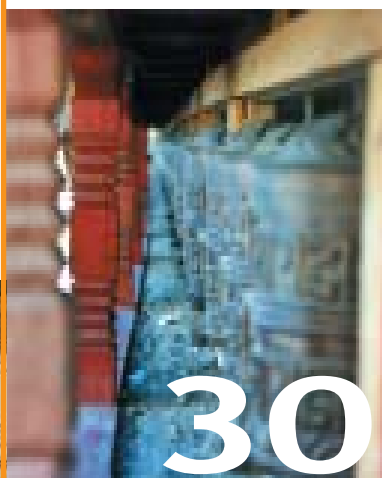




4



30



52



66



78

# introduction

## The greatest variety in the world

Nepal is rich in so many ways; in its topography for those interested in climbing, trekking and adventure; and in its culture and heritage for those interested in discovering another way of life; so we thought it was time to tell you about 'special interest Nepal' and what you could find here to learn and experience, and even immerse yourself in.

In Art, Craft and Culture we have covered many areas of interest, such as bronze making, woodworking, jewelry, art, craft, pottery, and textiles, to name a few, with others just as inspiring and fascinating. All of these subjects can be observed in a number of ways; either from the aspect of just an observer or shopper, or even from the point of view of joining a workshop or training program.

Body, Mind and Soul reminds you of the heritage of the Himalaya and its synchronicity, the chance to learn about religions and philosophies, to study a language or music, to observe a ritual or a dance, and to be reminded of the great studies of ayurveda, homoeopathy and Tibetan medicine.

In Nature we have reminded you that the world's most famous arboriums probably gathered their first samples from the Himalaya, and that this country abounds with most of the butterflies and birds species in the world.

Under heritage we have mentioned the sacred sites of Nepal, and the UNESCO listing of World Heritage sites in Nepal, and in the Rural section have suggested to you what you could discover by way of rural visits, sustainable eco tourism, village tourism and home stays in Nepal.

Have a good read, come and visit and discover for yourself ☺

# special interest Nepal



## **NEPAL TOURISM BOARD**

P.O.Box: 11018, Bhrikuti Mandap, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Tel: 977-1-256909, 256229.

Fax: 977-1-256910, E-Mail: [info@ntb.wlink.com.np](mailto:info@ntb.wlink.com.np)

**[www.welcomenepal.com](http://www.welcomenepal.com)**

*Researched & Written by : Susan Stenson*

*Published by: Nepal Tourism Board. 2001*



# art craft & culture



# Metals

## Bronze & Metal

From the beginning Nepal produced beautiful art work in metal. The copper coins of the Licchavi from the 5th century of the Christian era show the highly developed metal art of Nepal. In the temples of the Kathmandu Valley there are copper statues made from the lost wax process (*cine-per-due*) that can be dated back to the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.

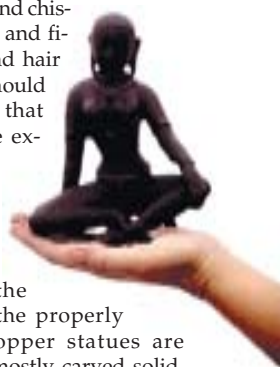
The Chinese traveller, Wang Hsuan Tse, when testified to the existence of highly developed metal craft skills in Nepal saying he was surprised to find crocodile headed copperpipes which drained the monsoon (waters) from the open balconies of the palaces. The palaces also had copper roofs. Copper utensils were used and exported to India. The Tibetans after the emergence of Buddhism in Tibet needed many Buddhist icons most of which were obtained from Nepal. A beautiful tall one-cast image of Buddha made in Patan in the year 591 A.D. is displayed in the Cleveland Museum in the U.S.A. In and around Kathmandu there are thousands of figures from the 7th century onwards. During the medieval period they sculpted various Hindu and Buddhist deities to fulfill the local needs as well as to meet the demand of the Tibetans.

The metalwork even today is done by the century old *cine-per-due* or lost wax process. Firstly the object is shaped in beeswax, every detail of the brow, hair, ornaments



are made in a wax model. Then the second process covers the wax model in soft thin clay and dried in the shade. (drying in the sun will cause the clay to crack). After drying, a second coat of

hard clay mixed with rice husks is applied. A small hole is left at the bottom. When the mould dries completely it is then heated on a fire so that the wax melts and comes out the hole, but the clay has taken the impression and then the melted metal or bronze is poured through the same hole and it takes on the shape of the original wax model now in clay. The mould is then broken and the figure takes the form of the object originally designed. The bronze is cleaned and chiselled, gilded with gold and finally the eyes, face and hair are painted on. One mould casts only one piece, that is why they are quite expensive.



At the Industrial Estate of Patan and in many homes around the Mahabauddha area the properly cast bronzes and copper statues are produced. They are mostly carved solid, but some are hollow inside. The artists can be observed preparing the wax models, coating the clay, taking the wax out, casting, chiselling and painting, at the workshops around Mahabouddha Patan.

Along with casting the Nepalese are experts in repousse - hammer beaten brass and copper works. There are life size repousse images of Ganga and Jamuna in the three royal palaces of the Kathmandu Valley. The copper and brass sheets are beaten by hammer into the required shape and then gold is applied. Many tympanums, the royal statues of the three cities supported by the tall monolithic stone pillars are done this way. The golden gate of Bhaktapur, the golden windows of Patan Durbar and Hanuman Dhoka are the best examples of these.

Patan Museum has good examples of these bronze icons in various styles, and the shop sells the posters and copies of bronze icons, and a number of the galleries have beautiful authentic bronzes cast more recently. Also, old household brass and bronze utensils can still be found in Bhaktapur ☺



# Pottery

## Ceramics and Pottery

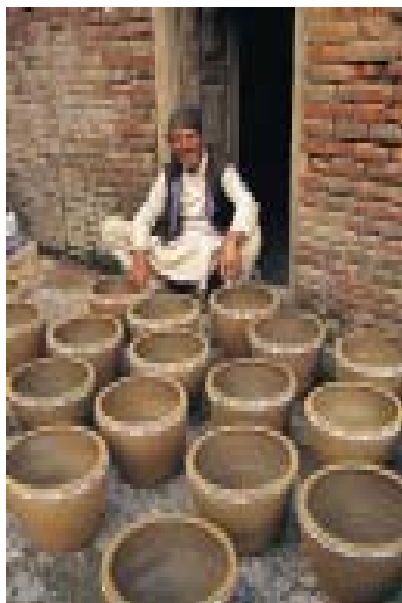
The pottery industry in Nepal is ancient; mention was made of pottery work in the Vedas probably dating back to 3,000 B.C. Pre-historic pottery of Nepal consists of red, brown or black shades on unglazed surfaces. Excavation on various sites in the Kathmandu Valley as well as Lumbini, have revealed specimens of ancient potteryware. They are usually terracotta unglazed, although a few pieces of glazed pottery have been found in the Lumbini area. Most of Nepalese potteryware is for utilitarian purposes, such as container jars, water pitchers, lamps, washing bowls, flower vases, and chilims - small objects used in religious worship.

The pottery clay is found in the Kathmandu Valley, the Pokhara Valley and the southern Terai belt of Nepal. In Nepal there are four techniques used, which are (1) hand forming (2) forming with coils (3) moulding, and (4) throwing. The hand forming technique is used to make small potteryware for burning oil-fed lamps in the temples. And at the *Tihar* season (October-November) the Festival of Lights is celebrated, and at this time most houses in Nepal will purchase numbers of these lamps to light their houses and gardens.

There are no known brick-built permanent kilns in Nepal except in Bhaktapur where there are commercial kilns, as normally the potteryware is fired in the courtyard or garden, or in the field.

Black terracotta is another variety of folk-pottery. This potteryware with a black shiny surface is first of all made on the potter's wheel and dried in the sun. When leather-hard, it is placed on the wheel again and the outer surface is rubbed with a smooth fruit seed, called *lekh pangra* to give it a shiny surface. It is then fired in an open kiln. When the firing is about to be completed all the openings are closed and the pottery is baked in an insufficient supply of oxygen. This produces a lot of smoke inside and carbon particles get deposited on the outer surface of the potteryware, which gives a shiny black surface to the pottery. Other clay products such as bricks and roof tiles are also produced all over Nepal.

The Nepalese potters are waiting to be helped and encouraged to widen their horizons; to learn to use glazes; to build brick kilns. A travel agent can arrange a series of visits to potters in their villages, and it is possible to arrange workshops and training programs for tourists and visitors. Speakers and practitioners can be sourced to present workshops, and the main areas where this could be an inclusion in a tour are in Thimi and Bhaktapur ☺





# Dance

Both spatial and temporal in nature dance derives its liveliness from music which is merely temporal. In Hindu mythology, Lord Shiva is the Natraj, the supreme king of dancing, and when he danced his 'Tandab Nritya', the whole planet earth was violently shaken. Since then classical dance has been based mainly on religion and myth. Nepal has had a tradition in which even epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana have been subjected to interpretation in dance.

Elaborate classical grammar which was laid down in the 'Natyashastra' written in the 2nd century B.C. in India, gives much emphasis to the movement of the eyes and the gestures of the hands to which Nepali dance also adheres.

The Newars of the Kathmandu Valley are the main exponents of classical dancing, with masked dances with a Tantric background, and in particular the Lakhe dance, and in Bhaktapur the colourful Mahakali masked dances are performed during the Indra Jatra festival each year.

As well, among the monasteries of Bouddhanath Tibetan masked dancing by monks can be seen at certain times of the year during celebrations and anniversaries, and in western Nepal Magars perform Sorathi, and in the Terai the stick dance is usually seen.

Contact The Royal Nepal Academy for dance, dance groups, and performances.  
Phone : 977-1-223069, 221242, 221241 ☎

# Festivals

Most festivals honor a deity with worshippers crowding around a shrine to perform puja. Temple courtyards are filled with long lines of people waiting to worship, or seated sharing a ritual feast. Great processions wind through the streets of the three old cities, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan, accompanied by bands of Newar musicians and masked dancers. Sometimes idols of gods are paraded in gigantic wooden chariot-shrines unique to Nepal.

**Bisket Jatra (April)** Nepalese New Year, celebrated particularly in Bhaktapur.

**Raato Machhendranath - Rath Jatra (April - June)** - a chariot procession through Patan lasting up to three months.

**Buddha Jayanti (May)** - the full moon of Baisakh (Nepalese month) is Buddha Jayanti, the triply auspicious anniversary of Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death. Swayambhunath and Bouddhanath overflow with crowds.

**Gunla (August)** - a Newar Buddhist holy month, celebrated at Swayambunath, Patan and Kathmandu.

**Janai Purnima (August)** - high caste Hindus change their sacred-threads the new ones; thousands gather at Patan's Kumbeshwar Mahadev temple; and some make strenuous pilgrimages to Gosainkunda north of Kathmandu.

**Gai Jatra (August)** - Gaijatra means the festival of the cow, but actually it is a day dedicated to the dead (those who have died within the last year) by their respective families. People clad in different costumes in heavy makeup walk round the streets, some of them leading cows, or dressed up as cows. Street and stage performers mimic the major happenings of the year.



**Krishna Astami (August)** - The birth of Lord Krishna, when people gather at Patan's Krishna Mandir to chant prayers, sing hymns, and light hundreds of oil lamps.

**Tej (September)** - Women wearing stunning red saris gather from dawn at Pashupatinath Temple; they fast for the day, sing and dance in groups, and pray for the long life of their husbands.

**Dasain (October)** - An 8-day celebration, Nepal's greatest festival, mostly celebrated with family members. Each day is significant, and on the third day with elders giving tika and blessings to their young relatives. The tika is made of thick sticky yoghurt, uncooked rice and red powder, which is pressed on the forehead of the person being blessed. Long queues of people from all walks of life line up at the Royal Palace to receive 'tika' from the King and Queen of Nepal.

**Tihar (October-November)** - A five-day festival in which the crow, dog, cow, and oxen are worshipped, with the 5th day being the day for Bhai Tika, a blessing given by sisters to their brothers. Women play "Bhailo" on the third day, and men play "Deusi" on the 4th day, visiting door to door singing and dancing (amid the festival of lights), and blessing each household with long life and prosperity. The family in return gives them cash and food as a mark of goodwill.

**Losar (February)** - Tibetan New Year celebrated with prayers and feasts, and visits to relatives and friends.



Shiva Ratri (February ) - A day dedicated to Lord Shiva when thousands of pilgrims from Nepal and India come to Pashupatinath to pay homage.



Holi (March) - Marks the advent of spring and is celebrated by throwing water and coloured powders at each other, and passers by. People who do not want to celebrate stay inside their home on this day.

Seto Machhendranath Rath Jatra (April) - Honoured by the Newar community from Kathmandu city with a chariot festival 🙏

## Jewelry

### Gold Jewelry

Jewelry is closely associated with a culture's aesthetic ideals, with its sensuous contours, the glistening patterns of its stones - even materials from which they are made - all reveal a culture's impassioned view about what is beautiful.

In the Himalayas, jewelry also communicates social status and political power. Its symbols convey ancient cultural values and, particularly in its form as an amulet box it serves as a powerful talisman. Himalayan jewelry also reflects the great religious traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism; The Newar craftsmen of the Kathmandu Valley created amulet boxes adorned with both Hindu and Buddhist iconography for their customers

from Nepal, and for export around the Himalayan region, and Tibet in particular.

Jewelry plays a significant role in Buddhist and Hindu iconography, with the gods and goddesses of these traditions richly adorned with abundant jewelry - crowns, earrings, necklaces, armlets, anklets, finger and toe rings.

The Newars became the gold craftsmen in Lhasa Tibet, as far back as the 16th century. Amulet boxes and other gold jewelry were created by repousse, a metalworking technique which flourished in the Kathmandu Valley as early as the 7th century A.D. It translates from the French word repousser 'to beat again'. The technique demanded great skill of the artist, as the material actually worked upon is metal a surface particularly unforgiving of mistakes. A sheet of metal must take the imprint of the craftsman's chisels and punches, beaten again and again against a pitch of wax and resin. Most surviving repousse work from Nepal is in copper or brass, although it is often gilded to look like gold.

Along with the gold the Himalayan stones of coral, amber and turquoise decorate the amulets, the jewelry, the ornaments, rings, earrings, and necklaces, and even belts. (Modern copies are made in silver and can be found in the jewelry shops scattered through the three cities).

Hunting among the antique, metal and jewelry shops of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur is a shopper's delight 🙏



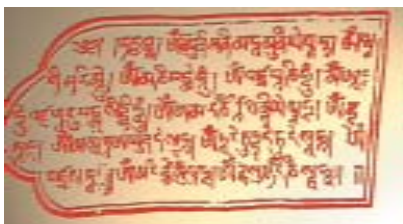
# Language

Nepali is the official language of Nepal, with over 30 other languages spoken as mother-tongues in different parts of the country, and as well there are many regional dialects. Nepali is of the Indo-Aryan family of languages brought from central Asia by the Aryans about 1500 BC. The original Old Indo-Aryan language gave rise to Sanskrit from which Nepali derives.

In common with Hindi, Nepali uses the Devanagari script ('the script of the city of the gods', sometimes known as 'Nagari') which derived from the Brahmi script of ancient India.

English is spoken, with much of the schooling in the cities in the English medium. As well many in the travel and tourism industry speak German, Spanish, Japanese, French and Italian.

In Kathmandu at the Bishwa Bhasha Campus (at Bhrikutimandap) of Tribhuvan University foreign students can study Nepali (spoken and Devanagari script), Newari, Sanskrit and Tibetan languages.



At Tribhuvan University in Kirtipur there is the Department of Nepali Studies, where BA and MA studies in Nepali language can be pursued. Sanskrit is also taught in the medical colleges, as many of the texts for natural medicines (ayurvedic and homoeopathic) are written in Sanskrit ☯

# Kumari

## The Living Goddess

From time immemorial the practice of worshipping an ordinary pre-pubescent girl as a source of supreme power has been an integral part of both Hinduism and Buddhism, a tradition which continues even to this day virtually in every household. They call this girl Kumari Ketī and worship her on all the religious occasions.

The predominance of the Kumari cult is more distinctly evident among the Newar community inside the Kathmandu Valley as she has become an inevitable feature of their worship almost in every Vihar and Bahal and including the nooks and corners of Newari settlements. However, it was the Vajrayana sect of Mahayana Buddhism that was responsible for establishing the tradition of worshipping a girl from the Sakya community as the royal Living Goddess.

The selection of the Living Goddess is a highly elaborate tantric ritual. Upon passing the preliminary test, which is merely concerned with their 32 attributes of perfection, the 4 to 7 year old poor girls from the Sakya community are made to confront a goddess in a darkened room. The sight of the buffalo heads scattered around, the demon-like masked dancers, the terrifying noises they encounter scare some of these innocent babies. The one who emerges victorious from these tests is the only girl who is entitled to sit on the pedestal for worship as the Living Goddess.

The god-house *Kumari Ghar* beside the Kathmandu Durbar Square is a storehouse of magnificent intricate carvings where the Living Goddess performs her daily rituals. During her tenure in the god-house, Guthi Sansthan, the government trust fund bears her entire expenses including that of her caretakers. Under normal circumstances, her days in the god-house come to an end with her first menstruation, but if she turns out to be unlucky, as they say, even a minor scratch

on her body that bleeds can make her invalid for worship.

On *Indra Jatra*, the Living Goddess in all her jewelled splendour travels through the older part of Kathmandu city in a three tiered chariot accompanied by Ganesh and Bhairab each day for three days. It is really a grand gala in which people in their thousands throng in and around the Kathmandu Durbar Square to pay their homage to the Living Goddess. During this festival she also blesses the King in keeping with the tradition in which the first king of the Shah dynasty, who annexed Kathmandu in 1768, received a blessing from the Living Goddess ☺





# Masks

The gods are on the one hand, the demons on the other, representing good and evil; they are the two radical opposing forces in Hindu mythology who have been fighting ever since the beginning of creation itself. In each drama the gods emerge as victors, the demons get vanquished, and the dancers have worn masks to stage these dramas. Wearing a mask makes a person a god, another a devil, and this is where the drama gets enacted amid the roaring sound of drums and cymbals.

Masked dances are performed in Nepal on almost every major religious occasion, like *Gaijatra*, *Indra Jatra*, *Pachalibhairaba Jatra*, etc. and the dancers are mostly gardeners from the Newar community. The three cities of the Kathmandu Valley have a number of organisations of masked dancers, with Bhaktapur city alone with more than one hundred groups.

Thimi, on the way to Bhaktapur, is where masks of all kinds are made, and it is possible to watch the mask makers at work mixing cotton and Nepalese rice paper with the clay, placing it in a mould, and drying it in the shade, and later painting the eyes, lips and mouths according to the norms set down by religious tradition.

The wooden masks are carved mainly by the Tamang in Nepal, although the wood is often not seasoned, and at Bouddhanath you can see many old wooden masks which are quite old and have an antique or art value, and Thimi is the place to see the paper and clay masks, including the masters turning a lump of clay into a beautiful masked wall hanging ☺



# Mithila Art

Janakpur, a city in Nepal's eastern Terai, is a Hindu pilgrimage site with a legendary history, and is the center of Mithila culture in Nepal. It is an age old culture with its own language and rich literature where women have had a predominant role in the field of painting, as well as handicraft.

The painting traditions vary from caste to caste. The art of Brahmins and

gods. Before weddings Kayastha women decorate a wedding chamber called the *kohbar*. The art of the women is transient with the rains destroying the mud and painted designs, or in the spring during a New Year festival the paintings are covered with mud. The practice of painting on paper is fairly new for most Mithila women, although the Kayastha caste has had a tradition of making paintings on paper to wrap gifts for marriages.



The Janakpur Women's Development Center (JWDC) was established for the purpose of encouraging the women to keep their artistic tradition intact, a tradition which is alive on the walls of its neighbouring village.

In view of the limited market for their paintings the women are taught to use their painting techniques and traditional designs in

Kayastha (the caste which once kept records for Brahmins) is closely tied to religious ritual, as shown in the making of *aripana*, in which the women grind rice with water into a paste called Pithar. Dipping two fingers into the pithar they make graceful lace-like designs on the mud floors of their homes or courtyards. These designs are used for worship, for rituals related to marriage, or a particular full or half moon day.

Brahmin women decorate a *maraba*, a pavilion made out of mud plaster on the occasion of *Upanayan* (a boy's haircutting ceremony) with images of the

printing, ceramics, sewing and weaving. The JWDC also provides training for the poor and uneducated women from the neighbouring villages. Subjects include, literacy, record-keeping, costing and quality control, marketing, management, leadership and teambuilding, gender awareness, planning and evaluation.

The range of products now made and sold throughout Nepal by the JWDC are paintings, notebooks, photo frames, writing sets, recycled cards, mirrors, ceramics, bags and cushion covers, screen printing on table sets, and t-shirts, and tapestry ☺

# Museums & Art Galleries



## Museums and Art Galleries

Nepal, specially Kathmandu, has a number of museums including a few outside the Kathmandu Valley. The most recently inaugurated museum is The Patan Museum so we will mention it first. This museum has been a great gift to the nation, and it now stands as an example of what we might be able to do with others.

### **The Patan Museum, Patan Durbar Square**

Located inside Patan Durbar in the Durbar Square, it specialises in bronze statues and religious objects, and includes as many as 200 items. Some of the art goes back to as early as the 11th century. Most of the statues are of Buddha, Bishnu, Lokeswar and Devi, covering both the Hindu and the Buddhist iconology.

*Open daily, except holidays, from 10:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Entrance fee is Rs.30/- for SAARC nationals, and Rs.120/- for other nationalities. (Phone: 521492).*

### **The National Museum at Chaunni near Swayambhu**

This museum houses breathtaking bronzes and a rich collection of *paubha* scrollpaintings or thangkas. It also has a collection of ancient fire-arms, leather cannons and relics of the Great Earthquake of 1934, along with a collection of terracotta. The National Numismatic collection is housed in the Mahendra Memorial Building of the National Museum, and it contains a good Nepalese coin collection spanning the Lichhavi and Malla dynasties (2nd to 18th centuries A.D.), as well as the Shah dynasty. The museum stands in old gardens and is ripe for renovation and upgrading in the same style as the Patan Museum.

*Open daily, except Sundays, Mondays and Holidays, from 9.00am to 4.30pm. Entrance fee Rs.10/- for SAARC nationals and Rs.50/- for other nationalities. An extra Rs.50/- for cameras and Rs.100/- for video cameras. (Phone: 271478)*



### **The Tribhuvan Museum, Kathmandu Durbar Square**

Located inside the Hanuman Dhoka Palace in Kathmandu Durbar Square the museum highlights the life of King Tribhuvan (1906-1955) who helped liberate the country from the Rana regime in 1951. The galleries also have rare photographs, paintings and portraits of other Shah rulers and members of the Royal family.

*Open daily, except Sundays, Mondays and holidays, from 9.15am to 4.00pm. Entrance fee is Rs.250/-. Cameras are not allowed (Phone: 258034)*



### **The Mahendra Museum, Kathmandu Durbar Square**

The Mahendra Museum is also in the Hanuman Dhoka Palace complex, the contents of which shed light on the life of the late King Mahendra (r. 1955-1972). His cabinet room, office chamber, and personal belongings such as medals, decorations, gifts, coins, stamps and his literary creations are exhibited.

*Open daily, except Sundays, Mondays and holidays, from 9.15am to 4.00pm. You can visit the Mahendra Museum with your ticket to the Tribhuvan Museum. (Phone: 258034)*

### **The Museum of Natural History, Swayambhu**

This museum situated behind the Swayambhu stupa has exhibits on animals, butterflies and plants. Stuffed animals, birds and crocodiles are a big draw at the museum, particularly for children.

*Open daily, except Saturdays and holidays, from 10.00am to 5.00pm. The entrance fee is Rs.20/- and an additional Rs.20/- for cameras. (Phone: 271899).*

### **National Library, Pulchowk, Patan**

Located inside Harihar Bhavan in Pulchowk, it contains about 70,000 books, most of which are in English, with a few in Sanskrit, Nepali, Hindi and Newari. The National Library has also conserved some rare scholarly books in Sanskrit and English from the 17th century.

*Open daily, except Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, from 9.00am to 5.00pm. No entrance fee (Phone: 521132)*

### **The Kaiser Library, Tridevi Marg (Thamel)**

This library houses the collection of one man, Kaiser Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana (1891-1964). Located in a palatial building on the corner of Tridevi Marg and opposite the west end of the Royal Palace. It includes books, (over 45,000) covering unrelated topics such as astrology and law, history, hunting, religion and philosophy.

*Open daily except Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, from 9.00am to 5.00pm (Phone: 411318) Entrance Free.*

### **The National Birendra Art Gallery, Naxal**

The Nepal Association of Fine Arts (NAFA) at Naxal has a collection of about 150 art pieces by prominent Nepalese artists. Art exhibitions are held regularly, and there are also studios where artists can be seen at work. Housed in a fine old unrestored Rana palace, named Bal Mandir.

*Open daily except Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, from 9.00am to 5.00pm Entrance fee Rs.25/- (SAARC) and Rs.75/- for other foreign visitors. (Phone: 411729)*

### **Asa Archives, Tengal (Nhyokha Tol)**

The archives are located on the western fringe of the old part of Kathmandu, and possess an exceptional collection of about 7,000 loose-leaf handwritten books and over 1,200 palm-

leaf documents. The oldest manuscript in the collection is dated 1242 A.D., and the manuscripts are in Sanskrit and the Newari Language (Nepalbhase), located at Tengal west of Nhyokha Tol.

*Open daily except Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, from 9.00am to 5.00pm (Phone : 263417) Entrance Free.*

### **The National Art Gallery, Bhaktapur Durbar Square**

This gallery is located in the old Malla Palace of 55 Windows in the Bhaktapur Durbar Square. It has a rich collection of *paubha* scroll paintings, bronze, brass, stone and wooden images.

*Open daily except Sundays, Mondays and holidays from 9.30am to 4.30pm. Entrance costs Rs.10/- for SAARC nationals and Rs.20/- for other foreign visitors. Entrance fee to Bhaktapur City Rs.750/- (Phone: 610004)*

### **The National Woodworking Museum, Dattatreya Square, Bhaktapur**

This museum is in a restored 15th century building named Pujari Math owned by the Malla king, Yaksha Malla. The Pujari Math is a museum in itself, with the very finest of Newar woodcarving including the famous Peacock Window.

*Open daily except Sundays, Mondays and holidays from 9.30am to 4.30pm. Entrance fee Rs.10/- for SAARC nationals and Rs.20/- for other foreign visitors. (Phone: 610005)*

### **The Bronze and Brass Museum, Pujari Math, Bhaktapur**

Opposite the Pujari Math there is 15th century building with a rich collection of domestic and ceremonial metalware, ritual jars, inkpots, spittoons, ordinary and ritual lamps.

*Open daily except Sundays, Mondays and holidays from 9.30am to 4.30pm. Entrance fee Rs.20/- and an extra Rs.20/- for cameras (Phone: 610448)*

Private galleries in Kathmandu exhibit local and overseas artists and at times have speakers and slide presentations on topics related to Nepal, Tibet and the Himalaya. Indigo Gallery, Siddhartha Art Gallery, J Art Gallery, Bamboo Gallery, Baber Mahal Art Gallery and the Woodmaster Gallery, to name but a few.



## OUTSIDE KATHMANDU

### The Dhankuta Museum

This is a regional museum representing the eastern sector of the country. Dhankuta is the headquarters of the Eastern Development Region and is located north of Dharan and Biratnagar. The museum concentrates on ethnic artifacts and archeological exhibits.

*Open daily except Tuesdays and holidays from 10.00am to 5.00pm. Entrance fee is Rs.5/- and an extra Rs.10/- for cameras. (Phone: 26-20248)*

### The Hattisar Museum, Bhimphedi, Makwanpur

This is an unusual museum which consists of a Fish Exhibition Room, and a rare collection of cages built by Rana Prime Minister Jung Bahadur, with plates depicting the Nepalese and British crowns, and hunting attire.

### The Elephant Museum, Bhimphedi, Makwanpur

Located in the old Hattisar or elephant stables at Bhimphedi, it houses 85 elephant howdahs used by the Rana Prime Ministers (1846-1950) for their journeys and the journeys of their guests by elephant.

### The Mustang Eco Museum, Jomson

This museum is about 15 minutes walk from Jomson airport. The ground floor consists of collections of beads, bones and pendants as well as ceramic vessels found in the burial caves of Mustang. Some of the exhibits date back to 800 B.C. There are also musical instruments, costumes and mannequins that reflect the culture of Mustang. On the first floor there is a Herbal Medicine exhibit.

*Open daily, 8.00am to 11.00am, and 2.00pm to 5.00pm*

### The Tharu Cultural Museum, Thakurdwara, Royal Bardia National Park

The Tharus are an indigenous people of the Terai with a colourful culture. The museum possesses exhibits such as costumes, accessories and household objects which highlight the art, traditions and lifestyle of the Tharu people.

### International Mountain Museum, Pokhara

A project of the Nepal Mountaineering Association, the museum will commence a series of soft openings in the autumn of 2001, with the grand opening in 2002, designated the Year of Mountains by the United Nations.

The museum has a unique shape with the roof structure fanning out to look like a range of mountains; very contemporary in style and sprawling over a six-hectare site south-east of Pokhara city, with the real Annapurnas as the backdrop.

In 2001 the museum will be ready to house exhibits from past expeditions, geological specimens, archival photographs, satellite maps and other paraphernalia.



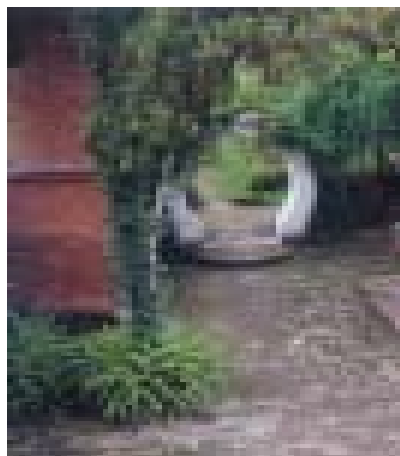
Continued support of the museum will be from the Trekking/Mountain peak permits issued for 18 peaks throughout Nepal, and from a committee formed in Japan, SANPAKU, to support the project. Supporters include mountaineering associations throughout the world, and individual supporters from Japan, China and Nepal. ☺

# Music

Nepali classical music owes its origin to Rig Veda. Later the metrical chanting of its hymns found its expression in the songs of Sama Veda. Since then classical music has associated itself with every sphere of Nepalese classical life. For nearly 3,000 years, this tradition has been handed down from generation to generation.

The classical structure of a melody is known as a Raga, and there are hundreds of Ragas either played on musical instruments or sung according to seasons and time. The 24 hour period is divided into 8 segments of 3 hours each, and each Raga has to stick to a particular time frame in order to produce a desired effect. At times, some branches of these ragas composed of songs are intertwined with dances.

Small groups of itinerant minstrels namely the Damais and the Gaines have become an integral part of the Nepali folk culture. Through the ages the Gaines have been visiting door to door singing accompanied by the Sarangee, a local violin, their only means of survival. The Damais do the same thing with Sahanai (a recorder), (although they have another source of income from tailoring). The Damais also play Pancai Baja (Sahanai, Narsinga



(horn), Damaha (drum), Dholaki (a recorder) and Tyamko (a small drum)) which they play in a group during weddings which is a feature of village life. Folk music in Nepal thrives throughout the country embracing a wide range of ethnic diversities. Every community dances to the beat of the drum and melody of the flute on important occasions.

Kathmandu University Department of Music is located at Bhaktapur at the Harsha Narayan Dhaubhadel Shivalaya, a most beautiful temple complex in a peaceful and idyllic setting. Both B.A. and M.A. courses in Music (Ethnomusicology) are available to Nepali and foreign students, plus a series of practical courses which include classes in Carya dance (Tantric Buddhist dance), Sarod, Guitar, Classical Vocal, Tabla, Dhimay (an elongated drum), Sitar and Piano. ☯



Harsha Narayan Dhaubhadel Shivalaya

## Paper (Handmade)

The Nepalese handmade paper is called "kancho kagaz" (kancho meaning raw and kagaz meaning paper). This paper is ancient in origin. The craft appears to have been introduced to Nepal from China via Tibet by the Lama Buddhists. Some immigrants from India and probably Kashmir also brought the art to Nepal. Papermaking is practised in the mid and northern belt of Nepal, probably the temperate climates being an issue as well. Different ethnic groups in Nepal are engaged in different professions. Gurungs, Magars of west Nepal and Rais of east Nepal are usually found in the paper making profession.

Nepali paper is used in making kites, dolls and toys, papier mache, calendars, envelopes and writing material, in writing horoscopes, mandalas and thanangka painting. The raw material of Nepali paper still grows wild; it has not been cultivated as yet. It is the Daphne plant grown in the altitudes of 2,000 to 3,500 meters. The common name for the bark is Lokta.

Handmade paper production can be seen very easily on the edges of the Kathmandu Valley and north towards the Tibet border. More enterprising entrepreneurs are now pressing petals, flowers and leaves into the paper and are making wallpapers, lampshades and other designer items. ☯

# Stones

## Semi Precious Stones

The artistic finesse of Nepal is also seen in semi precious stones like coral, quartz and crystal. Most of the artists who work in semi precious stones are located in Patan, using malakite, agate and jade as well. Hindus of Nepal use as pendant statue of a multiarmed Ganesh carved in coral, and some wear a ring carved from coral. In medieval Nepal, the coral was considered precious because it had to be imported from Europe. From the 18th century Nepal imported coral in large quantities and exported them to Tibet. During the 18th century they carved statues of Buddha and Bodhisattvas from coral, for the local market and for export.

The rulers and aristocrats of Nepal liked wearing jewellery and collecting ornaments made of semi precious stones, whereas the poor people wore jewellery made of wood, bamboo and copper. A Chinese traveller who visited Kathmandu in the 7th century described in detail that the then King Narendradeva adorned himself with various kinds of jewellery made of amber, jade and turquoise. The Nepalese used to import a yellow soft amber from Tibet which does not have any flies or aquatic leaves inside like that of the amber of Europe.

There are families in Patan who specialise in working in semi-precious stones like crystal, quartz, amethyst, coral, malakite and turquoise, and you can visit their workshops and see how they work their craft and the intricate designs, and of course you can order.

But now many art works in semi-precious stones are made in India on machines and sold in Kathmandu at quite reasonable prices. The real art works are all handmade with traditional technology, and of course their price reflects these age old techniques. It is important that the visitor should learn the difference, particularly if he has a real interest in stones. The Nepalese from way back loved coral so some old antique coral pieces can be found and purchased in Kathmandu. Patan is the best place to buy art objects and jewellery of semi-precious stones, and you can even watch your own piece of jewellery being crafted, and the prices are amazing in comparison to European and American prices. In Thamel there are bead shops which sell beads for jewellery, using coral, amber, turquoise and silver made up, or loose to design yourself. ☺



# Souvenirs

Nepal, specially Kathmandu is an 'Aladdin's Cave' for shoppers, with reliable original antiques, along with reproductions of antiques plus masks, woodcarvings, and metalwork all made to look old. There is bronze, metal, and wood, jewelry, masks, ceramics and terracotta all mentioned separately in this brochure.

Bookshops abound, with many selling second hand books, and one or two stocking some prized antique books. Nepal and South Asia is widely represented with novels, travel books and biographies, coffee table books and definitive research manuscripts.

The famed Tibetan woollen carpets are found aplenty. In Durbar Marg and Bouddhanath there are antique stores selling old carpets from Nepal and Tibet. The modern carpets, copies of old Tibetan designs, are woven with New Zealand or Tibetan wool, and mostly with reliable Swiss dyes, but vegetable dye rugs or carpets are sought after and can be found. As well there are modern designs, and of course they all come in different qualities, ranging from 60 knot to 100 knot.

Pashmina shawls and lambswool shawls are everywhere, plus jumpers and cardigans from Cashmere, and some handknitted jumpers in local colours and designs. There are also a number of fair price shops representing women's skill development groups and community craft groups, selling furnishings, bedspreads, cushion covers and all sorts of gift items made from bone, wood, cane and textiles ☺



*Note: There is an export ban on certain items. Contact Dept. of Archaeology (Tel: 250686).*

Association for Craft Producers,  
Ravi Bhawan, Kathmandu,  
Nepal.

Phone: 977-1-275108, 270721

Email: craftacp@mos.com.np

Handicraft Association of Nepal,  
Maitighar, Kathmandu.

Phone: 977-1-244231, 245467, 243015

Email : han@wlink.com.np

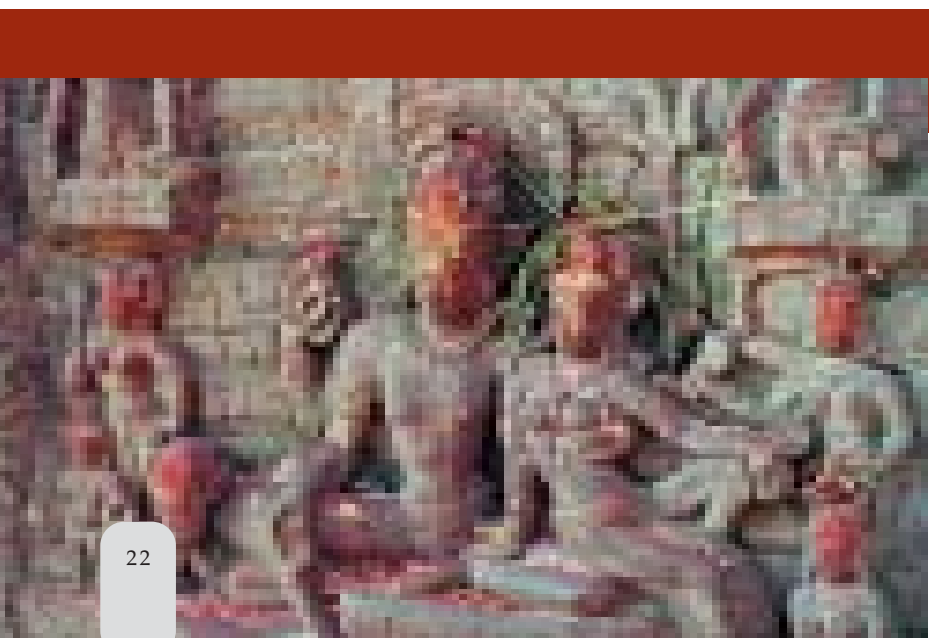
Website: www.yomari.com/han

# Stone

The Kathmandu Valley is endowed with thousands of works in stone, some of them dating back 2,000 years, with the huge life size statue of King Jayavarman from 185 A.D. considered the oldest sandstone sculpture in Nepal, which is on display in the National Museum at Chaunni, looking similar to contemporary Indian icons.

The ancient stone sculptures of Nepal could be divided into four categories, (1) Sculptures from the beginning of the Christian era up to the middle of the 5th century, (2) Sculptures from the middle of the 5th up to the 10th century, (3) From the middle of the 10th up to the 15th, and (4) from the 15th century to the present.

The statues of the first phase are of a soft sandstone, depicting the icons of Shiva, Yaksha, Bodhisattvas, Hariti, Laxmee and other mother goddesses. Some Uma-Haheswor, Shiva and Parvati statues have also come to light, and are very simple with no multi heads and arms. The second phase, around 450 A.D., reveals advanced technology on good quality stone that has stood the test of time and weather. Narrative in nature, the statues



engraved during this period depicted the whole story. The huge solid monolithic statue of the Sleeping Vishnu in Budhanilkantha can be seen as a fine example. (All the guide books will tell you how to find Budhanilakantha on the north side of the valley). They also sculpted buddhas, and boddhisattwas, and their attention to detail and skill shows in the proportionate limbs, slenderness of the waists, not too large breasts, limited use of ornaments, elaborate head dress or a tiara and attractive diaphanous clothing. The themes of the sculptures were various incarnations of Vishnu; Shiva lingas with or without face; Shiva along with his family. This phase can be regarded as the classical age of stone sculpture in Nepal. The third was a kind of transitional period with many similarities to the second phase but new gods, goddesses of Vajrayan Buddhism included. Yab-yum, the Tibetan expression that represents cosmic union gave birth to a number of multi-headed and multi-armed dieties full of symbolism.

Surprisingly from the 15th century onwards the figures became shorter with heavier breasts and waists, and combed hair, as if the virgins of the old days were heading towards their hefty motherhood.

In all the cultural sites such as the temples of Pasupatinatha, Changu Narayan and Panauti, the Bhaktapur and Patan Durbar Squares, the National and Patan Museums, you can see stone sculpture from all the phases.

Stone carvings are still done by the descendants of the same family who made the famous Krishnamandir of Patan. They now live in Bhinchhe Bahal, a little east of the Durbar Square of Patan and sculpt any figure of any size in a very short time. A statue of Buddha or a Boddhisattwas, Shiva or Durga can be bought for US\$1, or US\$5,000. To watch an artist working with a large piece of stone, and to see the change statue take form, is an exciting experience, and particularly if it is going to be yours. It is important to buy from the artist, as a curio shop may sell a similar piece for twenty times more in price paying very little to the artist. ☺



# Terracotta

Nepal is famous for this unique art, which is of a mostly religious nature, although there is some secular art from the very beginning of her civilisation. The excavations in the Nepalese Terai have brought to light many terracotta art works that have been scientifically dated to the 3rd and 4th centuries B.C. or even earlier. The terracotta art from Lumbini, and Kapilvastu, the famous Buddhist sites, prove that the terracotta art was highly developed during this period.

The National Museum of Nepal at Chaunni in Kathmandu, has many terracotta pieces on display. An excavation at Dhumbarai in the east of Kathmandu within the Ring Road, has yielded many terracotta figurines, animals, and miniature toys with various kinds of dress and ornaments. It has been ascertained that in certain areas of Handigaon and Chandol there were big terracotta centres in the Lichhavi period. During the medieval period a caste 'Prajapati' known as Kumale developed the terracotta art. Hundreds of gods and goddesses from this medieval period can be seen in the art in and around Kathmandu. The famous temple of Mahabauddha of Patan, built around 1600 A.D. is a perfect example of Nepalese terracotta and brick work. This terracotta art is different from the ceramic art of China and Japan. Archaeological findings at Lumbini and Kapilvastu have proved that around 600 B.C. the Nepalese made special kinds of ceramic pottery with black polish, smoothed and then glazed. These disappeared around the 2nd Century B.C. The medieval Chaityas were also made of terracotta, the potters of Bhaktapur made lattice windows from terracotta, and Tympanum and struts to support the roof were also made from clay.

The National Museum has on display many figures of terracotta with multiarms and heads, and the Temple of Ranipokhari

right at the centre of the pool has a wonderful collection of figures of Astamatrikas, Varaha, Vishnu, Surya, and Varaheni.

A huge standing terracotta Vishnu in the Aryaghat of Pasupatinath is another masterpiece of art. At the Kumarighar the official residence of Kumari, the living goddess in Kathmandu, there are some perfect examples of Nepalese terracotta art. Hundreds of terracotta pieces depicting the rulers game hunting in the jungle, the wild animals, the peacock dancing are some of the best art of Nepal. This art still continues in Nepal today, with the potters of Thimi and Bhaktapur working very hard to develop the art and to gain international recognition. They have started many ceramic industries making household objects. (See the Ceramic and Pottery entry in this brochure). The whole process can be observed in Thimi and Bhaktapur along with scores of souvenir shops. Thimi and Bhaktapur are approximately 15kms from Kathmandu, and can be reached by trolley bus, taxi or guided tour. There is an entry fee into Bhaktapur City of Rs.750/- (US\$10.00 approx), with lower fees for SAARC nationals.

Lumbini and Kapilvastu are in the south of Nepal close to the border with India, referred to as the Terai area. They can be reached by bus, air, or guided tour. And of course the visitor needs no reminder that any of these old terracottas cannot be taken out of the country. Seek some advice and find a master potter who could craft you a copy. ☺





# Textiles

Raw materials for textiles are abundant in Nepal, and with the contrasting climates and altitudes there has been a wealth of materials which for centuries have been extracted, spun, twisted and woven into a multitude of textiles. Animals and plants are the sources, and from animals they include sheep's wool, yak hair, cashmere-like hair from goats, and more recently silk from the *Bombyx* moth larva. Fibres from plants are the seed fibres from cotton, the stem fibres from nettle, jute, hemp and bamboo, and leaf fibres from the sisal family.

**Yak hair** is made into shelters, ropes and clothing, yak skin for shoes, saddle bags and straps.

**Sheep's wool** was made into rainproof Nepalese woollen blankets that were used for trading items 2,000 years ago; and now woven clothing, blankets and rugs are still in use in the mountain areas. The most common sheep is the *Baruwal*, a hardy sheep which produces a short fleece with little crimp, springy, strong and easy to spin, with the sheep shorn twice a year. The most attractive Sherpa woollen front apron is woven from sheep's wool, hand spun and coloured with multi coloured natural dyes.



**Cashmere, Pashmina** - although cashmere shawls became famous from shawls woven in Kashmir the fibre came from goats from Tibet and Central Asia. In Nepal the shawls woven from cashmere hair are referred to as pashmina shawls, *pashm* being the Persian word for 'wool'.

And here in Nepal, too, the wool comes from Tibet and China, although in Dolpo and Mustang there are Pashmina goat cross breeds producing milk and a coarser fibre. The pashmina shawls are in demand in Tokyo, New York, Paris, London, etc, and often the tassels are beaded, and lately even small Rajasthani style mirrors are sewn into the shawls.

**Silk** - There are two main types of silk fibre in Nepal - the high quality silk from mulberry in the hills, and *eri* silk from castor mainly from the Terai in the southern plains. This silk is also used in the pashmina and silk combined shawls.

**Himalayan Giant Nettles** (*Urtica heterophylla*) - Allo - are woven into nettle cloth, whereas before it was used for ropes, sacks, mats, cast nets and rough clothing, now it is woven for curtains, and blinds, and has a 'designer' potential (weaving with nettle fibres was known since the early Bronze Age, as a fragment of cloth found in Denmark has revealed).

**Hemp** (*Cannabis Sativa*) Hemp has three main products, a white bast fibre from the stem; oil from the seeds; and the ubiquitous narcotic.

**Jute** - Jute goods and raw jute are important export items for Nepal to India and Bangladesh. Within Nepal the jute is sold to the mills in the Terai where it is machine spun and made into sack cloth and rope.

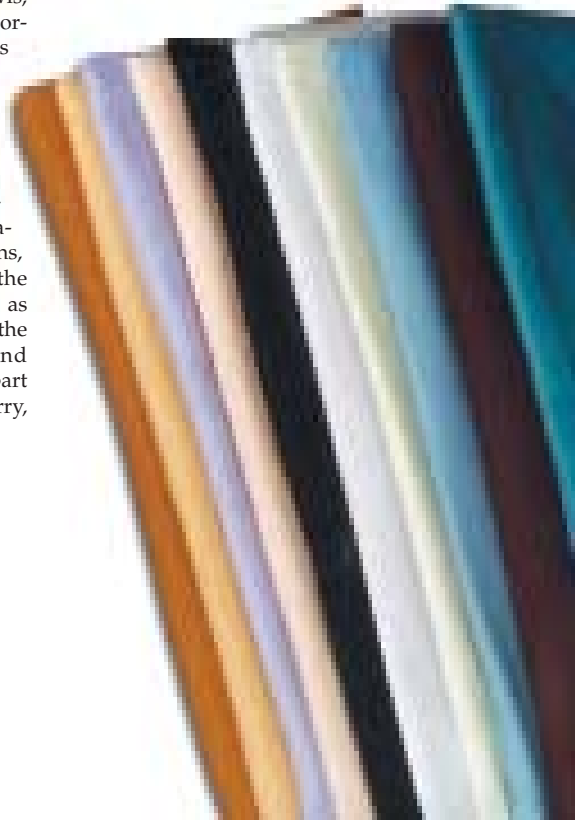
**Cotton** - A very special cotton thread, the sacred thread worn by high caste Hindus over the left shoulder and tied under the right arm, is spun and plied six-fold. Once a year, at Janai Purne during the full moon in August, the thread is replaced by a new one by the family priests.

Textiles in Nepal are woven, knitted, crocheted, plaited or braided. The most remarkable and visible cotton textile are the intricately patterned, colourful cotton panels used for caps for men, and blouses and shawls for women, called **Dhaka-cloth**. The traditional colours were black, white red, and orange, but now the colours used range through the rainbow and produce beautiful effects. The name is a little confusing, and has a few explanations as to the origin of the name, and one is that as the cloth and thread came to Nepal from or through Dhaka, Bangladesh, that it was given the name Dhaka cloth. Then it was also thought that maybe Hindu weavers, fleeing from Dhaka at the time of the Muslim invasion, settled in or near Nepal and influenced Nepalese weavers. A lovely cotton, with a very free design, very much up to the individual weaver, with no two pieces the same, unless mass produced to order. The Limbus and Rais of the mid-mountains are famous for their Dhaka cloth.



Block printing on cotton, with two layers of muslin, one on each side, are produced as bed covers, doona covers, and shawls, using quite traditional red, black and orange colours. The doonas themselves are filled with cotton, and each year the cotton men call at the house, undo the doona, beat and fluff the cotton and fill up the doona again.

All of these textile processes can be observed throughout Nepal, in a true traditional sense in the hills and mountains, and in a more commercial sense in the cities and the Terai. Other fibres such as bamboo and sisal are also utilised in the production of household goods and clothing. And the dyeing an integral part of the process still uses Indigo, Barberry, Walnut, Sorrel and Rhubarb. ☺



# Thangkas

"Painting is the mother of all forms of art", so says a Hindu scripture, whereas the pre-historic cave paintings of Dordogne in France and Altamira in Spain are considered 12,000 years old, the history of painting in Nepal dates back to the Lichhavi period in the beginning of the Christian era. The wall paintings and inscriptions in Chhabahil near Pashupatinath are dated to the 5th century, and inscriptions in Kathmandu and Gorkha are some other examples.

Some of the oldest most refined and beautiful Thangka paintings found in Nepal date back to the 12th century or even earlier. The majority of these paintings come from Buddhist manuscripts like *Pranajaparamita*, and are preserved in national archives, in temples and monasteries, and in private collections and museums abroad. The National Art Gallery of Bhaktapur, the National Archives, and the Kaiser Library have good collections of these manuscripts.

Wall paintings, frescos and mural paintings are found in the Kathmandu Valley in all of the three palaces of Kathmandu, with whole rooms painted without an inch uncovered, showing both religious and secular themes. The Kumarighar of Kathmandu, and the Temple of Kirtipur show wonderful examples of wall painting with gods, divinities and the rulers and aristocrats of the period. As far back as the Lichhavi period the temples of Jayabagiswari, the Temple of Chandeswari at Banepa, and the wall of Tika Bhairaba were painted every twelve years, and this tradition still continues today.

The rulers, and the rich and aristocratic painted nine planets, twenty eight constellations, all in different poses such as seated, standing, walking, eating, sleeping,

according to the birthtime of the constellations and planets, but these horoscope charts are not easily found as the tradition in Nepal is to burn them along with the body at cremation, or tear them up and throw them in the water with the ashes.

Thangka painting in Nepal was used to describe the complicated tantric philosophy which also worked as a visual aid to a layman. "Ushnisa Vijaya", a coming of age ceremony (77 years, 7 months and 7 days) in the Newar community is another occasion when an elderly person is depicted in the centre of a Thangka riding in a palanquin through his neighbourhood or locality. Thangkas are also painted to commemorate the building of a temple or stupa, and are used in worshipping the divinities in their various manifestations. When it comes to His Holiness the Dalai Lama or other reincarnate lamas in the monasteries ordering Thangka, these paintings still adhere to old iconographic rituals and they have their special masters who have been trained by their fathers or other masters. But the commercially motivated ones obviously fall into a different category.

The two types of thangka painted are the Newari Thangka; and the Tamang Thangka which has been influenced by the Tibetan school. The Newari Thangka are the more refined and detailed, and are always mostly much brighter in colour. The Newar thangkas have gods, Buddhist gods dominating the whole canvas, while the Tamang thangkas mostly depict mandalas, the life of Buddha and the wheel of life.

Throughout Kathmandu and the valley, Thangka schools and painters can be visited, and time can be spent learning, listening and watching the artists at their work. Westerners can learn thangka painting, and spend time learning this meditative art which will pervade their whole being, and bring them closer to their own truth. ☺



# Woodcarving

In the annals of the art and architectural treasures of Nepal wood has been the most common material used for carving. Although it is difficult to trace its exact origin, Nepalese craftsmanship in wood did exist even before the 6th century. The description of the Chinese traveller, Wang Hsuan Tse, in his travelogue, who visited Kathmandu in 673 A.D., about the sculpted and painted wooden houses in Kathmandu bears ample testimony to it. Its practice was evident in the Lichhavi era, and it reached its real stature during medieval Nepal. This was the period when the Malla Kings of the three cities of the Kathmandu Valley committed themselves to producing distinctive features in craftsmanship. Be it a palace or a temple, a place for public assembly or a window frame of a small house - nothing was left uncarved. Those were the days in which the three cities of the Kathmandu Valley had a splendour of their own. But this unique heritage suffered a major setback when the valley was razed to the ground by a number of tremors including the devastating one in 1934. Today most of what we see is a re-

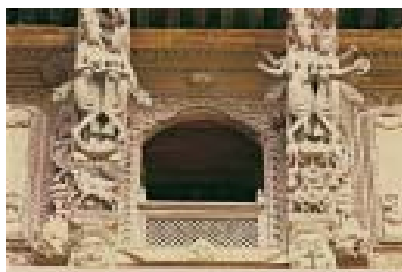
creation, a mere shadow of its antiquity, but thankfully, there are still some carvings in the valley from the 14th century which do reverberate with the memory of their glorious past.

Besides the struts, windows of various designs, the peacock window, the Desemaru Jhya, meaning the unparalleled one, fake and lattice windows have added to the beauty of Nepalese temples and monasteries. They have beautiful carvings on their pillars and door-frames, lintels and cornices. There are intricate carvings of a number of animals and birds including the story of Ramayana, the legendary Hindu epic - all of them contributing to their secular nature. These temples have erotic carvings at the bottom of their roof struts, a symbol of the tantric cult that was widely practised in Nepal during the 13th century.

The Nepalese wood carvers always used *Shorea Robusta* (Sal), and *Michelia Champaca* (Chapwood) to carve their best windows and doors, and now are also using *Adinga cardifolia* (Haldu) and



*Sissoo Dalbergia* (Rosewood), and many woodcarvers today are still using the original tools and methods, and following patterns and designs handed down through the family. The carvers can be seen throughout the city in Patan and Bhaktapur. And to see these carvings in their original locations, each Durbar Square has some absolutely beautiful examples, still vibrating with the sounds of the original carvers. ☺



body mind & soul 

# Astrology

Like the other significant parts of the Nepalese heritage Astrology too links its origin to the Vedas, the major source of virtually everything (for the Hindus) written thousands of years ago.

Mesh (Aries), Brish (Taurus), Mithun (Gemini), Karkat (Cancer), Simha (Leo), Kanya (Virgo), Tula (Libra), Brishchik (Scorpio), Dhanu (Sagittarius), Makar (Capricorn), Kumbha (Aquarius) and Meen (Pisces) are the 12 signs of the zodiac, and in Nepali they are called Rashi.

In Nepal the moment a baby is born, the first thing they do is note down the exact time of birth. Then it is given to the astrologer, who according to the position of the different planets in the solar system at that precise moment prepares a Cheena (horoscope). Cheena is a rectangular chart, which indicates the degree of influence of the planets from the solar world on the people born to a particular Rashi. Besides highlighting the positive as well as negative aspects of one's life comprising of achievements and failures, when it comes to facing difficult times the Nepalese people go to their astrologer with their Cheena for consultations and they act according to his recommendations.

As an astrological document, Cheena, they say, pre-determines the entire course of an individual's life.

For the Nepalese people on their birthday, the day is partly set aside to worship their planet that occupies a major position in their horoscope made according to the position of stars at the time of birth. It is also a day for them to please the other ones who are not placed in such a favourable position in their Cheena. As well on this day they also go through a number of rituals with their priest, who is offered grains and cash in order to stay in good health for the entire year. Astrologers are also consulted on various occasions like rice feeding, sacred thread and weddings. Tika in Dashain, Bhai Tika in Tihar, including a series of national festivals, are occasions when the astrologers are involved in choosing the auspicious hours for these festivities to take place. As well, they forecast the solar and lunar eclipses and their impact on the people.

When a person dies his Cheena is taken to the crematorium or ghat along with his dead body. ☯



# Ayurveda

Based on historical evidence Ayurveda has been practised in Nepal since the beginning of time. The Himalaya stand for purity, clarity and harmony, which is the goal and aspiration of every living creature. Nepal is one of the richest countries with diverse flora ranging from tropical to alpine within a small geographical area. Much of the flora is used for medicinal purposes. Nepal has a great tradition of Ayurveda, and it is considered to be part of the cultural and scientific heritage of the country.

Ayurveda is a Sanskrit word that means 'the science of life' or 'a natural way of living'. Ayurveda, is thought of as a life science, and includes yoga, meditation and the natural and spiritual sciences. It looks at every person as a unique individual, and seeks to understand and to correct the imbalances and restore the innate intelligence and harmony of the person.

The objectives of Ayurveda are the development of awareness which leads to a state of desirelessness; the promotion of health and the achievement of longevity; the prevention of disease; and the curing of disease. The Ayurveda practitioner first of all asks a series of questions to identify the person's 'type', after which it is possible to diagnose the problem, and suggest a series of activities and practices together with ayurvedic medicines. Neither stands alone, each patient is treated in both ways.

In order to understand Ayurveda in more depth, it is possible to visit Nepal to be treated by an Ayurveda practitioner, or to meet with practitioners to understand the philosophy on a more intellectual level. Excursions can be organised to visit practitioners, to meet rural people collecting the herbs, and to meet traditional healers such as Shamans and Jhankris.

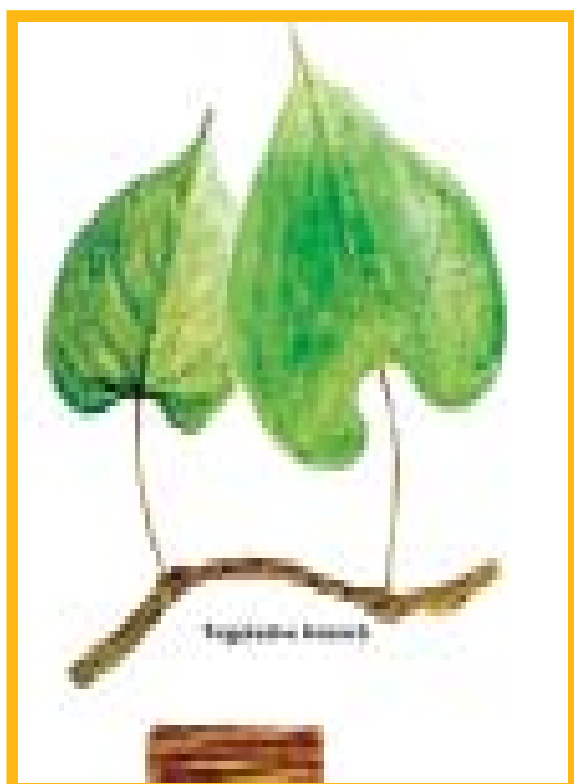
You could learn about the cultivation and harvesting of the herbs, and the treatment and final production of the herbal medicines. In Nepal there are libraries with manuscripts of herbal remedies and historical facts about Ayurveda, as well as a herbal specimen museum. The institutions involved in Ayurveda in Nepal include the **Ministry of Health**; the **Ayurveda Hospital at Naradevi** in Kathmandu; the **Council of Ayurvedic Medicine**; a number of Ayurvedic pharmaceutical companies, the **Himalayan Ayurveda Research Institute**, and the **Ayurveda Health Home and Research Centre** in Kathmandu.

Contact **Ayurveda Health Home & Research Centre** at Thamel, (Tridevi Marg), Phone 977-1-414843 Fax 977-1-415703 Email : [ayurveda@wlink.com.np](mailto:ayurveda@wlink.com.np) ask for Dr. R.R. Koirala Consultant Ayurveda & Yoga Physician.

**Nepal Ayurveda Society**, Tilingatar, Dhapasi-7, KTM. Phone: 358761 Email : [ayurveda@wlink.com.np](mailto:ayurveda@wlink.com.np) ☯



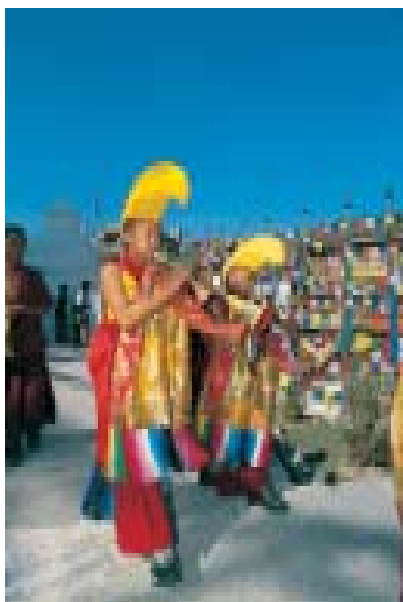






# Buddhism

## Buddhist Studies



The Himalaya, long renowned as the abode of mystics and yogis, is the birthplace of one of the greatest healers known to mankind, Shakyamuni Gautam Buddha. Today in the valley of Kathmandu there flourish many monasteries, schools and teachers where the teachings of Shakyamuni can be heard, just as they were taught two and a half thousand years ago.

What makes Buddhism unique is its scientific basis and logical explanation of the phenomena known as life, without the reliance on an external creator. The Buddha tells us that we are responsible for our lives and our environment, and that through practical methods of transformation, we can achieve enlightenment in this very lifetime.

Lord Buddha's teachings of Peace are more relevant today than ever before. Where better to find them than in the mighty Himalaya, birthplace of Buddha, where the teachings are practised as a way of life and a smile comes more easily than a frown. Peace, the Buddha taught, begins from within our own hearts and minds.

Two of the largest Buddhist pilgrimage sites in the world, Boudhanath and Swayambhunath attract thousands of Buddhists, circumnambulating the great stupas at dawn and sunset. Peace seekers and peace makers come to Nepal to learn the methods of 'the middle way' science. The many monasteries and schools of Buddhism here offer an answer

to the prayers of those wishing for peace of mind and happiness.

Seek a Master here with a sincere heart, and you shall find, for here in Nepal the door to enlightenment is not completely closed, and the petals of the thousand petalled lotus still unfold if you know where to look for them.

For the ancient legends taught that Shambala lies in the heart of the Himalaya and the Himalaya lie in the heart of many Buddhists, where Shambala exists, only those who have experienced it may tell. If there is no risk, there is no gain, come and see, experience, listen, the words of the Buddha still pass the lips of the people of this land, and those wishing to hear them, will not be disappointed.

Contact **Ka-Mying Shedrub Ling Monastery in Bouddhanath**. There are annual seminars for Westerners interested in Buddhism. Tulku Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche offers Saturday morning teachings each weekend year-round. Audiences seldom number less than 100. Travel agencies from overseas now include a tour of the monastery and an introduction to Tibetan Buddhism in their activities in Kathmandu.

Contact the **International Buddhist Centre at Buddha Nagar Lumbini Nepal** for all the activities available in Lumbini. Enquire about the Lumbini Sacred Garden, the Lumbini Development Trust and the International Buddhist Society. ☺





Wrapped in innumerable myths and legends, Nepal is a land of magic and mystery. The confrontation between its millions of gods and goddesses on the one hand and the most powerful demons on the other, at various points gives a meaningful perspective to this magic and mystery. The former represents positive spirits, and the latter negative ones. Somewhere between the two stands the faith-healer, almost like a catalyst, who, with his invocation and possession of positive spirits (white magic) manages to drive away the negative spirits (black magic) inflicted on his clients.

The cult of faith-healing in Nepal dates back to pre-historic times, with the faith-healers called "*Dhamis*" and "*Jhankris*" practising Shamanism in the villages and remote mountain regions. Their counterparts in the cities and suburbs are known as "*Gubhaju*", "*Matas*" and "*Jharphookes*".

# Healing

## Faith Healers and Tantric Healing in the Himalayas

The “*Jhankris*” are shamans, who, with the garlands of tiny bells around their necks tremble and chant at the beat of the drum which they play during the invocation and possession of spirits, and sometimes their elaborate performance runs for the whole night. Often their ritual also involves sacrifice of either a rooster or a black goat depending upon the nature of the complication. The others are incredibly simple people, a broomstick, some grains of husked rice, a pinch of ash, incense sticks and a couple of spoonfuls of water, charged with tantric spirits is all they need to come out with a miracle.

India witnessed its great tantric period between the 7th and 13th centuries. The visit of Padmansambhava, the great Indian spiritual master, to Tibet during the 8th century, his tantric encounters with his Tibetan counter-parts in the process of introducing his own brand of Buddhism in Tibet, and the subsequent visit of Atisha, the Indian Buddhist scholar during the 13th century bears ample evidence. Then came the Mugal invasion in India which was responsible for the re-emergence of the tantric cult both in Nepal and Tibet. While in Nepal, it fell into the hands of *Gubhajas* who came from the highest priestly class of the Newar community, in Tibet it was the Lamas from the monasteries who had access to this cult. This is how over the centuries, tantrism has succeeded in becoming an integral part of faith healing both in Nepal and Tibet.

Tantrism does have its intricate features, where it means many things to many people. For the common people ‘vajra’ and ‘dorje’ in Tantrism signify a mere curative ritual, however for the spiritual grand masters it has also been a path to liberation and enlightenment ☸

## Homoeopathy

Homoeopathy is a system of natural remedies made from animal, vegetable, and mineral extracts. These remedies are prepared in such a way that they are non toxic, and do not cause side effects. Homoeopathic medicine is prescribed according to the law of ‘*similia similibus curenatur*’, which means let likes be treated alike and opposite.

Homoeopathy and Ayurveda have their similarities, but in homoeopathy there is a peculiar phenomena whereby different medicines are used often to treat the same condition in different people, and the same medicine may be used to treat different conditions, even totally opposite ‘diseases’ such as diarrhoea and constipation. In Homoeopathy like Ayurveda, it is the patient that the homoeopathic practitioner concerns himself with rather than the disease. Ayurveda and Homoeopathy are often compatible, and can be used together.

The Ministry of Health has a homoeopathic division, and practitioners and pharmacies can be located throughout the city of Kathmandu. ☺



# Meditation

**Vipassana** is one of the most ancient meditation techniques. Long lost to humanity, it was rediscovered by Gautum Buddha more than 2500 years ago. Vipassana means 'to see things as they really are'; it is the process of self purification by self observation. One starts by observing the natural breath to concentrate the mind. With this sharpened awareness one proceeds to observe the changing nature of body and mind and experience the universal truths of impermanence, suffering and egolessness. The entire path (*Dhamma*) is a universal remedy for universal problems and has nothing to do with any organised religion or sectarianism. For this reason, it can be practised freely by all without conflict with race, caste or religion, in any place, and at any time and will prove equally beneficial to one and all.

Vipassana is an art of living which frees the individual from all the negativities of mind, such as anger, greed and ignorance. It is a practice which develops positive, creative energy for the betterment of the individual and society.

To uncover further truths through meditation, you could pursue the following in Nepal :

Ganden Yiga Chozin Buddhist Meditation Centre (Pokhara)

([www.dharmatours.com/gyc](http://www.dharmatours.com/gyc))

Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre ([www.dharmatours.com/hbmc](http://www.dharmatours.com/hbmc))

Ishayas' Ascension ([www.ishaya.com](http://www.ishaya.com))

Kopan Monastery ([www.kopan-monastery.com](http://www.kopan-monastery.com))

Nepal Vipassana Center

(email : [ngc@stp.com.np](mailto:ngc@stp.com.np))

Osho Tapoban International Commune ([www.oshotapoban.com](http://www.oshotapoban.com))

Many of the monasteries in Bouddhanath and Swyambhunath (see Buddhist studies in this brochure for more on Buddhism and monasteries)

At the Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre there are courses in Dance Mandal (Healing Meditation

Movement), plus weekly introductory meditation courses conducted by the resident teacher, guided meditation classes twice a week, and at certain times of the year Mandala Workshops. On Saturdays Dharma teachings, video showings, and residential Buddhist courses two to three times per month are conducted throughout the year.

At Kopan Monastery there are monthly courses during March, April, May, June, September and October. There are 7 and 10 day courses which include meditation teachings, and discussion groups, led by a Western nun, Ani Karin. They are residential courses which include food and a choice of accommodation at the monastery. For one month from mid November to mid December each year there is a meditation course at Kopan Monastery which allows a more intensive encounter with the practice of Tibetan Buddhism. It consists of intensive teachings, meditations and group discussion, and during the second half the Eight Mahayana Precepts are taken daily.

In the lower Solu Khumbu there is a small monastery, Thubten Shedrup Ling, where you can take a personal retreat under the guidance of a fully qualified teacher, and at the Lawudo Retreat Center at 4,000 meters high in the Solu Khumbu there is a further retreat centre for just a few meditators.

The Ishayas' Ascension is a series of simple, profoundly effective mechanical techniques that allow one to rise beyond, or Ascend, stress and self-defeating beliefs. Once this occurs, it is possible to be fully centered in the heart and reclaim our naturally enlightened state of freedom and innocence. The Ishayas' Ascension is so effective because the techniques are based on the fundamental principles of praise, gratitude and love, drawing one inward in a way that is extremely charming to the mind and body. The effects are immediate and cumulative. As the nervous system becomes more and more clear, the Ishayas' Ascension begins to serve its true purpose: the heart and mind come into alignment, producing a state of constant inner

stillness, oneness and clarity. In this state, because you are no longer reacting to the limitations of the past or projections to the future, life is lived fully in the present.

"The Ascension Attitudes involve no religious beliefs; indeed they involve no beliefs of any kind ... they can be equally well practised by the Christian, the Muslim, the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Jew, the agnostic, the atheist. They tap into universal human states and inspire Ascension from wherever one happens to be." **Maharishi Sadashiva Isham (M.S.I.) Ascension.**

In November 1999, March 2000 and May/June 2001 the first Ascension courses were held in the Himalaya in Kathmandu. Ascension will be available in Kathmandu in the future. Register your interest in Ascension in the Himalaya by emailing **Vidya at Ishaya@ishaya.com** and look on the website: **www.ishaya.com** or **www.ishaya.org**

The Nepal Vipassana Centre is located in the hills surrounding the Kathmandu Valley, at Budhanilkantha. Courses are for ten days, with Noble Silence observed from the evening of Day 1 until the morning of Day 10. (participants usually leave on Day 11). There is no charge for the Dhamma teachings. The cost of all boarding and lodging is met by donations from the old students. For this reason, no donation is accepted from a new student on joining the course, however at the end of the course on Day 10 participants can express their feelings of satisfaction and goodwill by offering donations in accordance with their hearts and means.

**Nepal Vipassana Centre, City office:** Jyoti Bhawan, Kantipath, Kathmandu, Ph.: 977-1-250581. **Budhanilkantha Vipassana Centre, Ph.:** 977-1-371655. Email: **ngc@stp.com.np** (no website)

**Lumbini International Vipassana Meditation Centre, at the birth place**

of Gautama Buddha, Lumbini, Nepal. **The Panditarama Meditation Centre in Lumbini.** Meditation method followed includes intensive Vipassana meditation in the tradition of the Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw of Myanmar, with alternate sitting meditation and formal walking meditation, daily interviews and regular Dhamma talks in English, Burmese and German. Dormitory style accommodation, clean and healthy Burmese food, both meat and vegetarian available. Meditators may schedule their individual retreat from a few days up to three months. Two formal retreats are conducted each year in December and February. Resident teacher is Venerable Vivekananda a German bhikkhu (monk) who trained in Myanmar for nine years. **Contact: Panditarama Meditation Centre Ph.: 977-1-80118 or on Email: panditarama@mos.com.np**

**Osho Tapoban International Commune** is located in a forest to the west of the Kathmandu Valley, at Tapoban. Its sole objective is to help seekers of spiritual growth, under the guidance of Osho, by providing a place for meditation, retreat and self transformation. A day in Tapoban starts with Dynamic meditation, Osho's own technique created for the modern man or woman. And at sunset, everybody in the commune merges together with the master. During the day other activities include Samathi Sathana, Chakra breathing meditation, Chakra sound/Nataraj, video discourses, Kundalini meditation and evening Satsang. There are monthly meditation camps from 3 days to 7 days, and meditation camps at each full moon. **Contact: Osho Tapoban by email at tapoban@enet.com.np or the website: www.oshotapoban.com** ☯



# Myths

## Myths and Folklore

Perhaps nowhere on earth myth features so prominently in the beliefs of the people as it does in Nepal. For Nepal has millions of myth-ridden gods and goddesses, mighty snow-clad mountains - some of them the very embodiment of the gods and goddesses themselves. Added to this, are the rivers and valleys - each of them dotted with a legendary myth of their own. Not even the planetary system in the universe escapes these myths. Indeed myth in Nepal amounts to a lively legend which manifests itself in the folklores of its diversified ethnic communities. That is why even a layman in Nepal is a great story-teller, be it a part of a myth he has heard or something of his own coinage.

### Why Ganesh is Elephant Headed?

Ganesh is the elephant-headed god who is in the forefront of all worship. As the remover of all sorts of obstacles no ritual is undertaken without worshipping him first. This is what the myth has to say about his strange looking human body. "It says that Parvati, the wife of Shiva, was in some kind of trouble with her over-romantic or jealous husband, who always needed to know too much. Her friends advised her to employ her own body-guard who would safeguard her privacy. So she collected some 'bukuwa' (a kind of paste) to wash her body, and from this she moulded a child and gave life to him. One day she asked him to guard her door and not to allow anybody in while she took a shower, but Shiva returned home and wishing to enter her room was prevented. Shiva became angry, and not knowing who the child was, decapitated him. Parvati came out and cried at the fate of her son, while Shiva trying to pacify her ordered his servants to find any creature, chop the head and bring it to him. They found a white elephant chopped its head off and brought it to Shiva, who added the head to the torso of Ganesh and provided life to him."



### Why the stone Ammonite fossils (shaligram), the Basil Plant (tulasi) and the Banyan Tree (pipal) are holy in Nepal?

"The story goes that in earliest times Britasura was a very powerful demon. He conducted a reign of terror in which the troubled people were scared to death. Even the most powerful gods including Lord Shiva were no match for him when it came to fighting. Britasura was to be killed at any cost but he wouldn't die as long as the chastity of his wife, Brinda, remained intact. Lord Vishnu in the disguise of the demon succeeded in violating Brinda's chastity and the demon was killed in the subsequent encounter. The furious Brinda cursed Vishnu so that he became a stone, plant and tree. These three are regarded as some of his holy incarnations and are worshipped even to this day."



### Why the moon has ascending and descending nodes?

The story goes, “that the moon was very handsome, attractive and enjoyed its life with 28 constellations. One day, he saw Ganesh and laughed at his appearance, but Ganesh so humiliated cursed the moon that he should be destroyed by tuberculosis. The curse worked immediately with the moon getting thinner and darker every day. The worried moon went to Shiva who advised him to go and apologise to Ganesh. Ganesh blessed him for his apology, and said that for only 15 days would he lose his rays, and again would begin to grow bigger and stronger. So now we have the cycle of the moon, growing to full moon and then waning”.

### Why does the Seti River flow partially underground at Pokhara, and how did Kali make the deepest gorge?

The folklore has it that “Seti” the white river, and “Kali” the black river, that flow from Jomsom are sisters born to the same Himalaya. Once they had a bet as to which of them would make it first to the ocean. In their wild, adventurous journey to the big sea, they ran an amazing race. Their shooting down from the Himalaya, their falling from the cliffs as waterfalls, the breaking down of rocks, the knocking off of mountains, hills and highlands that stood in their way, was an incredible sight to behold. Upon reaching Pokhara Seti saw an old woman ploughing her field and another working on the slanting roof of a village house. She felt sorry for these women and went underground to avoid any such encounters.



Kali, on the other hand, came across a different situation in the course of the journey. There were male porters in bare feet carrying heavy loads on their backs on narrow mountain trails, to support their wives and children at home. Kali too after Jomsom decided to hide herself by digging the deepest gorge on earth.

Then both Seti and Kali during their further journey to the ocean joined a number of big rivers. By the time they reached their destination they had learnt a lot more about human suffering on this planet. That was when they decided to visit their parental home, the Himalayas, in the form of rains, but maintained the usual course of their river without complaint. ☺





# Pilgrimage

## A Pilgrimage to Muktinath

*By Anna Howe*



You are sure to become enchanted by the sight of the bewildering Annapurna and Dhaulagiri ranges as you approach the Pokhara Valley by air or surface. The next morning when you discover the sky clear and the mountains in view, you then know you are on your special journey to Muktinath.

Once the flight takes off you are flying between the ranges with the river below in the deepest gorge on earth. It is a spectacular sight way beyond your ex-



pectations. Just under the Dhaulagiri icefall the riverbed widens, and you get your first glimpse of the stone houses with juniper and firewood stacked on the flat roofs. In no time you are landing on the runway on the banks of the Kali Gandaki River, leaving the Hindu sub-continent behind and entering the world of the Thakalis, Gurungs, Managis and the Tibetan Khampas.

The people of Jomsom, the Thakali tribe, have been traders for the past two thousand years trading salt from Tibet for rice and flour from the lowlands, of this trade

the people of the upper Kali Gandaki were influenced by the Bon Po doctrine of Tibet as early as the 12th century. A new faith known as Lamaism, which was influenced by Tantric Mahayana Buddhists on the Bon Po, is now more popular in the upper Kali Gandaki region, and its influence can be seen in several village monasteries as well as in the houses.

Hanging demon traps in the doorways and at the corners of the houses in the form of sun crosses, dead rabbits and peh moussas hanging just inside the door, and skulls and horns placed on the roof - all

offer protection to the inhabitants. Combined with this are the religious wall murals and the prayer flags flying on the house roofs.

Leaving Jomsom you follow the vastly wide Kali Gandaki River passing traders coming from Tibet and local village people who may have already walked two or three days to come to Jomsom to buy and sell goods. Dressed in traditional chuba (Tibetan dress) with colourful scarves wrapped around their heads and beautiful turquoise and coral necklaces hanging around their necks they remind you of the Tibet of the past.

A half hour walk out of Jomsom you will see three chortens hugging the cliff covered with small juniper bushes and hundreds of white kartas left as offerings hanging from the branches. Behind the juniper there is a small cave where Guru Rinpoche stayed the night on his journey through the Upper Kali Gandaki.

The way continues on the rocky river bed until you come to a somewhat smaller river entering the Kali Gandaki from the right. Take this river bed trail to the Bon Po village of Lumpira - seldom visited by tourists. Behind a chorten you will find a path lined with poplar trees leading up to the village. The Gumpa sits a little bit away from the village, and the main sight will be many village women doing Kora at all times of the day. There is a trail going straight across the river that then climbs up to high pastures. This will bring you down into the small village of Eklai Bhattai where there are four houses all providing food and lodging.

The Kagbeni trail veers to the left just after the last guest house - the right trail leads directly to Muktinath. Just a few minutes on the trail on the right you will see a very large 'Om mani' carved into the boulders and if you look further you will see the iridescent green fields and the walled village and red gumpa of Kagbeni. (of course it does depend on what time of the year as to whether you see the green fields).

Behind the gumpa stands the turreted palace and within the walls of the village are very old whitewashed houses intertwined between small alleys that seem to lead everywhere but nowhere. Kagbeni is one of the palace forts and is constructed like a fortress to ward off spirits and bandits during the bygone trading era. The monastery has been well cared for in the past 570 years, with a collection of rare statues and other rare ritual artifacts, and until the middle of the 18th century housed over 100 monks from five villages, now there are only about 5 monks in residence.

Kagbeni is an oasis with apple and apricot orchards, and barley fields standing against the vast landscape of silver grey river stones and shale cliffs of brown. There are guest houses and good food, and it is a restful place to stay before the steep climb begins to Jarkot and finally Muktinath.

Jharkot is on a prominent spot overlooking the Kali Gandaki, with a crumbling fortress wall the only remaining evidence of an original palace. At the other end of the village there is a beautifully maintained monastery, and also the Jharkot Tibetan Medicine Hospital and school, well worth a visit to see the herbs collected and dried, and a diagnosis from the Tibetan doctor is quite a special experience.

From Jharkot it is two hours to Muktinath - the place of 108 fountains, with the sacred temples of Muktinath just below Thorung La in a grove of trees. Every tree is laden with prayer flags, and here you could build your own chorten. Here in the early 19th century the Hindus consecrated a Vishnu temple and named it Muktinath - Lord of Liberation. Against a backdrop of incredible starkness you can sit and stare to the south the snow covered Annapurna range, or to the north the Tibetan plateau. ☯





# Pilgrimage

## Other Pilgrimage Sites

**Balmiki Ashram** - The Balmiki Ashram was a retreat used by the great Hindu sage Balmiki. This is where Sita came to live with her two sons Labha and Kusha after separating from Ram. Various statues were unearthed in the area during an archaeological excavation in the late 1960s. A temple to Sita has been built recently. The Ashram is situated in a forest on the bank of the Tribena river, at the south-western corner of the Royal Chitwan National Park, and it can be reached by boat.

**Devghat** - Devghat is where the Trisuli and the Kali Gandaki rivers meet to form the Narayani, a major tributary of the Ganga. Confluences of major rivers such as these are considered very holy. Devghat is situated 6 kilometers to the north of Bharatpur, the gateway to the Royal Chitwan National Park where hotels and guest houses are available. There are daily flights and bus services from Kathmandu. On the day of the Makar Sankranti festival in January, pilgrims converge here to take holy dips.

**Gosaikunda** - Gosaikunda Lake is believed to have been created by Lord Shiva when he thrust his trident into a mountain to draw water so that he could cool his burning throat after swallowing poison. There is a large rock at the center of the lake which is said to be the remains of a Shiva shrine. Gosaikunda (altitude 4,380 meters) is situated to the north of Kathmandu on the Langtang trekking trail. It is a two day trek from Dhunche, 118 kilometers from Kathmandu.

**Manakamana** - The temple of Manakamana lies atop a 1,302 meter hill. The deity is one of the manifestations of the Hindu Goddess Bhagawati who is be-

lieved to have the power to fulfill wishes. It is one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in Nepal. 125 kilometers to the west of Kathmandu, it is a steep three hour hike to the hilltop, and recently a cable car has been built from Cheres, which has made life so much easier for all the Nepalese pilgrims, especially the elderly.

**Simraungadh** - Simraungadh is the capital of the former kingdom of Tirhut, the seat of a rich civilisation which peaked between the 11th and 14th centuries. The ancient city suffered terrible devastation at the hands of past invaders, but its cultural glory can still be seen in the archaeological treasures there. There are also many Hindu temples which draw pilgrims in large numbers. Simraungadh is situated in the Terai plains south of Kathmandu. The most convenient access is from Birgunj (270 kilometers from Kathmandu), or you could fly to Simara and then drive to Birgunj (only 25 kilometers). Simraungadh is a further 25 kilometers from Birgunj. ☺



# Symbols

## Sacred Symbols of Hinduism and Buddhism

For primitive man what mattered most was his survival which was not easy as every now and then he did encounter different kinds of negative forces of nature, some of which threatened his existence, so in sheer agony and desperation he prayed to mother nature and the celestial bodies for their protection. The gesture this pre-historic man used while sending his prayers constitutes the first symbol of man's genuine worship on this planet.

In the process of this evolution, man's quest for knowledge led him to create his own religion, and since then man has travelled a long way sometimes falling victim to his own creed, at times elevating himself on to a spiritual plane of enlightenment. There are three thousand man-made major religions in the world today followed by around twenty five thousand sects - each with the creed and sacred symbols of their own.

In Nepal, however, Hinduism and Buddhism have been the two major religions

that have pervaded the entire gamut of Nepalese life and culture. Over the centuries, Hindus and Buddhists in Nepal have lived in harmony sharing the noblest aspects of each others religious traditions. This is evident not only in their daily rituals, but also in the many sacred religious symbols they share in common.

Take "OM" for instance, which precedes all invocations both in Hinduism and Buddhism. For the Hindus OM (A-U-M) is a metaphysical symbol that stands for Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva - the three main Gods in the Hindu trinity. For the Buddhists "OM" which comes before "MANE PADME HUM" refers to the divine spark in the human heart. "OM" being the primal sound (the Big Bang) in the creation of the cosmos is something which people from both creeds take as the symbol of the infinite.

Be it in the field of metaphysics or mysticism, ritual artifacts or paraphernalia for worship, Buddhism owes a lot to Hinduism when it comes to its hundreds of sacred religious symbols. At the same time the prayer flag 'Mane', the big prayer wheel 'Mane Largo', and the small prayer wheel with "Om Mane Padme Hum" inscribed on them do give Buddhism a distinctive character of its own. ☸



# Tibetan Medicine

## Tibetan Medicine

The Tibetan medical system is one of the world's oldest known medical traditions. There were many evidences such as applying residual barley from *chang* (Tibetan beer) on swollen parts; drinking hot water for indigestion and using melted butter for bleeding, and these gradually formed the basis of the art of healing in Tibet.

Tibetan medicine is a science, an art and a philosophy that provides a holistic approach to health care.

### Diagnosis in Tibetan Medicine

The diagnostic techniques include visual observation, touch and interrogation.

Visual Observation - This involves checking a patient's skin complexion, the colour and texture of his/her blood, nails, sputum, faeces, and other general conditions. Special attention is paid to the condition of the patient's tongue and urine.

Touch - Pulse reading forms the most important touching method employed in Tibetan medicine. Only after ensuring an important set of preconditions, the physician proceeds with a pulse diagnosis. This involves placing the three middle fingers at the patient's radial arteries.

Interrogation - Interrogation forms another important clinical aspect of the diagnosis. There are three main elements to a medical interrogation. Determining the causative





factors, determining the site of the illness, studying the signs and symptoms; this involves the doctor asking the patient about the sort of food and drink he/she has been consuming, and what kind of physical and mental behaviours he/she has been experiencing.

Tibetan Medicines - Tibetan medicines take various forms, from decoctions, powders, general pills, precious pills, and syrups, and are prescribed in small doses - a fact that reflects the emphasis Tibetan medicine places on gentle treatment.

There are a number of Tibetan medical practitioners and healing centres in Kathmandu, which can be visited and consultations can be arranged as well. Study in the field may also be possible.

Contact: Kumphen Tibetan Medical Clinic (Dr. Kunsang Dorjee) in Chetrapati near Thamel  
Kathmandu Ph. : 977-1-251920

Contact: Kailash Medical & Astro Society (Lady Dr Tsering Choekyi) in Boudhha inside Hotel Tibet, Kathmandu, Ph. : 977-1-484869 Fax : 977-1-474625 ☯



# Yoga

Yoga = 'Unity' 'Oneness'. Derived from the Sanskrit word 'yog' which means 'to join'. The science of life, the integration of mind and body, the union of the spirit to the divine, via tools left behind from rishis, ascetics and yogis of ages past.

To many, the mention of "yoga" conjures up images of postures (Asanas) to develop flexibility, general body health and of course awareness. This is just the beginning. While yoga's central theme remains the highest goal of the spiritual path; yogic practices can give direct and tangible benefits to everyone regardless of their spiritual aims.

The Eight Fold Path of Yoga (not to be confused with Buddha's Eight Fold Path), from sage Patanjali's yoga sutra delves deeply into the morality of living and plunges into the human psyche. It consists of : Yama (self restraints), Niyama (self observances) Asana, Pranayama (breath techniques), Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation) and Samadhi (identification with pure consciousness).

There is an inter-relationship between yoga and meditation. Part of Lord Buddha's contribution to humanity was to focus on meditation to develop Samadhi (while focusing on a platform of ethics and morality). You can choose whether to focus wholly on yoga, or more specifically on meditation, or saturate yourself in both of these.

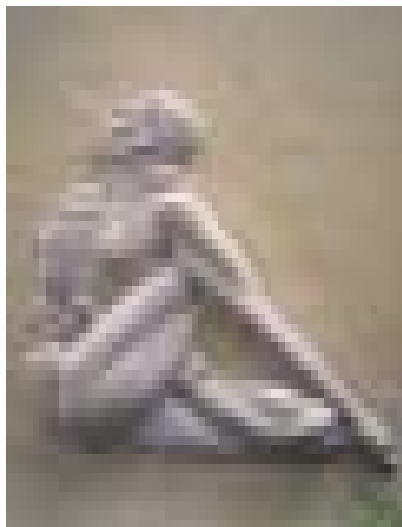
For millennia, the Himalayas have played a key role in mankind's journey to self realisation. Its total isolation from the rest of the world, its serene solitude has been an ideal environment for looking within. Nepal has inherited this unique past which is evident in its every day life and culture when it comes to diving deep into your consciousness or floating in to-

tal awareness. It still does have individuals and institutions capable of guiding you to this noble path; to the cosmic universe which has an infinite beauty of its own.

There are many classes from which to choose. Kathmandu also offers many practitioners/Ayurvedic healers who hold yoga as a primary source for the treatment of illness. Please see Ayurveda Section

There are many branches of yoga, such as : raja, hatha, jnana, karma, bhakti, mantra, kundalini and laya. Make sure you are not selecting a particular branch at random. Here are a few tips for choosing the right path.

1. The teacher's personal conduct, as one who "lives yoga",
2. On which area of yoga do you wish to focus,
3. Ability to communicate with your teacher,
4. Opportunities for personalised instruction (if required),
5. Intensive/live in courses if desired.
6. Value for money ☺



# Yoga Classes

Kathmandu in particular is where most yoga happens. Throughout the city and in particular Thamel (the tourist area), there are restaurants many with bulletin boards, listing all the activities taking place in the city. This is where you will find information on yoga. There are a few yoga studios, including one near Naxal, where you could enrol in an already existing course, or where you could enquire about private tuition and classes.

Contact The Kathmandu Center of Healing, at Maharajgunj in Kathmandu, Phone : 977 1 413094 or 425946  
email : [center@ancientmassage.com](mailto:center@ancientmassage.com)  
website : [www.ancientmassage.com](http://www.ancientmassage.com)  
(The Kathmandu Center of Healing also offers training in Ancient Massage or Thai Massage, Reiki, Yoga, and Tai Chi and other healing arts by masters in these and other disciplines.)

*"Iyengar", photo courtesy of Ms Lieve Aerts*



A number of the four and five star hotels also include yoga, relaxation and meditation classes in their fitness centres.

Contact Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Kamaladi Ganesthan in Kathmandu, Phone : 977 1 221875, Fax 977 1 251409, email : [hbmc@mos.com.np](mailto:hbmc@mos.com.np) website : [www.dharmatours.com/hbmc](http://www.dharmatours.com/hbmc) (see the Meditation and Buddhist Studies entries for more information about the Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre).

Contact: Hansada Yoga Ashram, Janagal Banepa, outside Kathmandu Ph. : 977-1-531718, or 530260, or in Banepa Ph. 977- 1-61536.

Contact: Arogya Ashram, Gaushala in Kathmandu. (Natural Health & Yoga Centre) Phone 977-1-470776 Email:[counsel@counsel.mos.com.np](mailto:counsel@counsel.mos.com.np) Patanjali Yoga Center Chaunni Kathmandu Phone 977-1-278437 Email : [saptayoga@hotmail.com](mailto:saptayoga@hotmail.com) ☺



nature



# Animals

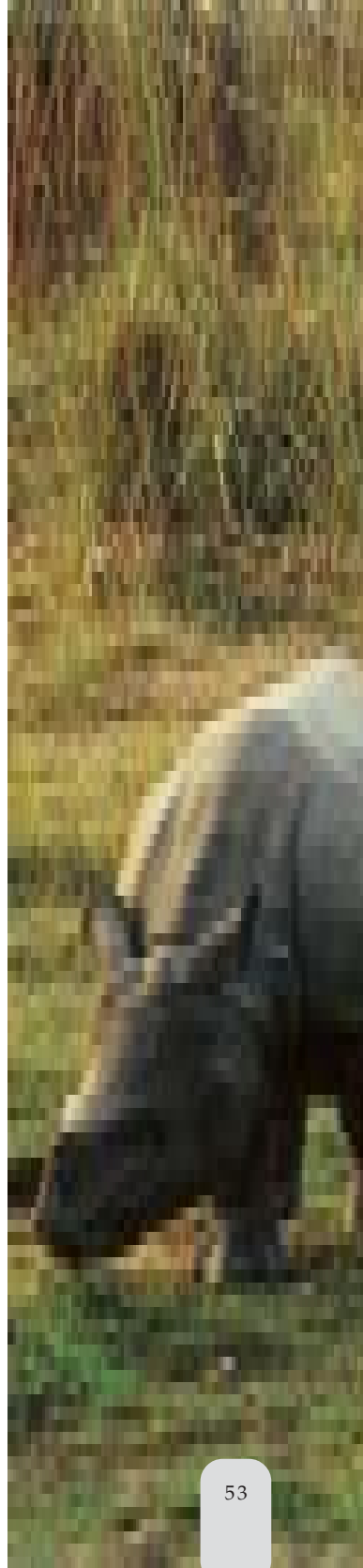
The **Asiatic Elephant** is found in great numbers in the Royal Bardia National Park in western Nepal. This park is on a traditional elephant migratory route from the western Terai to Corbett National Park in India.

The **one horned Rhinoceros** can be found in the parks along the Terai. There are very few **buffalo** left in the wild (unlike parts of Africa) although there is a small herd near the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve in the eastern Terai. The **tiger** is an endangered species, and the **leopard or panther** is even more elusive. And again most elusive is the **snow leopard** the mammal of fables, stories and novels and rare sightings.

Other animals include **sloth bear**, monkeys, langur, lesser panda, **chital or spotted deer**, **barking deer**, and the **musk deer** (in small numbers in the middle hills). In the Sukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve in the south west corner of Nepal there are herds of **swamp deer**, with the **black buck** found in the Bardia region. Near Lumbini the **Blue Bull Antelope** or **Nilgai** has made a comeback from 2-5 animals in the early 1990's to nearly 200.

The **wild dog**, the **golden jackal** and the **striped hyena** are there too throughout Nepal. And the ubiquitous **wild boar**, a meat favoured by the Nepalese at festival time.

All the National parks of Nepal have a variety of these animals and it is possible to have specific journeys designed to sight some of these but as to whether you will see the more elusive felines, that will be a matter of luck. ☺



# Birds



Nepal boasts 848 recorded species of birds. An ardent bird watcher can travel the length and breadth of Nepal doing little else but bird watching. Birding is possible everywhere in Nepal from the hot plains in the south, the Kathmandu Valley in the mid hills, to the mountainous regions of the north.

The Kathmandu Valley has four major bird watching areas, and one can start on the banks of the Bagmati and Manohra rivers. Birds sighted along these rivers are the Egrets, Herons, Kingfishers, Ibisbill, Wood Sandpipers and Plovers. The Chobar gorge is particularly recommended as an area for birds as its isolation from human habitation has encouraged their presence.

Phulchowki is another ideal site, with a Red-headed Trogon, a very rare bird sighted there in April 2000. (It was last seen in Nepal 44 years ago.) Phulchowki is 2760 metres and 18kms southeast of Kathmandu, and is reached via Godavari and the Botanical gardens. Walking can start from behind the gardens, with a combination of trails and roads. The hillside is covered with forest featuring outstanding flora as well as diverse birds. About 90 species have been recorded in this area including the endemic Spring Babbler, as well as the Cutia, Mountain Hawk Eagle, Rufous Bellied Pied Woodpeckers and the Black-throated Parrotbill, to name a few.

Two other areas of the valley are The Shivapuri Watershed and Wildlife Reserve, 12kms north of the city, and Nagarjun in the north west. Shivapuri can be reached two ways, either from Sundarilal or Budanilkantha. The reserve is managed by the Nepalese Army and it costs Rs 250/- for foreigners to enter. (Rs1,000/- is charged for a movie or video camera). Some of the birds in this area are the Laughing Thrush, Crested Serpent Eagle, Little Pied Flycatchers, Ruby - Throats, and Babblers. At Nagarjun at 2105 metres pheasants, magpies, sunbirds and ruby-throats are found.

Koshi Barrage and Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve are in the eastern Terai, to the far east of Nepal. The Koshi is great for waterfowl and waders, with about 26 varieties of ducks alone. Here the method of viewing is by boat, gliding through the waters in the stillness of the early morning and evenings. Over 450 species have been sighted here, including Black Ibis, Honey Kites, Ospreys, Black Headed Orioles, Peregrine Falcon, Partidges, and storks.

Chitwan is in the lowlands of Nepal, known as the Terai. The **Royal Chitwan National Park** is the best known site in Nepal for bird-watching. Bird watching needs to be done from the safety of a chair, the back of an elephant or in a jeep (by far the last choice). And if you wish to walk, accompanied by a guide or a naturalist, or preferably an ornithologist, all the jungle lodges inside and outside the park can arrange a guide. The area consists of Sal forest, riverine forest and grasslands, with three rivers forming the boundaries of the park. Some 500 species have been recorded in Chitwan, and some of them are Blue Indian Roller, Storkbilled Kingfishers, Bengal Florican, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Bee-eaters, and Cormorants.

In Pokhara, 200 kilometers west of Kathmandu, the forests around the banks of Phewa Tal and Begnas Tal, (two beautiful lakes) are ideal for bird watching, particularly in the less inhabited areas.

In winter around Phewa Lake you find egrets, herons, pipits, buntings plus gulls, terns, ducks and falcons. Begnas Lake has slopes and wet fields surrounding it, where ducks, pheasant-tailed Jacana, Happpy Grey Bellied Tesias, and bulbuls are seen.

**Bardia National Park** is covered with Sal forest and riverine forest and grassland much like Chitwan, but Bardia has the mighty Karnali river flowing by the park. Boating on the Karnali is a great way to

see the birds, and one would see the Ruddy Shelduck, Oriental Pied Hornbills, Night Herons and Purple Herons, plus many more. In the higher areas of Nepal the trek routes are good for birdwatching, including the Jomson Trek, the Annapurna Sanctuary, Gosaikunda and Langtang routes, Sagarmatha National Park, the Rara-Jumla trek route, the Arun Valley and Ilam in the far east. Nepal's national bird - the beautiful Himalayan Monal (locally known as "Danfe") is mostly found in the Sagarmatha National Park and the Langtang National Park. The other name for this bird is Impeyan Pheasant. Recently a rare bird known as Jerdon's Baza was sighted in Nepal.

Over the past few years a conservation group has worked specifically in the Lumbini area to conserve the **Sarus Crane**. Wetlands have been constructed in the Lumbini area to provide refuge for Sarus Cranes and other wetland birds.

Four hundred thousand saplings have been planted in the area of the crane sanctuary. The cranes are among the world's most endangered of birds, the world's tallest flying bird, it is thought there are fewer than 500 remaining in Nepal. In dedication to the Sarus Crane a thangka has been made called "Wheel of Crane Conservation" for use as educational material, with the art based on the Buddhist wheel of life philosophy ☸



# Butterflies

Butterflies have been studied in Nepal for over 150 years, with much of the original study and collection done by the British, including one or two British Residents (i.e. British Consuls of the day). After 1950 the Japanese became involved in collection through scientific expeditions, and this resulted later in the establishment by Tribhuvan University of the Natural History Museum at Swayambhu in 1974.

The record books state that Nepal has 11 out of the 15 families of butterflies in the world, or over 500 species, and still today in the 21st century new species keep turning up. It is said that you never really know with Nepal's butterflies; they just may turn up unexpectedly. From 1974 to 1981, only a period of seven years, a further 24 specimens or sub-families were added to the records, and in 1981 two alone, the BLUE DUCHESS and the SIKKIM HAIRSTREAK were discovered, with this last one known only from a single specimen from Sikkim, with this one female found in 1981 in Godavari, Kathmandu Valley; and later in 1986 an entirely new race of the CHINESE HAIRSTREAK turned up.

The original collectors were not allowed outside the Kathmandu Valley, so much of their research documented only the valley. Only after 1950 when Nepal opened up to expeditions and limited tourism, did the butterfly collectors venture outside the valley.

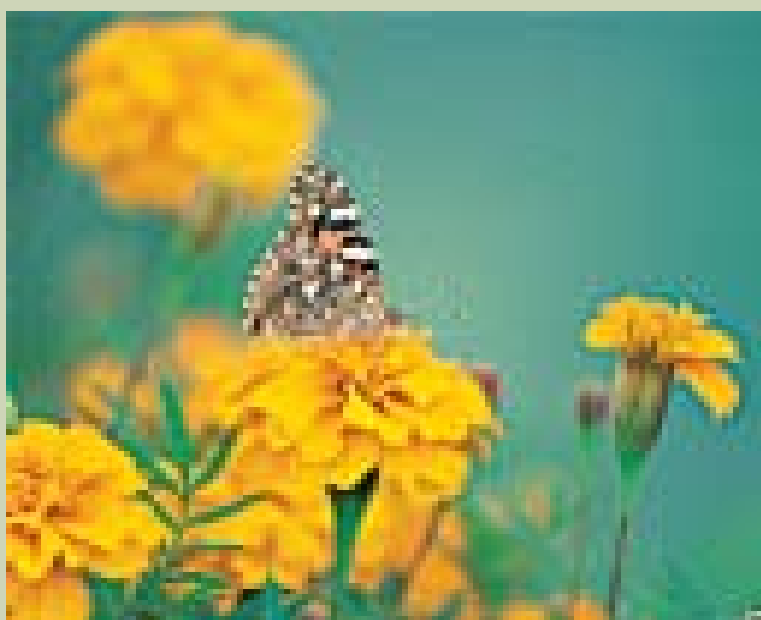
Nepal is divided into 5 regions based on altitude, and the seasons are specified as Spring, Pre-monsoon, Summer-monsoon, Post-monsoon, Autumn and Winter. In winter there is very little activity except for the very common Oriental Species, with the distribution of butterflies in Nepal being quite specific with about 10% of the butterflies being Palaearctic species above 3,000 metres, and about 90% Oriental species below 3,000 metres.

Within the Kathmandu Valley, the climate which is quite mild with day temperatures reaching 18 degrees celsius in mid-winter, there are butterflies all the year round. The best seasons for butterfly watching are late March/April, mid May/mid June, late August/September. There are forested areas in the valley which are still remarkable places for butterflies, and they include open country near Chobar and Swayambhu; the base of the hills and forest streams at Godavari, Nagarjun, Budhanilkantha and Sundarijal; the forested hilltops of Phulchowki, Jamachowk and Shivapuri, and the open scrubby bush areas of Nagarkot, Suryavinyak and Chandragiri.

There are about 20 Kathmandu Valley species on the endangered or vulnerable list. Outside the valley in the areas of the National Parks scattered throughout the country, the butterflies too are in profusion, and in undisturbed areas away from settlements are the ideal places to sit and watch. ☺







# Flora

In the years from 1950 onwards more than 200 new species of plants were discovered in Nepal. Prior to this the gathering and cataloguing was the prerogative of plant specialists such as Buchanan Hamilton, Wallich, Hooker and Burkill. In the 1920s two Nepalese collectors working for the British Museum amassed new plants for botanical science. Once Nepal opened its frontiers explorers and scientists carried out organised expeditions in the field of botany.

Prior to the 1950s Nepal's knowledge of its plants was limited mainly to local herbalists and medical practitioners (Ayurvedic Vaidhyas, Kabirajs) who collected plants in the wild for medicines. This practice and knowledge was passed down through the generations with little documentation.

In the 1960s a systematic study was prepared based on modern scientific methods by the Department of Medicinal Plants of His Majesty's Government of Nepal, with a herbarium started at the same time. Staff members were sent out for botanical collection and attached also to foreign expeditions engaged in botanical explorations. After this the herbarium had acquired over 60,000 specimens of vascular plants. Staff members were also sent to the famous herbariums of the world, such as Calcutta, Dehra Dun, Kew, Grenoble and Washington D.C. for training.

By the 1970s there were 3121 species of Angiosperms, 24 species of Gymnosperms and 308 species of Pteridophytes, with 1,242 genera and 210 families of plants.

For ecology and vegetation purposes Nepal could be divided into four floristic regions i.e. (a) western (b) north-western (c) central, and (d) eastern, and bioclimatically these are broken down into twenty regions from humid tropical climate to the alpine arid regions. But for the purpose of identifying Nepal's flora for the special interest tourist, the following shows the zones from the point of view of altitude i.e. Tropical zone (below 1,000 m), Sub Tropical Zone (1,000 to 2,100 m), Temperate Zone (2,100 to 3,100 m), Sub Alpine Zone (3,100 to 4,100 m), the Alpine Zone (4,100 to 4,500 m), and the Alpine Steppe region.



In the Tropical zone, consisting of the Terai, Siwalik hills and the Dun valleys, with warm humid climate the natural vegetation is dominated by *Shorea robusta*, plus *Dillenia*, *Terminalia*, *Adina*, *Careya*, *Eugenia* and *Salmalia* to name a few. In eastern Nepal still in the tropical zone there is *Cycas pectinata*, *Gentum montanum*, *Calamis sp*, *Padamus sp*, *Cyathea spiolusa*, and *Podocarpus nereifolius*.

In the Sub-Tropical zone in eastern and central Nepal there is *Schima-Castanopsis*, where as in western Nepal *Pinus roxburghii*. Dry oak forest of *Quercus incana*, *Q. lantana* with certain quantities of *Rhododendron arboreum*, and *Lyonia ovalifolia* occur on southern aspects usually below the pines.

The Temperate zone contains evergreen oaks, Rhododendrons and laurels in eastern and central Nepal, while in western Nepal it is the zone of evergreen coniferous forest on the one hand and

deciduous mixed forest on the other. In western Nepal quite a few west Himalayan plants like *Cedrus deodara*, *Cupressus, torulosa*, *Picea smithiana*, *Abies pindron*, *Aesculus indicus*, and *Juglans regia* occur frequently. East Himalayan trees like *Quercus lamellosa*, *Daphniphyllum himalayanse*, *Magnolia campbellii*, *Talauma hudsonii*, do not occur further west of central Nepal. The upper level of the temperate zone usually has a band of *Tsuga dumosa* and *Rhododendron barbatum* forest between the temperate broad-leaved forest and the sub-alpine conifer-oak forest. A distinct belt of deciduous forest consisting of *Acer*, *Magnolia* and *Pentapanax*, occurs in the montane zone of eastern Nepal.

In the Sub-Alpine zone coniferous forest of *Abies spectabilis* is found at the lower levels and *Betula-Rhododendron carysanulatum* forest at upper levels near the timber line. Many species of *Rhododendron* occur in eastern Nepal and their number falls as one travels towards central and western Nepal.

The Alpine zone consists of moist scrub vegetation above the timber line of mostly *Rhododendron*, *Juniperus* and *Berberis*. Beyond the alpine scrub meadows, rocks and screes, there are colourful herbs, grasses and sedges, namely *Meconopsis*, *Primula*, *Gentiana*, *Croydalis* and *Saxifraga*. Many new species of plants indigenous to Nepal have been discovered in the alpine and sub-alpine zones.

Alpine steppe vegetation lies north of the Dhaulagiri Annapurna massif and the heads of inner valley Himalayas - consisting of grasses and sedges with cushions of *Cavagana*, *Lonicera*, *Juniperus* and *Berberis*.

First of all visit The Godavari Botanical Gardens in Kathmandu, then plan your journey from there.

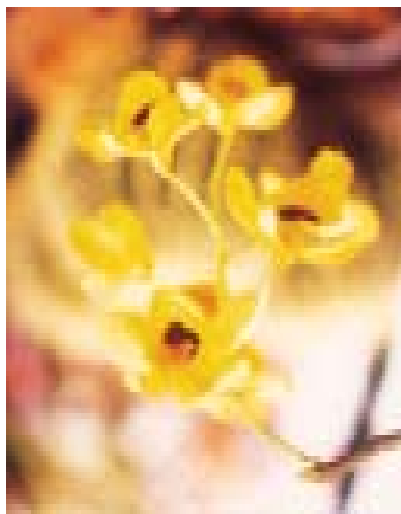
**Tropical Zone** - Winter - November to March and Spring - The Terai, Shukla-Phanta Wildlife Reserve, Royal Chitwan National Park, Royal Bardiya National Park, Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

**Sub-Tropical Zone** - Winter and Spring - November to March - Royal Gardens, Godavari Nagarjun Royal Forests, Phulchoki Hills, Shivapuri Hills, Mahabharat and Chure Range of Hills

**Temperate Zone** - Spring and Autumn - Pokhara, Central west and eastern Nepal, Langtang National Park.

**Sub-Alpine Zone** - Spring and Autumn - Makalu-Barun National Park, Sagarmatha National Park, Dolpo, Jumla, Humla, Manang, Jomsom, Upper Mustang, Dhorpatan, Helambu

**Alpine Zone** - Monsoon - July, August and September - Higher Himalayan Belts, Gosaikund, Annapurna Region, Everest Region, Upper Dolpo, Upper Makalu-Barun Area ☺



# Fossils

## Fossils, Shaligram (Ammonite)

To the geological world, Shaligram is one of the coiled chambered fossil shells of the extinct Cephalopod Mollusks that came into existence as a part of the initial emergence of the Himalayan heights from the depths of the Tethys-sea millions of years ago. To the Nepalese however, the Shaligram features very prominently in their religious lives because of its embodiment of Vishnu, one of the major manifestations in the Hindu Trinity. Puranas like Scanda, Padma and Baraha written around 2,000 years ago, give an exhaustive account of Shaligram, which are divided into a wide variety of colour, shape and size. They can be found in the north of the Nilgiri mountain range right up to Damodar Kunda, and also in the waters of the Kaligandaki river right up to Tribeni in Dolal Ghat. However, the most popular belt is on the banks of the Kaligandaki river at Jomsom where the pilgrims who pass through on their way to Muktinath search for a wide variety of Shaligram. On the other hand, this belt also had a past in which non-Hindu traders and local people, broke into pieces particularly the Shaligrams with golden streaks in them in their search for gold.

The tradition has it that the priest families particularly the ones that are involved in the ceremonies of a religious nature have been worshipping the Shaligram for aeons. Shaligrams do come in various forms and colours and one has to select a particular kind for worship depending upon what one wishes to achieve. The Shaligram is often placed on a copper plate over which water is poured, and then a Puja is performed. Later the water is drunk to purify the worshipper inside and outside. Under normal circumstances, it is believed that a sleek looking piece with a small mouth that fits within the fold of one's hand is ideal for worship.

In Riddi at Ruru Chhetra there is a Rishikesh temple in which the deity on a single huge piece of Shaligram measures nearly four feet in height.

In its legendary stories Nepal is a country where deities mingle with mortals and Shaligram is a symbol that has contributed to keep the glory and the sanctity of the sublime Himalayas intact.

### Where to visit and When

Jomsom and the upper belt of the Kaligandaki River - Winter

Riddi at Ruru Chhetra - Winter ☺

# Plants

## Medicinal Plants

Medicinal plants, Ayurveda and the Himalayas are intertwined in a very special manner and Nepal, right in the centre of the Himalayan region, has special significance. Medicinal plants are used in traditional rural remedies, Ayurveda medicines, Homoeopathic medicines, and many of them are also included in allopathic pharmacopeas.

The resource strained health services of Nepal, further complicated by an ever-unabated population growth, is said to serve only 15% of the 20 million population of the country giving only this small group access to modern health facilities. A large section of the population, mainly the rural people, still depend on primitive care such as traditional Ayurveda or herbal practitioners.

The use of locally available medicinal plants in the health care system of Nepal is a necessity, not a luxury.

The conservation, protection, cultivation and utilisation of this resource is a prime need of the country, of which thousands of species are available most of which are only available in the Himalayan Zone. The demand for these herbs is high and they can be cultivated on a large scale, but rare species of medicinal plants also need to be preserved.

Medicinal plants are an important component of the vegetation of Nepal, and the distribution pattern of medicinal plants has been found to be approx. 49.2% in the tropical zone (up to 1,000 meters), 53.96% in the sub-tropical zone (1,000 - 2,000 m), 35.7% in the temperate zone (2,000 - 3,000 m), 18.9% in the sub-alpine zone (3,000 - 4,000 m), and 7.14% in the alpine zone (4,000 m upwards). There are about 1,400 kinds of medicinal plants utilized by Ayurveda and traditional healers in Nepal.

Some of the important and wellknown medicinal plants follow :

Alpine & sub-alpine medicinal plants : *Aconitum Spp.*, *Picrorrhiza scrophularaeflora*, *Swertia multicaulis*, *Rheum emodi*, *Nardostachys jatamansi*, *Ephedra gerardiana*, *Cordyceps sinensis*, *Dactylorhiza hatagirea*.

Tropical and sub-tropical medicinal plants : *Terminalias*, *Cassia fistula*, *Cassia catechu*, *Aegles marmelos*, *Rauwolfia serpentina*, *Phyllanthus emblica*, *Ricinus recemosus*, *Acorus clams*, *Acacia concinnity*, *Butte monster*.

Temperate zone medicinal plants : *Valeriana wallichii*, *Berberis*, *Datura*, *Solanum*, *Rubia*, *Zanthoxylum armatum*, *Gaultheria fragrautissima*, *Dioscorea deltoidea*, *Curulligo orchoidies*.

Some of the regions where medicinal plants are abundantly found are, the **Tera**i region of Nawalparasi, Chitawan, Bardiya, Dhanusha, **Mid-hilly Region** of Makawanpur, Syanja, Kaski, Lamjung, Dolakha, Parvat, Ilam, Ramechhap, Nuwakot, and the **Himalayan region** of Dolpa, Mugu, Humla, Jumla, Manang, Mustang and Solukhumbu.

The institutions manufacturing Ayurveda medicinal products include Singha Durbar Vaidhya Khana Vikas Samiti, Kathmandu; Gorkha Ayurveda Company, Gorkha; Arogya Bhavan, Kathmandu; Siddha Ayurveda Pharmacy, Butwal; Pashupati Ayurveda Bhavan, Sarlahi; and Classical Herbal Group, Kathmandu ☺

# Orchids

Nowhere does nature manifest herself so vividly in all her playfulness as she does in the world of orchids. In their flowering pattern orchids are capable of mimicking a part of man as well as the animal world, at times, making us laugh. 'Monkey Face', 'Swan Neck', 'Little Bull', and 'The Velvet Bee' are among the few names they have been given for their peculiar looks.

In ancient Rome, Theophrastus, a student of Plato, was intrigued by the sight of a plant with a pair of roots. 'Orchis' was the name he gave them, the Greek word for testicles.

The world abounds with some 500 to 600 genera and some 20,000 to 35,000 names, the largest of all plant families, and out of this, Nepal has 57 genera (27 Terrestrials and 30 Epiphytic) with a few Lithophytes. Wide spread into different ecological zones, from the foot hills of the Himalayas to the plains in the Terai, the orchid-world in Nepal is immensely interesting for nature lovers and horticultural experts.

Some terrestrial orchids which flower during July-August have a stem with only two leaves and purple flowers; another orchid from the same genera in west Nepal flowers during February-March and is orange-green.

In March-April in Godavari there are orchids with greenish fragrant flowers, and in Shivapuri and Kakani orchids with white or pale yellow flowers. During September-October Sundarijal has green orchids streaked with purple, and on the way to Daman in November pale mauve orchids line the banks of the road. All of the above areas are accessible in a couple of hours or less from Kathmandu, with Dhankuta and Hetauda a little further away sporting yellow flowers, and in Khandbari purple-brown with pale borders.

Nepal is indeed endowed with an incredible variety of orchids scattered all over the Himalayan kingdom. *Dedrobium* is the largest species, followed by *Habenaria* and *Bulbophyllum*. *Anthogonium*, *Hemipilia* and *Lusia* are some of the other varieties amongst the nearly two dozen single species families.

No destination in Nepal is devoid of orchids including most of the trekking routes, and near Kathmandu the areas to visit are the Godavari Botanical Gardens to the south, Sundarijal to the north, Nagarjun to the west and Dhulikhel to the east. You will find orchids at one or more of these areas all year round ☺



# Rhododendrons

## Rhododendrons



During Spring - March to May - Rhododendron blooms can be seen in all the hilly regions of Nepal above 1,200 m altitude. More specifically, the mid mountain vertical belt between 2,000 and 4,000 m serves as the 'wild' preserve of the Rhododendron, or *GURANS* and *CHIMAL*, the two words used in Nepali.

There are four major areas for Rhododendron treks -

- 1) *Milke Danda-Jaljala Himal*, a transverse mountain range which separates the two river systems of the Tamur and the Arun
- 2) *Upper Tamur River Valley*
- 3) *Makalu-Barun National Park and Conservation Area*, and
- 4) Closer to Kathmandu - the *Langtang Valley inside Langtang National Park*

Nepal has 30 indigenous species of Rhododendron, and one which is endemic to Nepal and not found elsewhere, is *R. lowndesii*. It has lemon or creamy yellow flowers, which are short well-shaped and are solitary or in pairs on the stem. It grows in the drier areas of western Nepal near Muktinath and Phoksundo.

A Rhododendron trek to the Upper Tamur River would consist of a flight to Bhadrapur then a drive to Ilam. Ilam is the well-known tea production centre and could include some interesting side trips to tea plantations. From Ilam a trek can start to the south-west side of the Kanchenjunga area and the upper side valleys of the Tamur River system. Very grand sightings of Rhododendron can be assured in this region.

And closer to Kathmandu, Dhunche at 2,000 metres is a 5/6 hour drive away. Trekking can start here to the upper areas of the Langtang Valley. Nine species of Rhododendron can be seen in this region.

The best time is late March to mid June, and in addition to the Rhododendron, spring blooms of wild poppy, magnolia and primrose will make the trek a memorable one. Botany or flora trekking requires the same equipment, guides, porters and fitness as normal trekking in Nepal. The usual precautions need to be taken, and respect for the environment needs to be uppermost in the minds of the trekkers ☺

# Trees

Nepal has a variety of beautiful trees, of which the **Banyan** and the **Peepul** are associated with Hindu and Buddhist holy sites, frequently found beside temples and shrines. It is considered that the original tree under which Maya Devi gave birth to her son Gautama Siddhartha was not a peepul tree, but probably a **Sal**; it may have survived into the 6th or 7th century AD.

The **Eucalyptus** were introduced into Nepal from Australia in the 19th century, and in Kathmandu can be smelt as you walk along a street after rain has fallen. The **Spruce**, an evergreen, coniferous pine tree which took its name from Prussia where it traditionally came from; the **Juniper** another evergreen is a crucial ingredient in the flavouring of gin, and in medicines it is used as a diuretic. The **Laurel**, or bay tree, is well known, and **Cedar** and **Deodar** are found throughout Nepal, with the cedar often used to make incense, and in west Nepal there is an indigenous **Cypress** called Himalayan Cypress. The treeline in Nepal is at 5,000 metres, and above this no trees are found.

In the **Annapurna Conservation Area** Alpine Pasture, Alpine Meadow, Trans-Himalayan Steppe, Fire-Blue Pine Forest, Birch Forest, Rhododendron Forest, Sub-alpine Juniper Forest, Hemlock and Oak forest, Cypress Forest, East Himalayan Oak and Laurel Forest, Alder Forest, and Schima-Castanopsis Forest.

In the **Kanchanjunga Conservation Area** Dwarf Rhododendron Scrub, Rhododendron shrubberies, Fir and Larch forest, Mixed broad leaved forest, East Himalayan Oak and Laurel, and Schima-Castanopsis Forest.

In the **Khaptad National Park** Fir, Oak and Rhododendron Forest, West Himalayan Fir and Hemlock forest, Mountain oak, Mixed oak and laurel forest, Chir Pine and broad leaved forest. In the **Langtang National Park** Alpine pasture, juniper scrub, alpine meadow, dwarf rhododendron, juniper shrubs, fir and larch forest, mixed blue pin and oak forest, laurel and chir pine forest.

In the **Makalu-Barun Conservation Area** alpine pasture, alpine meadow, and dwarf rhododendron scrub, fir and birch forest, and rhododendron shrubberies, temperate mountain oak, oak and laurel forest, Hill Sal Forest.

In **Rara National Park** alpine mats and scrub, rhododendron and juniper shrubland, fire forest, mountain oak, upper temperate blue pine forest, and spruce. Mixed oak and laurel forest.

In the **Shey-Phoksundo National Park** alpine pasture, alpine mats and scrub, trans-himalayan steppe, blue pine, birch, rhododendron forest, larch, mountain oak, cedar and cypress forest, deciduous walnut, maple, alder forest, steppe with Euphorbia, Royleana, Grasses and Artemisia ☺







# heritage



# Religion

## Religious Sites - Hindu and Buddhist

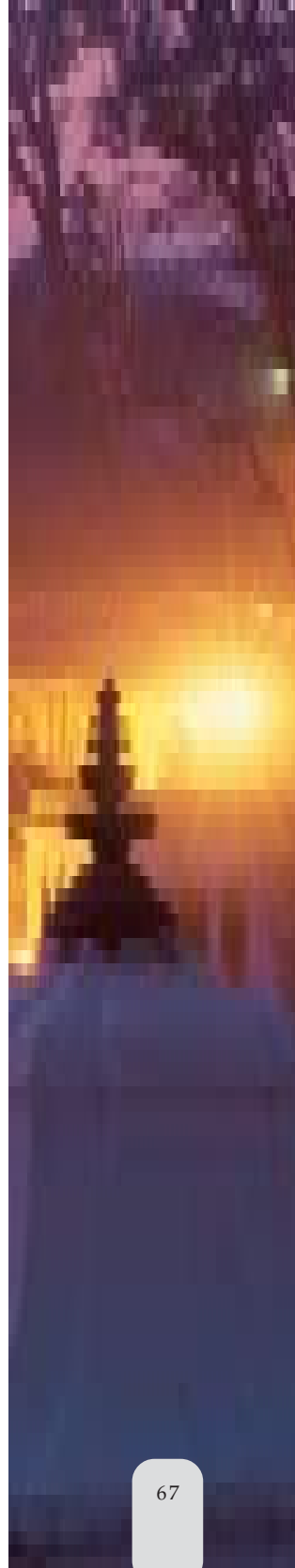
### Pashupatinath

Pashupatinath is the other popular name of Shiva. Shiva in the form of Rudra was imagined by the early Aryans and later was worshipped in the form of a Linga, a Phallus, a vertical piece of stone placed in an upward position on a round pedestal. The Indus Valley civilisation in Pakistan has shown that the people there worshipped Shiva in the form of a Linga in about the 3rd century BC. Besides south Asia, archaeological excavations in some ancient cities of Europe have revealed that the linga-worship cult existed there too.

Pashupatinath, in a limited sense, literally means the Lord of the Animals. But 'animal' is also a term that denotes the animal like instincts in human beings. Capable of destroying instantly every evil force either with his trident or the third eye, when it comes to his devotees, the Lord Pashupatinath destroys their ignorance. Be it an issue of material gain or release from the cycle of mortal existence he is the height of compassion, generosity, as well as consciousness.

Shiva has been worshipped in Nepal from the beginning of the Neolithic civilisation in the Kathmandu Valley, with scientific archaeological studies and findings around the temple proving that the god Pashupatinath was worshipped here from about the beginning of the Christian era. From about the 7th century onwards it became the first and foremost temple of Nepal, with kings, aristocrats and the rich offering a great deal of wealth and land in trust to the god, making it one of the richest temples in Nepal. Many temples and statues around the temple were added making it a big complex rather than just a temple. The main God or the Linga of Pashupatinath is carved on a blackish stone, with four faces engraved on four sides of the Linga.

Nepal is constitutionally a Hindu kingdom so non-Hindus cannot enter the temple, although Buddhists can. But no one is allowed to enter the inner sanctum except the Bhattas, the main priests who come from the south of India. The temple starts swarming with devotees around 4am every morning. However the top of the hill to the east of the temple is the ideal place for the non Hindu visitor to view the temple, its rich surroundings, and below on the edge of the Bagmati river the ghats where the dead are brought to be cremated ☯



# Changu Narayan

Situated on the top of a small hill about 15 kilometers east of Kathmandu and only a few miles north of Bhaktapur, the temple of Changu Narayan is perhaps the best and oldest in the context of Nepalese art and architecture. Built around 239 A.D., it's not only the temple but the whole complex which is an open air museum - breathtaking and bewildering in character.

The stone inscription (dated 464 A.D.) placed in front of the Changu Narayan temple describes in detail the story of Dharmadeva a King of Nepal who died suddenly, with his young son succeeding him to the throne. The son later after a series of victories in war inscribed his victory on a stone pillar and placed it in front of the Changu Narayan temple. It is written in poetry and in an academic Sanskrit which is something like an encyclopedia of the then society, tradition and culture. It starts with an invocation to the Vishnu of Doladri proving that Changu Narayan or the Doladri Narayan is much older than the date on the inscription of 464 A.D.

Situated on a beautiful hill the square two storeyed temple stands in the centre of a brickpaved courtyard, with the main structure raised on a three tier diminishing plinth, with doors on all four sides, although the western door is the main entrance to the sanctum. The doors have pairs of carvings of animals such as lions, horses, griffins and elephants, with the main western door richly carved in brass, with a brass tympanum above the door. (one of the most beautiful pieces of brass work of medieval Nepal).

The roof is supported by 24 struts or brackets, which serve as decoration and to support the temple roof. They are beautifully carved and hung at a 45 degree angle. They represent the ten major incarnations of Vishnu and his various



manifestations. Though a Vishnu temple the struts also depict Manjushree and Buddha. To the south some of the struts have as many as twenty arms, and carrying various attributions they represent the whole Hindu philosophy. The Buddhist community from the Kathmandu Valley also pay tribute to Changu Narayan as the Haribahana Lokeswar and Kileswar Shiva as Samantabhadra Lokeswar.

The courtyard has many other temples such as that of Kileswar Shiva, Chinnamasta Devi and other figures like that of Garuda from the 5th century; Vishnu mounted on Garuda from the 7th/8th centuries; Vishnu surrounded by Laxmi and Garuda from the 10th/11th centuries; and the cosmic universal form of Vishnu shown to Arjuna in the great battle of Mahabharata; plus other multiheaded and multiarmed Vishnu.

From the temple one can see the beautiful Manohara river flowing like a serpent through green fields, and to the north on a clear day one can see many Himalayan peaks. A whole day is needed to study and enjoy Changu Narayan, just 15 kilometers from Kathmandu city ☺



## Janakpur and Janaki Temple

Janakpur in the eastern Terai is one of the oldest and most famous cities of Nepal. Mithila was the capital of the Videha (bodyless) spiritual Janakas, the rulers who were the embodiment of spiritual attainment. Janaki, Sita was born to Sivadhwa Janaka and was married to Rama, the King of Ayodhya the legendary hero of the great epic Ramayana.

A great centre of learning for scholars in ancient times, Janakpur once had hundreds of sages who contributed substantially to Hindu philosophy, with one of their oldest works being the famous Upanisad 'Brihadaranyaka' written in the form of a dialogue which deals with the gods, the nature of Brahma, the supreme reality and the introduction to the self.

Predominantly inhabited by Maithilis, it has its own language, script and a rich artistic tradition and culture. The religious Mithila art is well known in the local and international art world.

Janakpur is a city of dozens of holy pools, with a number of ancient sites, some of which have yet to be identified. The really famous object for adoration in

Janakpur is the Janaki temple which is some times compared with the Taj Mahal of India. A simple construction to start with, the present structure owes its existence to King Pralapa Singh and his consort who donated hundreds of thousands of silver coins when they were blessed with a child by Sita, enshrined within the temple. Started about 1895, it took a number of years to evolve into its present shape and was completed in 1911.

Constructed in an area of 4,860 sq. feet in a mixed style of Islamic and Rajput Domes the temple is 50 metres high; a three storeyed structure made entirely of stone and marble. All its 60 rooms are decorated with coloured glass, engravings and paintings, with beautiful lattice windows and turrets.

Thousands of pilgrims visit the temple in November/December for *Vivah Panchami* ('marriage over 5 days'), the town's major annual festival, when the marriage of Sita and Rama is celebrated with various re-enactments. A popular time too for modern day weddings ☺

# Boudha

## The Stupa of Bouddhanath

The largest stupa in Nepal and revered by both Tibetan and Newar Buddhists, with the Tibetans believing that the stupa contains the bone relics of the past Buddha Kashyapa. Like every monument or pilgrimage site in Nepal both Hindu and Buddhist, there are a dozen stories as to who built it, and how and why.

Because of its location and size, it seems much larger than the Swayambunath Stupa, with the same hemi-spherical dome symbolizing the emptiness from which everything emanates. On top is the *harmika* painted on each side with the eyes of the Buddha symbolizing awareness, and above the spire with its 13 stages to the canopy.

At ground level there is a brick wall with 147 niches and 108 images of the meditational buddha inset behind copper prayer wheels. Early morning and evening are the times to visit Boudha to join the local residents in *kora* (walking the pilgrim's circuit, sometimes with Tibetan pilgrims on their hands and knees).

The festivals of importance to Bouddhanath are The Tibetan New Year, *Losar*, usually February, Buddha's birthday and the Dalai Lama's birthday. The Tamang Buddhists celebrate *Gonai* in July/August with processions and much revelry.

Surrounding the stupa are dozens of monasteries housing monks and western students too, from every school of Buddhism



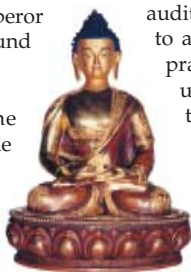
# Lumbini

Located approximately 250 kilometers west of Kathmandu, Lumbini rests in the plains of Kapilvastu. In the 6th Century BC., when the Buddha lived, the Sakya clan of the Newars were located in Lumbini. There are a number of buildings of religious significance in Lumbini, the most important being the massive stone pillar erected by the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka in 250 BC, which was found only in 1895.

Under restoration nearby is the shrine of Maya Devi, said to be the site where the Buddha was born in the palace garden which contains a stone relief depicting Gautam's nativity scene. Also there is a pond, possibly the remains of a sacred pool; the brick foundations of an old monastery; some small stupas; and large plinths. In the area too are modern Buddhist shrines and a very old Lamaist gumpa.

There is a great deal of work being carried out in Lumbini by The Lumbini Development Project. In 1967 The UN Secretary General, U Thant from Burma, visited and inaugurated the project. 13 countries, including Korea, Japan, India

and the USA are involved. The objectives of the plan include development and restoration of the sacred garden, the creation of a monastic zone and of the "Lumbini Village" to provide accommodation and facilities for visitors, as well as a visitors' centre. A museum and research centre, a 420 seat auditorium and a library all dedicated to advancing Buddhist learning and practice have been built in a rather unusual style, like huge concrete tubes stacked beside and on top of each other.



The Buddhist community in Lumbini believe in the need to inspire the international Buddhist community about the strong relevance of Buddha's teachings to modern conservation issues. In the monastic enclaves of Lumbini, organisations from 22 Buddhist nations are building temples, monasteries and visitor facilities. Millions of Buddhists worldwide will travel on pilgrimage to the revered birthplace of Buddha.

In the region are Taulihawa, Kudan, Gotihawa, and Tilaurakot, all housing ruins of forts, monasteries and stupas ☸











## The Stupa of Swayambhunath

This stupa is the oldest and the other most important site of Buddhist worship in Kathmandu, very much a major landmark towering 175 metres above the valley, just 3km west of the city centre - walking distance from Thamel, Chhetrapati and Kathmandu Durbar Square. Vrishadeva, the patriarch of the Licchavi dynasty is said to have built the first shrine on this site, and later inscriptions attribute the stupa's construction to his great-grand son King Mandeva I (c.450AD).

It later became an important place for Indian pilgrims and Padmasambhava was said to frequent there. Later it forged close ties with Tibet and became an important centre of Buddhist learning.

There are numerous chaityas, shrines around the stupa, but to get to it you should climb the 400 stone steps. Often used by climbers and fitness freaks before they embark on some journey or other.

It has been a model for other stupas throughout Nepal, and similar to Bouddhanath there is the dome, the square *harmika* with the eyes of the Buddha, and the 13 steps of the spire.

Losar and Buddha Jayanti is celebrated here in April or May. Both are marvelously crowded and are worth visiting. Surrounded by monasteries too, an international Buddhist library, and other institutions, plus monastery schools for children and monks ☺

## Panauti

The township of Panauti lies about 34 kilometres south east of Kathmandu, just off the Arniko Highway, 6 kilometres south of Banepa. Situated in between the rivers Punyamati and Rosikhola, Panauti derives its name from the Punyamati river, also known as Punyamata by the local people. Geologically it is an interesting spot as the people tend to believe that there is a huge rock all the way to Godavari from Panauti. They take it as a Naga, the serpent king capable of protecting them against earthquake of any Richter scale. Surprisingly, during the major earthquake in 1934 when almost all the houses in the Kathmandu Valley suffered total devastation not a single house in Panauti had even a minor crack. Indeed for the people of Panauti consisting

of mainly farmers and tradesmen from the Newar community, it was the serpent king who was protecting them.

To the south of the confluence of the two rivers where Panauti city comes to an end, there is a small hill and it only takes five minutes to walk to the top. It offers spectacular views of Panauti and all the way up to Phulchowki and the snow-clad mountains to the south and north. Down beside the confluence of the rivers there are many cremation sites allotted to people from different castes. To the north of the rivers below the Gorakhanath hill there is a three storeyed temple dedicated to the Goddess Brahmayani with various forms of Durga and her associates painted on the walls. Some figures here are half buried under the ground, others are broken.

A suspension bridge links the two sides of the river and from there one can walk to the Ghat filled with temples dedicated to various Hindu gods and goddesses. Here there are replicas of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Jagannath and Ramehwar temples, the four major holy pilgrimage centres at the four corners of India. There are some old statues of Surya, the planet sun and a Shivalinga with five faces - one turned up towards the linga shaft and the bottom of the linga is surrounded by animals. On this side of the Ghat there is an inn which displays the Ganesh and the ten major incarnations in mural paintings.

The three storeyed temple of Indreswar Mahadev is the most conspicuous one in the area with a coppersheet on the top-most roof, whereas the remaining two have tiled roofs. Its huge struts supporting the roof are among the best existing wood-carvings from the 15th century. Depicted in the struts are the legendary heroes of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the two great Hindu epics, and depicted among others are the celestial nymphs and Durga Kalee. The courtyard where the temple stands is large and is decked with many composite figures of Shiva and Vishnu, Ardhanariswara, meaning a single figure having both the male and female aspect of the god.

To the south of this temple, there is a rectangular building with wonderful images of Astamatricas, the eight divine mothers, all carved on Champaka (*Michelia champaca*) wood during the 15th century, followed by figures of Bhairabas and Bhadrakalee. As well there is a life size image of Vishnu engraved on a monolithic stone slab at the eastern end of the temple.

Once you are in Panauti, you will discover that the whole area is dotted with innumerable gods and goddesses, rather like the constellation of stars in the universe ☺

## Ruruchhetra

Palpa, in western Nepal, is not only famous for its beauty but also for its unique setting, landscape, people, and bronze work, plus its special potato salad with curd. This place, mostly the hill of Srinagar of Palpa, makes it like the real Srinagar of Kashmir. The famous area of Palpa is Ruruchhetra or now known as Ridichhetra. Ruruchhetra or Ridi is situated at the confluence of the Gandaki river and Ridikhola in a most beautiful setting, surrounded by mountains, ever-green forest with various creepers and indigenous plants. There are some caves yet to be explored and studied. According to the Varahapurana, a Pauranic literature composed sometime in the 7th century, various saints and sages meditated here and were liberated from suffering. The river Gandaki which starts from Damodar Kunda and reaches to India has three important religious centres Muktichhetra in Mustang, Ruruchhetra in Nepal and Hariharchhetra in India.

There are many myths and legends about Ruruchhetra, and combined with a trip to Lumbini, the beauty and solitude of Ruruchhetra can change the life of a visitor, a place that many Nepalese have a lifelong wish to visit ☺

## Namoda Buddha

Namoda Buddha or Namoda Stupa, which is highly revered by both Nepalese and Tibetan Buddhists is situated in a beautiful natural setting which is accessible from either Dhulikhel or Panauti. During the rainy season you would need a four wheel drive vehicle as these roads are not paved. Although smaller in size than Swayambunath or Bouddanath its bush setting sets it apart from either of the other two, both located in a more urban setting now. From Namoda Buddha there are incredible views to the Himalaya to the north.

It is said that Buddha in one of his previous lives was a prince and while game hunting with his friends he found some tiger cubs whose mother was starving and not able to feed them. The prince cut some flesh from his body and fed the starving tigress and her cubs. The local people of Panauti claimed him as their prince and say because of this good deed he became the Buddha in a later life.

A 7th century Chinese Buddhist pilgrim was told a similar story in Mongolia when he visited a pilgrimage place, which seems to show the story was going the rounds of the story tellers.

Nepalese natural beauty, Buddhist culture and local village culture can be easily appreciated on this walk to Namoda Buddha, and although visited by many tourists and pilgrims is still well protected from the developer, and 21st century deforestation, although below one can see the results of the need to make a living ☹



## Varaha Chhetra

Like the Muklichhetra, Devighat Chhetra and Ruru Chhetra in western Nepal, the Varaha Chhetra of eastern Nepal is ancient too. The Koshi river and its seven tributaries run from the mountains and hills and meet at Chatara in Sunsari District. A place of natural wonder where seven rivers meet is called the “Sangam of Saptakosi”, the confluence of seven rivers. Local people have venerated this place since time immemorial. Previously they had to visit by boat, or climb up, or descend from above, but in 1882 a devotee, a military official, built a straight route from Chatara to Varaha Chhetra.

At the point where the seven kosis meet the Tribeni, the big Kosi turns towards the south about four kilometers below Tribeni and four kilometers above Chatara, and at the confluence of the Kosi and Koka rivers there is the Shrine of Varaha Chhetra. From the confluence of Kosi-Koka there is a series of stone steps to the temple, with many Varaha images known as Guru Varaha, Surya Varaha, Koka Varaha and Indra Varaha. Near the close of the 18th century artisans from the Kathmandu Valley helped repair and renovate the temple, the buildings and the inns around it.

The Himval Khanda of Skanda Purana described this place in detail.

The story goes that ‘Hiranyakshya, the demon who was afraid that Vishnu might take the earth from his possession, searched for Vishnu near the top of Koka hill, but when he found Vishnu, in the form of a boar, he teased him, which infuriated Vishnu who subsequently killed the demon and stayed on at Koka hill.’

Then a learned Nepali Brahman living in Kasi (Varanasi) as a pilgrim heard about Varaha Chhetra and decided to travel there. When he reached Varaha Chhetra in devotion to the Varaha incarnation of Lord Vishnu he sat and meditated on the bank of the river. Varaha blessed him and he became the priest of the temple.

On the full moon day of Kartika (October-November) thousands of pilgrims from both Nepal and India visit Varaha Chhetra, and again on the first day of Magha (January-February) pilgrims come again for worship.

Indian archaeological documents have proved that in the 5th century A.D. this was a popular pilgrimage site, with two copper plate inscriptions from the 5th century describing in detail people buying land and offering it to the temple.

As well as its religious aspects, Varaha Chhetra is also endowed with ocean-like rivers, scenic hills and plains and the age old cultures of various ethnic groups 🌍

## World Heritage - UNESCO Cultural Activities in Nepal

Culture not only constitutes a country's identity, it is also at the very heart of development. Cultural values determine the priorities a society sets for its future economic and social development. In Nepal especially, the value of the cultural heritage can not be underestimated. Being a premier tourist attraction, the monuments play a central role in the

country's economy. As the only UN agency specially mandated to safeguard the world's rich and diverse cultural heritage, UNESCO has a unique role to play in Nepal.

In Nepal technical expertise as well as financial assistance have been provided for the safeguarding of the following World Heritage sites :

The Kathmandu Valley - composed of seven monumental zones with three historical palaces within their essential urban settings (Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur), two Hindu centres (Pashupatinath and Changu Narayan) and two Buddhist centres (Swayambunath and Boudhanath). Together, these monumental zones represent the highly developed architectural expression of religious, political and cultural life of the Kathmandu Valley, with a concentration of monuments unique and unparalleled in the world. It is the principal centre of settlement in the hill area of Nepal and one of the prime cultural sites of the Himalayas.

Lumbini - a small town in the southern Terai plains of Nepal, the birthplace of Lord Buddha and a sacred ground for Buddhists ever since 🌍





rural

# Home Stays

Home-stay tourism is in its infancy in Nepal, but nevertheless is available and can be experienced by anyone with the time and desire to live life at the grass roots level. To experience Nepalese rural life in its true sense it is possible to receive an introduction into a village; to find a bed and food in exchange for the appropriate sum of money, and then experience the pleasure of learning the Nepalese language and contributing to village life by offering your own expertise by way of school teaching, veterinary expertise, health and hygiene expertise, agricultural practices; in other words in any field of work of benefit to the village.

As yet there is no collective organisation available to coordinate such stays, but many Kathmandu or Pokhara based companies, organisations or individuals would be able to arrange such stays ☺



# Rural Visits

Special interest tourism also covers the rural sector, by allowing the tourist to discover and learn about the daily life of the farmer.

Single, couple or group tourists can experience rural life by visiting farms, have a meal with a Nepalese family, and learn about their livestock and agricultural practices. In Nepal there are three types of farmers; the ones on the roadside or at a road head who are able to sell their produce to a wider market; those who are 4-6 kilometers walk from a road, both of which could be considered commercial farmers; and those outside this range who are subsistence farmers who may sell or trade with their neighbours or the nearby village.

Nepalese farming is multi-faceted with few specialising; rather they rear goats for meat; use buffalo and oxen as a work animal and sometimes the buffalo for milk; and they grow rice, maize, mustard and wheat. The altitude controls their choice of agricultural products, with the higher altitudes bearing maize and millet, and the rice grown at lower altitudes.

Land use patterns or farming and forestry systems may be of interest to visitors and all these can be incorporated into a visit or stay in a region.

Many institutions and organisations are working in the field to assist user groups in rural Nepal to utilise their land; they are supporting local communities (men and women) to organise self governing institutions such as user groups, user committees, functional organisations and buffer zone development councils to undertake conservation and development activities. These groups are particularly active on the edges of National Parks and protected areas, to help the local inhabitants to live in harmony with their neighbours, the natural habitat.

Many farming communities are living and working side by side in culturally sensitive areas, where monuments, temples and monasteries are standing and surviving in the forests alongside the farmers and their animals, plus in the wild and unprotected and inaccessible areas of Nepal.

Banking systems and the rural methods of lending, where the banks lend (in the field) small loans to small collective projects and groups, can be seen first hand. Particularly, rural women have benefited from these schemes and have proven to be reliable borrowers and successful entrepreneurs.

Rural Nepalese are keen to learn about the need for collective strength, and to learn new ways to contribute to the economy but also to enhance and better their own circumstances and that of their children ☺





# Tourism

## Sustainable Eco Tourism

In Nepal there are two groups actively involved in sustainable tourism. The Sustainable Tourism Network (STN) is a group of INGOs, NGOs, tourism operators, government departments and research and conservation organisations, who have formed a relationship to exchange ideas and experiences; to develop strategies for tourism promotion and environment protection, and in particular develop sustainable tourism.

Other members focus on development projects with a primarily social, ecological and cultural focus. Conservation and eco-tourism management are other areas which members work in to promote, conserve and manage nature in all its diversity balancing human needs with the environment on a sustainable basis.

Alongside STN there is another group (some are members of both) called Eco-Tourism in Protected Areas Network (ETPAN), which is working to create a platform and are sharing experiences, discussing contemporary issues and current trends in the development of tourism in and around protected areas of Nepal. They are producing a 'blue-print' for ecologically and economically sensitive tourism, and from their study will emerge a set of guidelines for the development and management aspects of sustainable protected area conservation.

Their study will consider carrying capacities in certain regions; the affects of tourism on the cultural outlook of the indigenous people most threatened by over

exposure; and also the need to protect the fragile historical and cultural infrastructure.

In Nepal, with only limited areas open to tourists, it is in everyone's interest that as new areas are developed that they are eco-friendly and that sustainable tourism



practices are put in place. Natural areas, especially legally protected areas, which consist of almost 20% of the total area of Nepal, need to be developed in such a way as to provide a new form of tourism of a specialised nature making sure of the "minimum impact maximum benefit" philosophy.

The Sustainable Tourism in Nepal brochure published by Nepal Tourism Board in March 2000, describes in detail the work of the members of the Sustainable Tourism Network (STN) & ETPAN ☺

# Village Tourism

Village tourism, a recent innovation, is successfully demonstrated at Sirubari in Syangja a half day's distance from Pokhara. It is a three hour walk from the road-head just 30 kilometers from Pokhara. A management committee takes responsibility for visitors, their welcome, accommodation, sightseeing and guiding. The village consists of 60 households of which many are offering guest accommodation. It is a very neat and clean village, the accommodation is simple, but comfortable, with good bedding, as well as clean toilet facilities. Meals of daily fresh food are eaten with the family, and each evening there is entertainment provided by the community, which is usually Gurung dancing and singing.

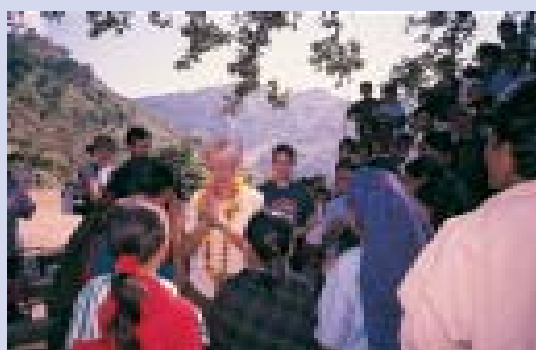
There is a Buddhist monastery/Gompa in the core of the village; it has a vibrant Gurung culture, and they are a mixture of Buddhist, Hindu or Shaman. The region abounds with flora and fauna, with two hills nearby providing stunning views of Nepal's western Himalayas. Trails and steps are formed and paved, and many shrines and pilgrimage sites dot the landscape. The season is September to June, and while staying there visitors can visit cottage industries such as traditional handicrafts and paper making; and a plant nursery covering 380 hectares of flora, including one million trees and plants. There are two small lakes nearby and bird watching and wildlife observation are possible. Sirubari won the PATA Gold Award 2001 in the Heritage & Culture - Heritage Category.

In the Gorkha District of Nepal a community tourist program is in its third year of operation. The area is full of natural beauty, panoramic views, green mid-hill trekking, unspoilt jungle areas, lakes, caves, waterfalls and flora (medicinal, scented and edible plants).

Accessible from Kathmandu and Pokhara, there is a one day walk to the 'model tourism village'. Village treks can be undertaken while experiencing village and rural life, as well as visiting the majestic hill-top palace of Gorkha Bazar. Accommodation is in individual guestrooms with host families, or in between villages, in tents. During trekking meals are provided by professional teams, and in the villages visitors can try a delicious, hygienically prepared Nepali "Daalbhaat" consisting of locally produced rice, lentils and garden fresh organically grown vegetables. The guestrooms are simple, but clean and cosy, with latrines available and a water tap close by. (Electricity, hot showers and separate bathrooms are not available so far).

In the mid-west of Nepal in the Shyangja District, another model tourism village project is underway. This is an agricultural and animal husbandry based community with no other income source; the intention is to carry out infrastructure development, heritage conservation and renovation, plus training and development of the villagers in the region. Located to the north east is Dahare Deurali, a famous religious site, and a beautiful location for viewing Himalayan peaks like Annapurna, Dhaulagiri and Machhapuchhare. It is at an altitude of 3,900 feet with a population of more than 6,500 people in the village and surrounding area.

There are also some new areas coming up with village tourism facilities. Contact your tour operators and agents for other locations. ☺





Namo Buddha	Near Dhulikhel & Panauti	All year
Orchids	See entry page	March-May
Panauti	Outside Kathmandu	All year
Paper, Handmade	Kathmandu Valley	All year
Pashupatinath	Pashupatinath, Kathmandu	All year
Pilgrimage to Muklinath	Muklinath via Jomsom	All year
Pilgrimage sites, other	See entry page	All year
Rhododendrons	See entry page	March-June
Ruruchhetra	West Nepal	All year
Rural Visits	All over Nepal	All year
Sacred Symbols of Hinduism & Buddhism	Throughout Nepal	All year
Semi Precious stones	Patan, Thamel	All year
Souvenirs	Throughout Kathmandu Valley	All year
Stone	Cultural sites, see entry	All years
Sustainable Eco Tourism	See Sustainable Tourism in Nepal brochure	All year
Swayambhunath, The Stupa of	Swayambhunath, Kathmandu Valley	All year
Terracotta	Bhaktapur, Thimi	All year
Textiles	Throughout Nepal	All year
Thangkas	Throughout the valley	All year
Tibetan Medicine	Kathmandu Valley	All year
Trees	Everywhere	All year
Varaha Chhetra	Gunsari District	All year
Village Tourism	Gorkha, Sirubari & Shyangla District	All year
Woodcarving	Patan, Bhaktapur & three Durbar Squares of Kathmandu Valley	All year
World Heritage-UNESCO Cultural Activities in Nepal	See entry page	All year
Yoga	See entry page	All year

# where to find and when ?



Subject	Where	When
Animals	All the National Parks of Nepal	All year
Astrology	Kathmandu	All year
Ayurveda	See entry page	All year
Birds	See entry page	All year
Boudhanath, The stupa of	Boudhanath	All year
Bronze and Metal	Patan & Kathmandu	All year
Buddhist studies	Lumbini & Kathmandu Valley	All year
Butterflies	See entry page	Spring-autumn
Ceramics & Pottery	Kathmandu Valley	All year
Changu Narayan	Changu Narayan Kathmandu Valley	All year
Dance	Throughout Nepal	All year
Faith Healers & Tantric Healings in the Himalayas	Throughout Nepal	All year
Festivals	See entry page	All year
Flora of Nepal	See box page	All year
Fossils, Shaligram	See box page	All year
Home stays	All over Nepal	All year
Homoeopathy	Kathmandu Valley	All year
Janakpur & Janaki temple	Janakpur	All year
Jewellery, Gold	Bhaktapur, Patan, Thamel, New Road, Kathmandu	All year
Language	See entry page	All year
Living Goddess, The Kumari	Kumarijhar, Durbar Square & in Patan & Bhaktapur there are living Goddesses as well	All year
Lumbini	Lumbini	All year
Masks	Bhaktapur, Thimi, Patan & Kathmandu	All year
Medicinal Plants	See entry page	All year
Meditation	Janakpur, Terai	All year
Mithila Art	See entry page	All year
Museums and Art Galleries	All through Nepal	All year
Music	All over Nepal	All year
Myths and Folklore	All over Nepal	All year

# Notes

Notes