country has a long way to go to raise the estimated US\$6.7 billion needed for reconstruction. Nepal's recovery will depend on the resilience of its people through lean years to come, as well as the goodwill of foreign governments and the willingness of foreign travellers to look beyond the tragedy and return to Nepal's hotels, restaurants and trekking lodges.

Recovering From War

Against this backdrop, the ordinary struggles of day to day politics seem somehow less important, but Nepal is still struggling with the legacy of a decade of armed conflict. Inflation is rampant, and crumbling infrastructure, held back by years of under-investment, makes daily life a struggle for most Nepalis. Kathmandu's population, in