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## Tamur River Expedition: Nepal 2009

In late October 2009 my wife Sharyn and I are teaming up with old friends from Nepal and around the globe to run our favourite Himalayan river expedition: The Tamur. Fed by the snows of Kanchenjunga, the spectacular Tamur combines an exhilarating river expedition with one of the best short treks in the Himalayas. This is not a commercial venture for us – its about getting back to our roots of exploring Himalayan rivers with good friends, running big rapids and relaxing by the riverside. We deliberately keep the price (US\$1350) as low as we can so kayakers and rafting friends can easily afford the trip!

We'll meet in Kathmandu before flying out to Eastern Nepal. Picking up our team of fifty porters at Basantapur we trek for 3 days through ancient moss covered Rhododendron forests and sunlit meadows. The short trek is stunning, with great views of Kanchenjunga, Makalu and Everest. Descending to Dobhan we wander through charming Gurung villages and emerald fields of rice. Children play excitedly along the trail as we pass, snow-capped Himalayan giants surround us, and the champagne river churns and bubbles below. It gets even better - local people are a fascinating collage of tribes and castes who have perfected the brewing of their local drink, Tungba, to a fine art.

At Dobhan three tributaries of the Tamur join their forces, combining the racing rivers of the high mountains to the north. Steep canyon walls enclose the river and the rapids are powerful and continuous. In the middle section the river opens up and there are beautiful white sandy beaches. The last few days where the river turns back to the west is phenomenal. Towering waves leap skyward, with seemingly endless rapids surging through steep canyon walls. Small fishermen's villages line the confluence of every major tributary, while wild monkeys watch from the jungle as we drift past.

This trip is suitable for anyone with a sense of adventure but previous rafting experience is preferred. Class 4 kayakers are also welcome. For river connoisseurs who want a longer trip that combines a spectacular short trek with intense whitewater, the Tamur is without a doubt THE river to run.

**Trip Code:** ge\_tamur2009

**Trip Duration:** 12 days

**Trip starts at:** Kathmandu

**Type of Tour:** Full-service expedition rafting or kayaking

**Price:** US\$1350.00

**Group Size:** Set Departure open to individuals

**Trip Dates:** Oct: 24<sup>th</sup> – Nov 4<sup>th</sup>

**Trip Finishes at:** Kathmandu

### ITINERARY

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*Note: All itineraries are designed to be flexible based on road and weather conditions and the unexpected surprises of adventure travel in Asia.*

**Day 1 (Oct 24<sup>th</sup>)** Arrive in Kathmandu, take a deep breath and you are ready to confront the confusion of Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport. After clearing immigration and customs hang onto your gear, ignore the porters who will try to carry your bags and charge ridiculous amounts even if they only touch your bags, and continue through the restricted section to the passenger pick-up area outside the building. This can be pretty confusing with taxi drivers looking for fares, hotel touts desperately seeking customers and a large number of people just getting in the way - welcome to Asia! Don't worry, an Ultimate Descents representative trained in anti taxi-wallah judo will meet you at the airport with an Ultimate Descents sign and escort you to your



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hotel. In the afternoon there is time to face the hustle of this amazing city and explore Kathmandu. Walking around this ancient city is like being in the world's biggest outdoor museum! We recommend a good guide book (cheaply available in Kathmandu's many book shops) and then grabbing either a taxi or rickshaw or heading off on foot to visit some of the incredible temples, stupas, and squares that make up this most vibrant of capitals. From observing prayer wheels turning at the Buddhist stupa of Bodhnath, to perhaps gaining a glimpse of the Living Goddess in Durbar Square, there are endless ways to pass the day. A great way to finish it off is with a cold drink on one of the many terrace cafes people watching. Kathmandu has more eccentric characters per square km than any other country on Earth. At 6pm this evening we'll have a pre-departure briefing then head off to one of Kathmandu's finer restaurants for a meal together.

**Day 2 (Oct 25<sup>th</sup>)** After a hearty breakfast at Mike's Restaurant it's time to head off to the airport for a 55-minute flight to Biratnagar. On a clear day the views of the Himalayas and Mt. Everest are incredible. At Biratnagar we meet up with the rafting bus and drive up through the bustling market town of Hile and onto the end of the road at Basantapur where we camp.

**Day 3-5 (Oct 26<sup>th</sup> – Oct 28<sup>th</sup>)** No visit to the Himalayas would be complete without trekking and it is no accident that one of the world's finest rivers starts with one of Nepal's most scenic treks. At Basantapur our Sirdhar (head porter) will be there with a tough looking crew who will carry all the expedition gear to the river. Gear is divided up, prices haggled, and these stouthearted men and boys then pick up loads with their necks, and head on up the trail. It's quite a sight to watch a 60-kilo man in his mid thirties trudge up a steep mountain trail with a 70-kilo raft hanging off a strap which runs across his forehead. It's enough to make you want to join a health club. This part of Nepal sees very little tourism and the villages and farms you see along the trail are much the way rural Nepal has been for hundreds of years. Our 3-day trek follows a ridge up to a 10,000 ft pass above the sacred lake at Gupha Pokhari with magnificent views of Kanchenjunga, Makalu and the Everest mastiff, before dropping into the lush villages of the Tamur valley providing a truly memorable approach to this classic Himalayan white water descent. Days are long and the trail can be difficult in places, but with Porters carrying the gear and Sherpa guides we should all make it to the river intact. Expedition members carry a daypack with a warm set of clothes, water bottle and camera. Trekking camps are an extravagant affair with staff preparing well-deserved meals. Arriving at Dobhan where the river expedition starts it is highly recommended that you sample the local Thungba (Millet wine).

**Day 6 – 10 (Oct 29<sup>th</sup> – Nov 2<sup>nd</sup>)** The Tamur and its tributaries drain the snows of Kachenjunga, third highest peak in the world. Constrained by steep valley walls, it becomes Nepal's sixth largest river and one of the world's remotest whitewater river expeditions. At our put in point we sort equipment and inflate the rafts. The guides tie all the equipment into the rafts, which is quite a thing to witness. Twenty years of running rivers has taught us a lot, not the least of which is how to tie a load so it stays put no matter what, which is just as well because the first 20 kilometers of the Tamur is basically one long rapid.

A raft trip down the Tamur isn't just a vacation • it's an education. Our river guides spend the first part of the morning explaining the finer points on how to paddle through whitewater and stay in the raft as it bucks and contorts through rapids. For those who missed a point in the previous lesson there is a lesson on how to swim through whitewater, using your flotation device to keep your head up and your feet to push off rocks or pesky kayakers who happen to be surfing in the middle of a rapid. The guides will also teach you what they look out for when they run a river, the innocuous looking rise in the water that hides a hole, or the way you can use a pillow of water



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rebounding off a rock to push the raft where you want it. Whitewater rafts are amazingly versatile and stable crafts, and in the care of an expert raft guide it is possible to run challenging lines safely and confidently. Your guide is a professional, someone who has devoted their life to learning and running rivers. Under his or her careful indoctrination the raft crew learns how to work as a team, practicing on the numerous smaller rapids we encounter on the first two days of the river.

From Dobhan we have 120 kilometers of breath-taking river journey through the heart of eastern Nepal. With over 100 class 3 and 4+ rapids, the Tamur offers a unique six days of white water with plenty of time to explore hidden side valleys and visit remote villages.

Camping on the Tamur is awesome. The massive floods of the monsoon deposit huge tracks of pure white sand along the river creating ideal campsites surrounded by lush forest and terraced hillsides. We will have at least one layover day where we stay at the same river camp for two nights. HELLO BEACH PARTY!!! Volleyball, sand sculpture, foot bag, Frisbee, sun bathing or just relaxing on a warm beach with a good book are favorite activities for the layover day. You can also take advantage of the layover day to trek to a peak or nearby village, or take part in the kayak workshop the safety boaters offer. Evenings are spent around the campfire, drinking hot-spiced rum and getting to know the people on the trip. Food is communally prepared, every day a different raft crew helping with the creation of sumptuous meals. The kitchen becomes one of the main social points on the trip, and without a doubt the best place to catch up on the latest gossip or get to know someone better • Gut that chicken for you, mam?

**Day 10 (Nov 3<sup>rd</sup>)** The Lower Tamur is a steep and continuous mountain river section; a unique combination of exceptionally fun and challenging rapids without it ever getting past the point of recreation. It's sort of like being flushed down a huge open-air toilet, but the Tidy Bowl Man is your guide and there are no worries. Emerald green fields are terraced high above the river on precipitous slopes, curious villagers lining suspension bridges are amazed as we plunge through cascading waves and chutes of foam.

**Day 11 (Nov 4<sup>th</sup>)** The Tamur / Sun Kosi confluence is called Tribeni Ghat and has an interesting temple to visit. Before emerging onto the flatland Terai, there is another larger Hindi Temple called Baraha Chhetra. Every year on the day of the full moon in January, thousands of Hindu pilgrims mass here to pay homage to Lord Vishnu. Legend has it that once a demon god inhabited this area and troubled the villagers, holy men and pilgrims. Hearing of this, Lord Vishnu, preserver of the universe, took the form of a pig and slayed the demon in battle. Inside the temple is a pig headed figure of Lord Vishnu, and the annual Braha festival commemorates the victory. Just a little further downstream lays India and all its semi functional chaos. The final day we raft the Sun Kosi to Chatara and then return to Kathmandu. From the takeout it is a short 2 hours drive then a 55-minute flight back to KTM and a welcome hot shower. The mountain views on a clear day are outstanding as the flight goes right along the main Himalayas.

**Day 12 (Nov 5<sup>th</sup>)** After a rather leisurely breakfast we take you back to the airport for your return flight.



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## NAMASTE & WELCOME TO NEPAL!

The magic of Nepal is impossible to ignore. From the world's highest mountains to dense lowland jungle, Nepal is one of the planet's most diverse and exotic travel destinations. Seeped in history and dominated by the majestic Himalayas, Nepal enthralls everyone who visits. Linked by a rich heritage the friendly peoples of Nepal have created a kaleidoscope of exotic customs and beliefs. An uncanny blend of natural splendor, warm settled weather, and phenomenal whitewater journeys make this tiny Himalayan country an absolute gem.

If you have never been to Nepal before, you're in for an amazing experience. Very little in Nepal resembles life anywhere else in the world. This is a place of deep religious customs, the most radical topography on earth, and one of the least developed infrastructures in the world. Most of the population of Nepal are subsistence farmers, living many days walk from the nearest road. Even flying into Nepal is a unique experience. Aside from the spectacular mountain views, veteran air travelers will find themselves amused by the spectacle of clearing immigration at Kathmandu International airport. This is not Heathrow. A flight from Kathmandu to anywhere else in Nepal is more than worth the price just for the views it provides. Once you leave the Kathmandu valley there is little to remind you of the world you have left behind. It's a great place to escape to. There is no better way to see Nepal than on a river trip, which by its very nature is the essence of escapism. Be warned: once you start on this journey, it may be hard to quit!

### **The price is right:**

What you see for the price is what you get - there are no hidden costs. Your trip cost includes all the elements of the expedition included in the trip itinerary:

- Transfers to and from Kathmandu Airport to the hotel. If you provide us with your arrival details we will be happy to meet you at the airport and ease that transition into Asian chaos! We request that you are there the day before your rafting trip departs, as chasing the rafting bus over the Nepali countryside is not a great start to your journey.
- Accommodation as per your expedition itinerary before and the night after the river trip in a tourist hotel. This will be on a share twin basis with somebody else on the trip. Should you require a single room then advise us in advance so we can arrange this. A single supplement will apply.
- All transfers to the river and internal flights as indicated in your itinerary.
- Tasty and carefully prepared meals, tea, coffee, and snacks on your river journey.
- All safety and river gear (except clothing and personal items - see personal equipment below) such as lifejackets, helmets, spray jackets, dry bags, camera barrels, tents, and comprehensive first aid kits. You'll be amazed at what we can take on a river thanks to gravity.
- Tented accommodation while on the river.
- All camping and cooking equipment.
- Qualified and experienced guides and safety kayakers.
- All necessary permits and licenses.

Perhaps the most important thing we provide is 20 years experience running professional river expeditions in Nepal and worldwide - it counts!

### **Not included in the costs:**

All meals in Kathmandu (we have found people prefer to have time and opportunity to explore in towns on their own), bottled and alcoholic beverages of any kind (including bottled water! We boil and iodize our drinking water), any kind of insurance, inoculations, visa costs, airport departure



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taxes (both International and Domestic), expenses of a personal nature or any personal equipment listed below.

**Personal equipment:**

When packing for a river trip, I always remember the adage KISS: Keep It Simple, Stupid. The less luggage you have to carry around, the more you will enjoy yourself, and you will also be able to carry more gifts and souvenirs from Nepal back home. Clothing should be light-weight, dry quickly, and provide insulation even when wet. Synthetic fibers are preferable to cotton on the river for this reason. Here is a fairly extensive list of what you will want to bring. Alternatively you could go in what you are wearing and survive reasonably well.

**For camping and traveling:**

A sleeping bag and pad. Your sleeping bag should be a three season bag, either down or synthetic filled. A foam pad, Thermarest or sleeping mattress is mandatory for a good night sleep. For those who do not have a sleeping bag and pad, they can be rented easily in Kathmandu for about 1\$ / day.

Lightweight pants and jacket. The brushed nylon pants and windbreakers made by a variety of companies (Patagonia Baggies comes to mind) are ideal for river wear.

Long sleeved thermal, top and bottoms (long underwear). These are synthetic clothing such as Patagonia Capaline which maintain their insulating value even when wet, and are therefore ideal for wearing on the river. They are also colorful and stylish enough to wear casually around town. The zippered turtle neck is particularly handy, as it can be vented and keeps the sun off the back of your neck. Light and medium weight weaves are the handiest.

*Socks:* polypropylene or polypro mix athletic socks. Two pair is plenty.

Cotton or silk underwear:

Light weight long sleeved shirt. We use these as sunscreen in camp. Don't worry about getting enough sun, you will!

Two cotton T-shirts.

A fleece jacket.

A Gore-Tex or similar material rain jacket will go a long ways towards keeping you warm and dry in a variety of situations. A simple shell design is preferable, as they can be packed into remarkably small bundles.

Small Towel

*Toiletries:* keep it to a minimum, and forget the cosmetics. you won't have a chance to use them. Bring plenty of moisturizing lotion.

Spare glasses or contact lenses if you wear them.

Flashlight or headlamp with spare batteries.

Water bottle:

*Toilet paper* - yes! we do provide it on all trips, but you can guarantee that when you are on a bus ride or trek that it is never there when you need it. The lighter is for burning the toilet paper after you've used it - not before you use it.

**River Wear:** River sandals are the preferred footwear on the river. They are available in KTM, but are of exceptionally poor quality. Tevas, Alps, or other high quality river sandals should be brought from home. It is essential that all rafters have footwear that they can wear in the raft, which will not come off in the event of a swim, as this is considered standard safety equipment. Good quality, River shorts, such as Patagonia Baggies or Guide Shorts. These are by far the best all around river wear, as they dry quickly, are built like nails, and provide the pockets you will need for little items you'll want to keep close. Two pair are enough, and a lot of the guides wear one pair for months at a time (with occasional washings, of course).



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Swimming costume - (you can just get by with river shorts).

A sarong for women (a long piece of cloth wrapped around your waist) is another good option, and can be purchased cheaply in Nepal. This is invaluable for visiting villages and respecting local custom for dress. It can also be used to replace your towel for drying after washing.

A baseball style cap and good sunglasses equipped with a retaining device to keep them on your face where they belong.

Sunscreen (SPF 15 or greater and waterproof) is essential, and while available in KTM, it's expensive. Bullfrog brand sunscreen is probably the ultimate for in-the-water use, and worth the price.

Lip Balm, SPF 15 MINIMUM!

#### **For trekking (Tamur Expedition):**

A daypack for the trek to the river. It should be a medium volume day pack without a frame, and again, the most important criteria is how well it fits and works, not how good it looks.

Good quality, lightweight hiking boots are a must. Some of the guides will do the trip in Tevas, but if you saw their feet, you'd opt for better footwear. For people who do not routinely walk in the mountains, light hiking boots are strongly recommended. Heavy mountaineering boots are also not recommended, as they are overkill, and more of a burden than blessing on a trek.

#### **Optional:**

Camera and digital storage. Also bring a good cleaning kit, as field conditions are harsher than in towns. Spare batteries are also handy. There will be a waterproof barrel for carrying your camera gear, but if you're going to bring an extensive photography assembly, we recommend bringing your own waterproof camera case. By far the best is the Pelican Case. Bring a spare O-ring as well, in case the one in your case gets damaged. Packets of silica gel will help reduce humidity in the camera case.

Small binoculars for wildlife viewing in the national parks. If you're an avid bird watcher you may want to bring a more substantial pair of binoculars with a waterproof case.

Pocketknife or multi-tool.

Fishing equipment.

Walkman and tapes.

Reading and writing material.

Personal first aid kit.

If you are going to be spending any time in the Terai at the game parks, bring light weight, tightly woven pants and a long-sleeved shirt, as well as mosquito repellent as your first defense against malaria.

Perhaps the most important thing you can bring is a good mental attitude and a tough, empty duffel bag for bringing back all the wonderful goods of the Subcontinent.

#### **Personal spending:**

You will need to budget for meals in town, souvenirs and personal items, and the beer / alcohol kitty for the raft trip, if you're a drinker. In addition to this you will need cash for the entry visa (\$30 / month payable only in US\$).

Bring as much money as you can spare, as the possibilities for retail therapy in KTM are unlimited. Nepali Rupees must be purchased in Nepal, which you can do upon arrival. You will be hard pressed to find them in any banks outside Nepal. It is recommended to bring US\$, Euros or Sterling cash or Travelers Cheques as many other currencies are not accepted in Nepal. Master cards and Visa cards are accepted by many places but most merchants, hotels and restaurants will not accept American Express or Diner cards.



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### **Retail therapy:**

Meals are excellent and very reasonably priced in Kathmandu. Many things such as food, bus and plane transportation fares, and items purchased in cold stores have fixed rates, but most things in Nepal are bartered for. Taxi and rickshaw rides, souvenirs, and crafts must be bargained for, and the starting price can be ridiculous. Be patient, polite, and dogged in your determination to pay as close to the local price as possible. Currently, prices for a beer range from US\$1 to US\$1-50 (depending on can or bottle, imported or local). A full meal with appetizer and small desert will range from US\$4 to US\$6, again, depending on type of meal and restaurant. Sweaters / jumpers should range from US\$12-18 and light clothing (tops, skirts, sarongs, cotton pants) will cost approximately US\$3-6, well worth the expenditure of time and energy! Shops carry unique items such as Tibetan carpets and Thankas (religious paintings), Nepalese woodcarvings and bronze Buddhas, exquisite jewelry and other remarkable wares. It's fairly easy to get carried away so bring as little as possible to Nepal in the event you may end up taking a lot more back. Kathmandu is a strange assortment of haves and have-nots. You could basically equip yourself for an Everest expedition, but it's impossible to find a bottle with a closing lid. In brief, you can buy most things such as batteries, film, razors, toiletries, and western snack food. Ray Ban Sunglasses are available, though you have to be careful to get the real ones and not Bangkok imitations which will make you cross-eyed in minutes. Contact lenses and specific hygiene items should be brought from home.

### **Tipping:**

It is customary to tip your river staff. On the average a tip of 5-10% of your trip cost is recommended but the final tip given is up to you. Tips should be given to the Trip Leader to be divided amongst all the staff on the trip.

### **When to go:**

Best times of the year for river running in Nepal are September through to November. In September, early October the rivers are running high with the Monsoon run-off so we choose to run the classic big volume rivers. In October, the weather is settled, and this is one of the most popular times for rafting and kayaking in Nepal due to warm water and long hot days, perfect for the river and with dropping river flows time it is time to graduate to some steeper runs. From June till August the Monsoon rains arrive and the rivers hold ten times their low flows, and can flood with 60 - 80 times these flows

### **Weather:**

One of the most fascinating things about Nepal is that in the space of a hundred miles you can go from the coldest and most bitter conditions on earth to the sweltering heat of the North Indian Plain. In general it's best to plan for sub-tropical to temperate conditions on the rivers.

Temperatures in the daytime range from 25-32 degrees Celsius, with evenings being 8 to 10 degrees cooler. Expect typical northern hemisphere seasons, with the monsoon thrown in. Most people are surprised to find that Nepal is actually the same latitude as Florida or Egypt, the extremes in temperature and climate are all do to altitude variations.

Visas: The Nepali Government changes their visa regulations on a fairly regular basis. With this in mind, here is the current situation. Visas are available upon arrival for \$30 for one month and \$60 for two months. However, you can save yourself an hour or more in a queue by having your visa before you enter Nepal. For those who want to get them at the airport, have a passport photo and new, crisp US dollars, as they will not accept payment in any other form. And yes, they will reject overly wrinkled or worn notes. Nobody knows why, it just is.



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**Insurance:**

Expedition members are responsible for having their own travel insurance including helicopter evacuation.

**Age and fitness:**

Age is an attitude and not a problem, but we do require that all group members be at least 16 years old. The strength of a weekend warrior will more than suffice for what is needed muscle wise. But keep in mind that there will be moments going through a class IV rapid that you will wish you did more than 12 once curls as your work out routine. Expedition members should be reasonable swimmers and comfortable in the water.

Language: It is not necessary to learn Nepalese, most locals speak at least a little bit of English outside of the rural areas. A few handy words are always useful and could make some day-to-day transactions easier. However if you are going to spend a lot of time in rural areas you should learn some. Charades is the usual second language. Be creative.

**Health:**

The most important and simple thing you can do to prevent serious illness in Nepal is to arrive properly immunized. You should be immunized against Hepatitis A and B, Typhoid, Meningitis and Polio. Some of these immunizations take some weeks or months to do correctly, so don't leave it to the last minute. Check with your local health department for more detailed information. Make sure that your tetanus shots are current, and a thorough dental check-up is strongly recommended.

Dentists in Nepal have a lower standard of hygiene than janitors in the west, and they expect a higher pain threshold than your high school wrestling coach. If you need a cavity drilled, have it done before you arrive.

Antibiotics and other medications are available in Nepal without a prescription and at a fraction of the cost of the rest of the world. You do, however, need to know the chemical name (not the brand name) of what you want, as well as the dosages and side effects. Consult your doctor at home. Some drugs which are not available in the West are available in Nepal, and they can be much more effective than Western equivalents. They can also kill laboratory rats outright, so consult a knowledgeable source before venturing down this dimly lit pathway.

Dysentery, either amoebic or bacterial, is the normal ailment that travelers to Nepal are struck with. With this in mind, be careful of where and what you eat in Kathmandu before the trip.

Sanitation is a top priority on our raft trips, and almost without exception all illnesses which occur on the river are brought from Kathmandu.

Malaria has not been completely eradicated in Nepal, though it is only present on the Terai. Everyone has a different opinion on whether it is a good idea to take malaria prophylactics, but several of us who have had the disease on numerous occasions still feel that the disease is preferable to the side effects of the prophylactic medications. Without a doubt the most effective deterrent against malaria is to protect against mosquito bites with long, tightly woven clothing and mosquito repellent. Mosquito repellent should be brought from home. If you're not going to be spending any time in the game parks in southern Nepal it's a non-issue, as the rivers are essentially bug free. (No kidding!)

If you have any relevant medical conditions please make sure they are listed on your booking form. Also make them known to your guide and the trip leader when you meet them in Kathmandu. On all journeys we carry a very comprehensive first aid kit, which is the product of 20 years running rivers here, but if you want to bring your own personal basic first aid kit by all means do.



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## **NEPAL IN A NUTSHELL**

**Area:** 147,181 sq. miles.

**Population:** 21 million (some argue closer to 23 million, but it's hard telling not knowing).

**Government:** In theory it's a young democracy, and it was an absolute monarchy until 1990. Recent Political developments are more difficult to predict and follow. After the killing of the King and his family his Brother became the new king of Nepal. He dissolved parliament and set up his own government. The Maoists control most of rural Nepal and in April 2006 forced the King to step down and release his control over the political process. Hopefully recent events will pave the way to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Nepal.

**Economy:** 35% of GNP is contributed by Foreign Aid, and 17% by Tourism. 90% of the population are subsistence farmers, and at least 1% sell Tiger Balm in Thamel.

**Language:** Nepali. English is widely understood in the tourist areas, though not at all in the rural parts of Nepal. The Nepali language is relatively easy to learn, and even knowing a handful of words will increase your enjoyment of Nepal immeasurably. Two good books on the Nepali language are "Basic Course in Spoken Nepali" by Tika B. Karki and Chij K. Shrestha, and a condensed version of the same book called "A Beginners course in Spoken Nepali".

**Religion:** 70% Hindu, 30% Buddhist.

**Currency:** Nepali Rupee, at present the exchange rate is about 74 rupees/US\$1.

Reading about Nepal: Nepal has spawned a plethora of books and articles, some of them excellent and some absolute tripe. David Allardice and Peter Knowles literally wrote the book on rafting and kayaking in Nepal when they published the extremely informative and sometimes scurrilous book "White Water Nepal". "Nepal, the Rough Guide" by David Reed is another excellent book. "The Waiting Land a Spell in Nepal" by Delva Murphy is a wonderful book on Nepal's changing times with a Celtic twist. Other books worth reading are "To the Navel of the World" by Peter Sonerville-Lager, "The Snow Leopard" by Peter Mathiesson and "Travels in Nepal" by Charlie Pye-Smith. If you are considering trekking as well then you should consider buying a trekking guidebook. Hugh Swift's "Trekking in Nepal, West Tibet and Bhutan" is very readable and inspiring. Stephen Bezruchka's "A guide to Trekking in Nepal" is also excellent and has more detail on the individual routes. Kathmandu is well stocked with good bookstores, which specialize in literature on Nepal, Tibet, and the customs and religions of the Subcontinent. For those not worried about intellectual property rights, there is an abundance of popular and classic novels printed in India and available at very cheap prices.

**Maps:** Maps of Nepal are readily available in Kathmandu, though if you can find a well-stocked bookstore overseas you can probably pick up a Rand McNally or Nelles map of Nepal for a general overview. National Geographic published an excellent map of Nepal in one of their early 90's issues, and if you can get hold of it, it's pure gold.

**Safaris:** The extreme geographical diversity of Nepal combined with its location in the transition zone between the Palaearctic region to the north and the Oriental realm to the south has endowed Nepal with one of its biggest treasures: a diverse wealth of flora and fauna unlike anywhere else in the world. The National Parks in Nepal's lowland Terai are among the best in Asia. Comprising of grasslands, and river lined forests, they are home to an abundance of wildlife. The Royal Bengal Tiger, the most difficult of the big cats to observe in the wild, roams these dense jungles stalking the sambar, spotted deer, and the four-horned antelope. Leopards



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and other lesser cats compete for prey. The Great Indian One Horned Rhinoceros wallows in the swamps, water buffalo and gaur - the largest of the worlds wild - cattle ruminant here. Other mammal species to be found include the sloth bear, the langur and rhesus monkeys, wild boar, the wild dog and hyenas.

The rivers flowing through these reserves are the playing grounds of the Gangetic Dolphin and two species of crocodiles: the marsh mugger and the thin-snouted, fish-eating gharial. Over 800 species of birds have been identified in Nepal - that is over half the total of the Indian subcontinent and approximately a tenth of the world total in a country that covers a fraction of one percent of world's landmass! Naturally, bird watching here is some of finest in the world. The Giant hornbill, the Paradise Flycatcher, the Large Pied Kingfisher and the Racquet-tailed Drongo are some of the more exotic birds that can be spotted in these forests. Bardia, being more isolated, is less crowded than Chitwan, and is particularly know for its high rate of tiger sighting. Chitwan on the other hand is arguably richer in fauna, and is considered by many naturalists to be simply the best wildlife reserve in all of Asia.