

April 3 – Depart USA

April 4– Welcome to Kathmandu Nepal

B (meals)

Touch down in the storied city of Kathmandu and get our first glimpse of the snowcapped Himalayas! This legendary former Royal Capital of the Kingdom of Nepal is located deep in Kathmandu Valley, a place that served as the crossroads for the ancient civilizations of Asia. A vibrant city bursting with color and culture, Kathmandu is the center of Nepal's history, art and economy. This is home to an inexhaustible number of palaces, golden pagodas, temples and monuments which pay homage to countless deities. It's also a buzzing capital where daily life unfolds out in the open for great photo ops.

Our home for the next two nights is the Shambala Kathmandu. Located near embassy row, it is a modern Tibetan style boutique hotel with views of the mountains and plenty of shops and restaurants nearby. International flights arrive in the morning, so we should be to the hotel by late morning. Check-in is officially 2pm. We have the day to relax in the hotel or explore. In the evening, we will meet our escort who will be our guide for our trip

Overnight: Shambala Kathmandu – 2 Nights. Tibetan themed boutique hotel on Embassy Rd with spa and gorgeous rooftop pool.

April 5 – Full day Kathmandu Tour

B D

Much of the day is spent exploring the incomparable Kathmandu in a half day tour. We start with fabulous Kathmandu Durbar Square, one of three royal palace squares in the valley. Here, we will visit the Hanuman Dhoka Palace Complex where the Shah (Gurkha) Dynasty and later the Rana maharajas resided. The 16th century complex still plays a major role in Nepalese royal activities. This is where important ceremonies take place such as the coronations for Nepalese monarchs.

The complex includes the King Tribuwan Memorial Museum (dedicated to the monarch who opened Nepal to the outside world) and the Mahendra Museum (dedicated to Tribuwan's son). We have the opportunity to visit the palace's State rooms and the one of Nepal's best known curiosities – the Kumari Chowk. Kumari Chowk is home to a living goddess called Raj Kumari. This young girl is believed to be the human incarnation of the demon-slaying Hindu mother goddess, Durba. Raj Kumari is chosen from girls as young as 5 years old through an ancient and mystical selection process and serves until she reaches puberty. Worshipped during religious festivals, she makes some public appearances for a fee paid to her guards but photographing her is prohibited.

Later, we enjoy peace, prayers and indescribable panoramic views as we visit the Swayambhunath Stupa. Known as the "Monkey Temple, Swayambhunath is the oldest of its kind in Nepal and sits high on a hill above Kathmandu. Legend has it that the glory of Kathmandu Valley had its beginnings at this spot. This is considered one of the country's holiest spots, drawing Buddhists and Hindus alike.

In the afternoon, we'll pay a visit to the respected SOS Children's Village in Old Kathmandu. The complex houses and schools both orphans and children whom their parents cannot afford to raise. After the devastating earthquake of 2015, one million of 27 million Nepalese children were left orphaned. You will be amazed at the spirit and smiles of these children. If you are inclined, it is always nice to bring small things like crayons or even candy to give to the children. www.sosnepal.org.np (Note, visit based on conditions of director that week. Another orphanage may be substituted.)

This evening, we enjoy our official Welcome Dinner at the Shambala to get to know our new family of travel lovers.

Overnight: Shambala Kathmandu 2 Nights

April 6 – Into Thin Air on Top of the World

B

It's an early morning for us as we set out for the fabled Mt. Everest and a meal of a lifetime! Helicopters with experienced pilots will whisk us high into the Himalayas to Kongde Ri where we have a luxurious hot breakfast, complete with champagne, at the Top of the World. Served up by sherpas at almost 14,000 feet, our breathtaking views are the stunning snowcapped peaks of Mount Everest and the rest of the Himalayas. It's about a 4-hour journey. Photograph Everest glowing her first light of sun in the shadows on holy mountains. Heading back to Kat, we stop in Lalitpur to explore Patan Durbar Square. Like its counterpart in Kathmandu, is an enchanting mélange of palace buildings, artistic courtyards and graceful pagoda temples. Listed as a World Heritage Site, the former royal palace complex is the center of Patan's religious and social life. One remarkable

monument here is a 17th century temple dedicated to the Hindu God Krishna – Krishna Mandir built entirely of stone with rare stone carvings on its walls depicting the epic wars from Ramayana and Mahabharata. The rest of the afternoon is free to rest or explore Kathmandu. Perhaps go shopping in the Thamel district for some cool prayer flags and wheels, carvings and paintings. Ask your guide or just google Things to do Kathmandu and you'll countless thrills.
Overnight at hotel Shambala

April 7 – Fly Kathmandu to Chitwan National Park

B

After breakfast, we take a short flight from Kathmandu to Bharatpur where we trade the mountains for the lush jungles of Chitwan. Almost the entire region is covered with flowering trees called Chitwan Sal and riverine forests. A UNESCO Site, Chitwan National Park is Nepal's first and most famous National Park. Once a popular hunting area, it is now committed to conservation and home to an astounding array of exotic animals. Chitwan is a heaven for wildlife enthusiasts. It is renowned for tigers, one-horned rhinoceros, crocodiles, a host of other wildlife, more than 450 species of birds and over 45 species of amphibians and reptiles.

We will be staying in the mind-blowing new resort, the Taj Meghauili Serai. Tucked away along the scenic banks of the Rapti River, this extraordinary jungle retreat will pamper you to no end. While the Taj can arrange a host of excursions for your free time, you may not want to leave. The main guest areas offer uninhibited views of the river, while a spacious lounge boasts a warm fireplace and as well as a bar. A sparkling swimming offers a refreshing respite in between activities. There are viewing decks overlooking the river which are made for the guests to relax and enjoy the beauty of nature. You'll want to park yourself here for sunset which is something you do not want to miss.

Your afternoon and evening are yours to enjoy these wonderous surroundings. Your guide will direct you or google "things to do Katmandu" and you'll find countless fun activates.

Overnight at Hotel Taj Meghauili Serai, Chitwan (3 nights)

April 8 – Chitwan Jungle Safari

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We start the morning with a Jeep safari through Chitwan's landscape, passing through the towering, dense canopied Sal forests, lush grasslands and oxbow lakes. Our guides are trained naturalists and experienced trackers from the local community. We'll be on the lookout for the elusive tiger or the majestic migrant bird species like Great Hornbill, Ruddy Shelduck, Pied Kingfisher and Red Headed Trogon. There's one-horned Rhinoceros who are the stars of Chitwan and can usually spotted in open woods and grasslands. The Gharial crocodiles are highly endangered and the park authorities run a breeding center for these unusual looking creatures that can be visited while out on a safari drive.

We'll return to the lodge for a break and then in the afternoon to get up close and personal with the most pampered elephants you have ever seen. These pachyderms live on the Taj property and live a life of luxury after being rescued. You'll get to know these gentle giants by bathing, feeding and humanely riding, if you choose. Enjoy a walk into the jungle with them. They love the attention! You'll learn just what great memories they really have. If you come back in a few years, they'll recognize you!

Your evening is your own to take advantage of the amenities at the Taj.

Overnight at Hotel Taj Meghauili Serai, Chitwan (3 nights)

April 9– Free Day in Chitwan

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You have a whole day to enjoy this special place. The hotel can help arrange a number of activities including a walking safari with a naturalist or perhaps a canoe trip down the picturesque Rapti river enjoying beautiful views of the Himalayan foothills and spot innumerable rhinoceroses, gharials and birdlife. They can even arrange a visit to a local Tharu village to see the authentic way of life of the locals.

Or you could choose to just relax and enjoy this gorgeous property. The hotel can arrange spa treatments in your room.

Overnight at Hotel Taj Meghauili Serai, Chitwan

April 10– Whitewater rafting & Katmandu

B D

We make our way back to Katmandu overland to take in some of the stunning scenery and a little adventure – White water rafting! No experience necessary, these are just

class 2 and 3 rapids along the scenic Trisuli River. The river runs from Kathmandu towards Chitwan and this 3 hour adventure gives you a river's edge view of terraced rice fields and dramatic granite gorges. Exhilarating and downright fun, there is no better way to see the gorge.

We'll also stop by the sacred temple known as the "Goddess of the Wishes," Manakamana temple. Home to the Hindu Goddess Bhagwati, the temple is located high on the mountain, so we'll take a Cable Car to visit. In addition to being a beautifully ornate temple on its own, the views are spectacular.

We'll be back in Kathmandu in late afternoon. Tonight, we'll enjoy their famous local Newari dishes with our AFS Farewell Dinner.

Overnight: Shambala

April 11 – Thursday Head home

B

It's time to say farewell. We'll check out of the hotel after breakfast and make our way to the airport for our flights back to the U.S.