



Understand Nepal

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As Nepal's shaky political system recovers from civil war, what next for the troubled Himalayan nation?

HISTORY306

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

RELIGION 319

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

THE PEOPLE OF NEPAL.....326

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

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Read up on the artistic influences and deep symbolism behind Nepal's spectacular temples and palaces.

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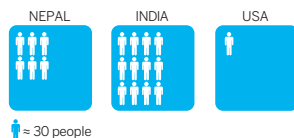
Home to tigers and rhinos, yaks and yetis, Nepal offers an incredible geographic range, from jungle plains to the world's highest peaks.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL..... 351

Tread lightly and give something back as you travel or trek through Nepal.



population per sq km



Nepal Today

Just five years ago, Nepalis were stepping out of the wreckage of a decade-long civil war; today Nepal is a quite different country, literally. An elected prime minister instead of a hereditary monarch now rules as head of state, reflecting the change from traditional Hindu kingdom to Communist-led federal republic. Security is much improved across the country, the once omnipresent roadblocks are a thing of the past and the crippling strikes that defined so much of the 2000s are a receding memory.

There have been other less obvious benefits to the end of Nepal's civil war. Soldiers have been pulled back from active duty to patrol the boundaries of Nepal's national parks – good news for wildlife, bad news for the poachers who reduced Nepal's rhino population by more than 30% during the armed conflict.

For the first time in years Nepal's trekking lodges, hotels and restaurants are once again crammed to capacity and funds are being poured into infrastructure and construction. The government has also turned its attention to improving living conditions for Nepal's workers, something that was rarely a priority under the autocratic rule of the Shah kings.

This is only the start of a long process of recovery, but locals are already breathing a sigh of relief.

The Hard Work Begins

The initial optimism engendered by the end of the armed conflict has been tempered somewhat by the fundamental infrastructure problems that make daily life a struggle for most Nepalis. Electricity shortages are a fact of life, despite a huge potential for hydropower. Kathmandu's population boomed during the decade of civil war and the city is now close to

Tourism generates around US\$335 million each year in foreign earnings for Nepal and it is estimated that the money spent by each tourist supports 10 or 11 Nepalis.

Greetings

- » Nepalis rarely shake hands – the *namaste* greeting (placing your palms together in a prayer position) is a better choice.
- » If you are introduced to a lama (Tibetan Buddhist monk or priest), it is customary to offer a khata (white scarf).

Body Language

- » A sideways tilt or wobble of the head conveys agreement in Nepal, not a 'no'.
- » Don't sit with the soles of your feet pointing towards a person or a Buddha image.
- » Avoid touching children on the head, particularly young monks.
- » When giving or receiving money, use your right hand and touch your right elbow with your left hand, as a gesture of respect.