
PREPARING TO TEACH



IN NEPAL

Mark Pinoli



Interest in teaching or volunteering in Nepal?

This publication provides you with important information you need to prepare yourself to teach or volunteer in schools in Nepal. There are details about Nepal, what to expect when you arrive, issues you may face in the classroom, what you need to do, what you need to bring, and important information about health and safety. This guide, along with your own research, will ensure that you are well informed and fully prepared for this wonderful opportunity.

The advice and information within was compiled over many years and draws on first-hand experience in placing students, teacher and other volunteers in rural government schools. The placement service, the Pathways Program, was part of the work of the Logged On Foundation, an Australian charity commitment to children's education and community empowerment in underprivileged areas of Nepal.

This guide has been written for anyone preparing to volunteer teach or who wants to know more about the country and its education system. The focus is on teaching in government and community primary and lower secondary schools, but there are lessons for teaching in other domains such as professional development for local teachers and vocational training for members of the community.

If you are going to use a placement service, consider making a choice based on an organisations' commitment to a long-term positive impact for the community. For instance, is there a commitment to a community consultation and impact assessment process to ensure there are positive outcomes? Does the program seek suitably qualified people that have the qualifications and abilities that will allow them to succeed? Also, a commitment to documenting the collective experiences of volunteers for the purpose of building a knowledge base that provides a reference point for future volunteers is a good sign.

If you decide to go to Nepal, I hope that you will fully appreciate the experience and grow from the opportunity of helping communities to secure a more prosperous future. May you also develop the knowledge and skills that help you in your future endeavours.

Mark Pinoli
CEO, Logged On Foundation Ltd





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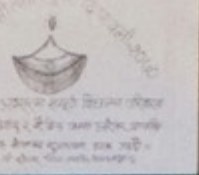
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Past: Before Tam an

Present: When Tam

Future When Tam



01

Overview

Have you ever wanted to help make a difference by becoming a volunteer or fulfilling your teacher or professional placement requirements overseas? Do you believe that children should have every opportunity to reach their full potential by giving them the skills and knowledge necessary to participate fully in the world? Perhaps you are interested in local teacher training, women's education and community empowerment programs that impact on the welfare of children and their families? Nepal could be your ideal destination.

Nepal is an ideal place to immerse yourself in vibrant community life and culture. You'll be contributing to helping children or community groups while gaining hands-on experience in your field of expertise.

When you are in the classroom, look at ways of integrating your efforts with local teachers and take the opportunity to learn from each other. If you develop a good relationship with local teachers and work together, you are ensuring that the positive impact you make continues long after you have departed.

Professional experience

Professional experience is at the very heart of many professional placement, teaching practice or field experience programs, particularly in the domains of international development and education. Volunteers are placed into a real-life professional setting, allowing them to practice what they have learnt during their studies and to further develop skills and confidence as a professional.

Teacher training institutions, for example, have a focus on preparing pre-service teachers for the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse school systems. In Australia, cultural diversity is evident in many schools with around 45% of the population being born, or have at least one parent born, overseas from one of over 200 countries.

Volunteering in Nepal provides unique opportunities for participants to develop greater skills and abilities in working with diversity and to become culturally competent and Asia literate. As a volunteer, you can develop personal and professional skills that can come from being in a program where you step out of your comfort zone, are completely immersed in a different cultural and linguistic environment, and are challenged personally and professionally. You also have the opportunity to reflect on your biases and preconceived notions and develop strengths that will help you to face life challenges.

Who to Choose?

There are many organisations, both charitable and commercial, that offer volunteer placement services in Nepal. You may even consider going to a community independently and asking if they need any help. Unfortunately, due to the popularity of volunteering, individuals are exploited or your help may be doing more harm than good. So, before you take the dive, be sure to consider the following questions when choosing a placement service:

1. Are they genuinely wanting to help underprivileged communities and what is their track record in doing so?
2. Do they only place suitably qualified individuals in schools?
3. Do they have close relationships with the communities where you will be placed and do they provide solid support throughout your stay?
4. Do they provide pre-departure information and training?
5. Do you have the opportunity to meet other participants and be able to work as a team?
6. Do they provide you the opportunity to connect with professionals in Nepal who will help you broaden your understanding and outlook?
7. Do they have experienced in-country support and licensed operators to ensure you are safe and well-looked after?
8. Do they work closely with stakeholders to create a unique and supportive environment for your cultural immersion experience?





**WE MAKE A LIVING
BY WHAT WE GET,
BUT WE MAKE A LIFE
BY WHAT WE GIVE**

WINSTON CHURCHILL







Preparation

This guide is based on years of experience in working with local communities to create an environment for introducing volunteers, and on the experiences and feedback from volunteers themselves. Some insights may be obvious and others are emphasised in the context in which we approached education assistance and community development.



Going solo or using a placement service, consider:

- ✓ Airport reception on arrival.
- ✓ Accommodation that is and isn't included before, during and after your teaching placement period.
- ✓ Transport as indicated on your itinerary - what is and isn't included. Nepal Visa fee and travel insurance.
- ✓ International airfare in and out of Kathmandu.
- ✓ Extra night(s) accommodation because of early arrival, late departure, early return from the placement location (due to any reason) outside the itinerary.
- ✓ Meals included in the placement location where you will be teaching as indicated on the itinerary.
- ✓ Pre-departure and in-country support.
- ✓ Expenses (phone calls, laundry, bar bills, porters, bottled water).
- ✓ Excess baggage charges, personal medical kit or personal equipment.
- ✓ Meals and transport not confirmed as included on the itinerary.
- ✓ Fees, tips or gratuities.
- ✓ Tours and activities during free time.





Making connections

During your time in Nepal, work with members of the school community, parents, local businesses and community leaders to develop friendships and create opportunities to mutually share knowledge and understanding. Your time and goodwill in contributing to the education needs of the schools or community groups will be respected and greatly appreciate. It opens up a rich sphere of engagement that you would normally not have the opportunity of experiencing if you were traveling through the country as a tourist.

Participants have been ambassadors in establishing friendships and networks between Nepal and their own countries that have continued long after they returned home.

By being immersed in Nepali culture, living in a village and working in the local school, you could have powerful and life-changing moments, as well as personal and professional growth.

Have you ever ventured into an emerging economy and lived in a village as a worker? It can be confronting to experience the limited resources faced by Nepalese people daily; an environment where children, their parents and teachers must attend to livestock, cultivate their own food, and collect water from community wells before and after school on top of homework and preparing for classes.

Previous volunteer teachers have said:

"It has been an amazing learning opportunity for me and I now know the value of my education and have a clear direction in my life. I have fallen in love with this country, it's people, it's peaceful energy, the beautiful landscape in particular those mountains and the dahl baht! I will definitely be back soon."

"In getting chosen for the opportunity to teach English in a Nepalese school I felt extremely lucky, upon return I felt luckier still. The opportunity I was given was the best possible professional experience I could be granted, it was challenging but it also made me aware of all aspects involved in a schools functioning, as well as the aspects of teaching in great detail. To have the chance to be immersed in another culture and country on top of everything else is icing on top of an already awesome cake!"

The responses received from children, parents and local teachers during impact assessments have been equally positive.







02

About Nepal

With its rich and diverse culture and the Himalayas as a backdrop, landlocked Nepal has a romantic image. Nonetheless, it is one of the poorest countries in the world, with the United Nations Human Development Report (2019) ranking it 147 out of 189 countries in the human development index. The incidence of multidimensional poverty has gone down from 59% in 2006 to 39% in 2011 and 29% in 2014. The UNDP states that Nepal has made successful strides in reducing poverty from 25.2% in 2011 to 21.6% in 2015. According to the UN, however, these numbers belie a harsh reality: huge disparities and inequalities persist between regions and social groups. Underdeveloped trade and industry, low agricultural productivity, and lack of access to affordable credit are among the key factors contributing to high unemployment rates and the relative weakness of Nepal's economy. The massive earthquake in April 2015 further undermined efforts to reduce poverty by taking thousands of lives, and destroying public and private infrastructures worth billions of dollars.

Nepal overview

Geography

Nepal is a land-locked country bordered by two economic giants, China (Tibet Autonomous Region) to the North and India in the East, West and South. Home to eight of the ten highest mountains in the world including Mount Everest (8,848 metres), the Great Himalayan Mountain Range to the North of the country covers around 15 percent of Nepal.

The flat plains or Terai region to the South and adjacent to the border of India has a hot, humid climate and makes up 18 percent of Nepal. In between these two regions are the hill regions that make up 67 percent of the country.

Kathmandu, with a population of around 1.5 million people, is the capital city and lies in the Hill Region at an altitude of 1,400 metres. According to the World Bank (2019), around 80% of Nepal's 29 million people live in rural areas, some so remote that the nearest road is within 2–16 days walking distance.

Nepali is the official language of Nepal but many government officials also speak English. The 2011 census reported 126 caste/ethnic groups living in Nepal and over 12 languages are spoken.

In 2015, Nepal was struck by a devastating series of earthquakes that left 9,000 dead and three million homeless. It was the worst disaster to hit Nepal in 80 years. About 30,000 classrooms were

either destroyed or damaged, putting the aspirations of a generation of children at serious risk. The UN estimated that about eight million people were affected by the disaster. The effects are still being felt, with the rebuilding of homes, schools, businesses, roads and other infrastructure a long-term challenge.

Political landscape

Nepal is in the middle of an exciting time of social and political change as the country shifts from what was, until recently, the world's only Hindu monarchy, to a secular democracy with increased rights for women, ethnic groups and other minorities.

The political situation in Nepal has been in transition since 1990, when a mainly peaceful democratic revolution led to a multi-party parliamentary system under a constitutional monarch.

Frustration with the rate of progress in rural areas led to a Maoist insurrection and 10 years of low-grade but violent civil war. The conflict between Government forces and the Maoists claimed more than 17,000 lives and displaced thousands more.

The conflict was brought to a halt when seven political parties and the Maoists signed the Comprehensive Peace Accord in November 2006. In 2008, elections were held and a Constituent Assembly was formed to draw up an inclusive and democratic constitution through

a participatory process. As their first official act, the delegates to this Assembly declared Nepal a democratic republic and asked the King to leave the palace.

Since 2008, the country has been governed under an interim constitution and many years of debate between the numerous political parties failed to move the constitution to a final governing document. The country's first constitution was finally promulgated soon after the 2015 earthquake by a two thirds majority of the Constituent Assembly.

Implementation of the constitution from a unitary system to a federal system is one of the biggest challenges currently being faced on the political landscape. Many communities are not happy with the boundaries of the provinces and the structure and power of the local tier of the Government.

Economy

Although Nepal has benefited only marginally from the economic growth of its two neighbour countries, the Human Development Report has acknowledged Nepal as one of the top performers in human development across the world. According to the report, Nepal has shown significant progress in areas of health and education through effective public policy efforts.

However, development challenges exist in access to quality primary education, improving basic

health outcomes, strengthening governance and reducing poverty. Looking ahead, economists project that Nepal's economic growth will remain strong, but it is expected to moderate in line with the country's overall growth potential. While healthy growth is expected to continue in the agricultural, construction and industry sectors, the activity in remaining sectors is expected to be affected by uncertainty stemming from transition to the federal structure and the possibility of further slowdown in remittances being sent into the country by Nepalese working overseas (World Bank, 2017). Other issues that have previously contributed to low productivity and investment include political instability, corruption, poor infrastructure, and lack of political attention to long term strategic planning for a stronger domestic economy. However, at the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning to take its toll both in human and economic terms and expected to have a severe impact.

Nepal has considerable development potential since the country has a large and relatively cheap labour force, access to raw materials (especially in the agro-industry), access to the Indian and Chinese markets, and great potential for hydroelectricity and irrigation. Agriculture provides a livelihood for 75 percent of the work force. Industrial activity mainly involves the processing of agricultural produce including natural fibres, sugar, tobacco, and grains.

Other industries include tourism, clothing and textiles, and cement

and brick production. Money sent back from Nepali people working overseas (remittances) is also important to the economy.

Tourism

Nepal has many tourist attractions, including spectacular high snow-clad mountains, lakes, national parks, ancient buildings and monuments. Some attractions were damaged or destroyed in the 2015 earthquake but the majority of Nepal has been unaffected. Nepal also has an incredible richness in cultures and ethnic groups, and together with its natural resource, these make it a popular tourist destination.

Interesting facts about Nepal can be found at:

cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html

Life in the village

The traditional way of life in many villages in the hill regions revolves around subsistence agriculture. Families plant rice in irrigated terraces before the monsoon season and harvest in the autumn. Other crops include millet, corn, greens, squash, beans, cucumbers, pumpkin and mustard seed (for cooking oil). Livestock such as cattle, buffalo and goats are an integral part of the local agriculture. They provide meat, milk, draught power for farming and fertilizer (manure) for cultivation. This labour intensive life makes it difficult for some children to attend school regularly because of the tasks required at home to support the family.

One of Nepal's major international exports is labour and many rural households depend on at

least one member's earnings from employment overseas. From our research, around 70% of households in the areas of Nepal where we placed teachers have a member of the family working overseas. Sometimes workers can face harsh employment conditions with abuse, manipulation, low pay and unsafe working environments.

Caste system

A majority of Nepalese people are Hindu and although centuries of discrimination based on the caste system is banned by law in Nepal, it still plays a role in many Nepali lives, particularly in remote areas.

Broadly speaking, the caste system is a process of placing people in occupational groups. Rooted in religion and based on a division of labour, the caste system, among other things, dictates the type of occupations a person can pursue and the social interactions that they may have. People from the Sudra (also known as Dalits) or working caste (the most marginalised) have slowly risen to higher social and economic positions and have had the opportunity to move beyond the confinement of traditional labour professions. Despite recent successes in the abolition of discrimination, Sudras come from an intergenerational disadvantaged position. For instance, the grandparents of the current generation of students from the Sudra caste were forbidden to attend school and many are illiterate. You may also find that many of the children in government schools are from this caste.

Northern Neighbour:

China (Tibet Autonomous Region)

Population: 1.4 Billion

Area: 9.6 Million km²

Average Elevation: 1,800m

(Tibet: 4,500m)

Population:

29 Million

Area:

147,291 km²

Mt Everest:

8,848m

Southern Neighbour:

India

Population: 1.4 Billion

Area: 3.9 Million km²

Coastline: 7,000 km

Great Himalayas

Mid mountain region

Forested Churia foothills

Tarai—low, flat, fertile land



Monetary unit:

1 Nepalese rupee = 100 paisa

Exchange rate:

AU\$1 ≈ 80 Rupees

GDP per capita (2019):

US \$859



Capital:

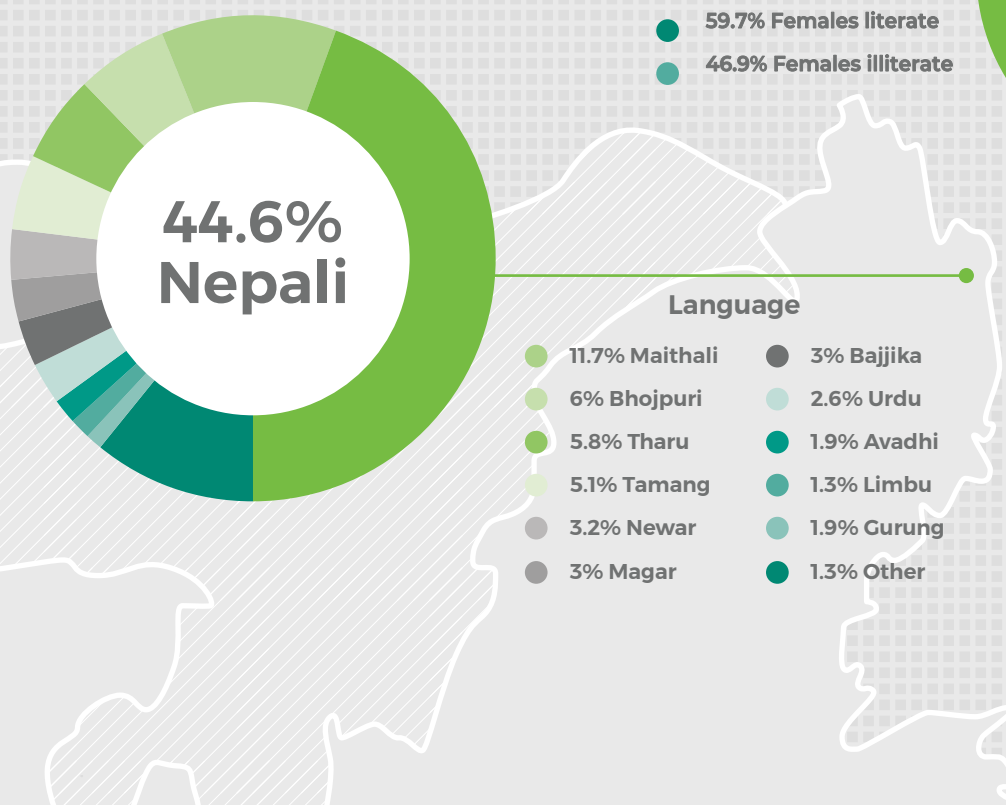
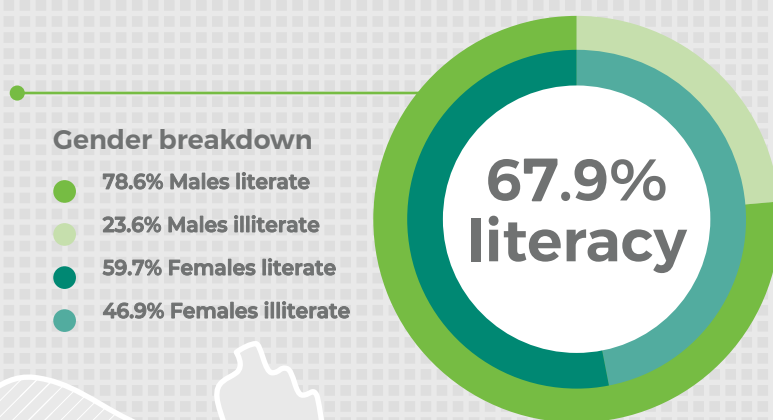
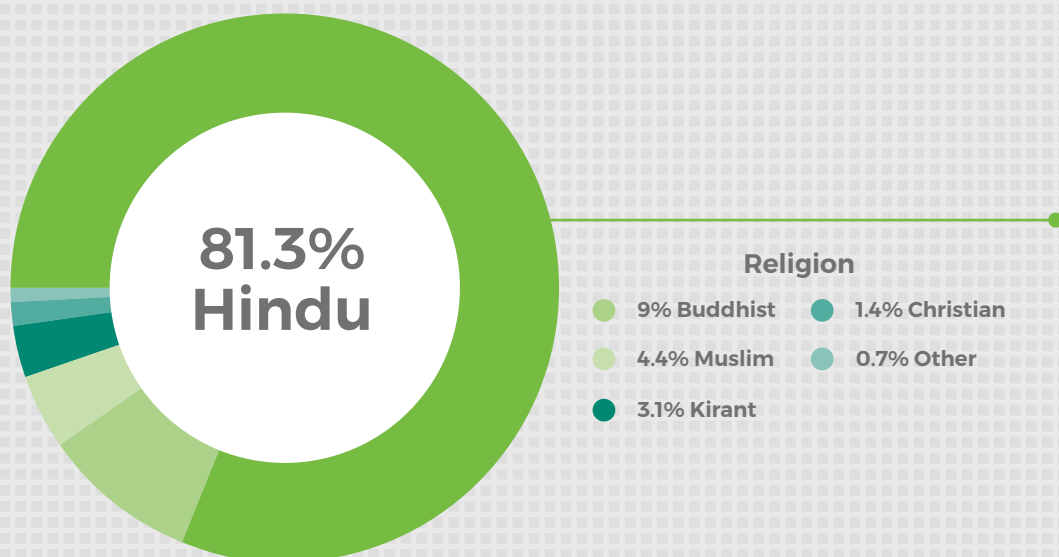
Kathmandu

Geographic coordinates:

27 43 N, 85 19 E

Time zone:

UTC+5.75



Life expectancy:
Women = 72 years
Men = 69 years

Median age:
Women = 25.3 years
Men = 22.8 years



Infant mortality rate:
Nepal: 26.5 in 1,000
Australia: 3.2 in 1,000

Doctors per 10,000 people: Nepal: 7.5
Australia: 36.7



Nepal is

1 of 42

of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 147 of 189 on the human development index.



In many areas of Nepal as many as

70%

of families have a relative working overseas to send money home.





6M

Nepalese people live below the international poverty line.

A row of 10 white human icons on a green background, representing a population or group of people.




03

Preparing to travel

The following sections provides you with some suggestions on travel arrangements, health and wellbeing considerations, insurance requirements, risks, cultural considerations, equipment, documents and money, and details about travelling to and within Nepal.

Getting Ready

As much as this guide can provide information about how to prepare and what to expect, you are encouraged to do your own research to fully prepare for the challenge.

A placement organisation can plan your itinerary but you are travelling to an emerging economy and you need to be prepared for major changes. Please be prepared to adapt and to use your initiative and commonsense during your time in Nepal.

Sometimes this requires effective communications with your fellow volunteers and people in the community where you will be teaching. Learning to accept changes, implement solutions and to resolve issues is a major part of the learning and personal development process. Stay in contact with the school Principal, teachers, in-country agents and your contacts at home who can provide both personal and professional support when required.

Please ensure you have done your own research about Nepal by reading online material and your government travel advice website to ensure you have a realistic idea of what to expect, the risks, and how you should prepare.

This guide, although not exhaustive, provides a good overview of important topics to help you prepare and provides a springboard for further investigation.





Enjoy Nepal

Research what you would like to do before, during and after your teaching assignment. Nepal is a beautiful country with a lot to offer!



Insurance

Don't travel without the appropriate level of cover. Make sure your travel insurance will cover you for your activities in Nepal, especially if you go trekking.

Preparation checklist

Depending on whether you are going solo or using a placement service, there may be a number of requirements that you need to tick off prior to your departure.

Pre-departure seminar

In preparation for your placement, your provider may provide support and advice at a seminar prior to your departure. Take advantage of this opportunity to gather more details, ask questions and meet other volunteers.

Police check

Professional placement services sometimes require participants to undergo a Police Check or Working with Children Check prior to taking part in their program. This is used to determine whether a person is suitable for placement and to protect the communities where volunteers are placed.

Booking form

Read the principles for placement and the booking terms and conditions carefully before signing and contact your provider if you have any queries.

Medical consultation

You may be required to complete a medical clearance form where you will have the opportunity to

complete details about any medical conditions you may have and confirm that you have or will consult a medical practitioner before your departure. It is important that you disclose any medical conditions so your provider can best address safety concerns and help to minimise any risks to you while you are in Nepal.

Flights

We suggest that you do this as soon as you have considered all the information presented to you and you are happy with the terms and conditions. If there is anything you think could prevent you from going, contact your placement service immediately.

Travel insurance

Travel insurance is usually a condition of placement and if you go solo, please arrange travel insurance that will cover you for your activities in Nepal. Make sure it covers you for your entire overseas stay.

Insurances may not cover you for higher altitudes or certain adventure activities.

At the very least you should have emergency medical and repatriation insurance which should include the cost of rescue. Cancellation insurance is strongly recommended as money paid to service providers may not be refundable.

Please carefully check your insurer's terms and conditions and in particular, you should make sure the following is covered if you plan on undertaking them:

1. Higher risk activity (i.e paragliding, trekking or mountaineering, motorbike riding).
2. Going to higher altitudes if you intend on trekking, especially about 3,500 metres.
3. Helicopter evacuation in an emergency.

It is important for you to understand that the burden of any expense incurred in an evacuation and repatriation may be borne by you and that it may be your responsibility to pay any costs incurred in respect of any evacuation or for medical treatment.

Be aware of the limitations and exclusions of any policy you take out. You should also be aware that under certain circumstances, your local placement agent might instigate rescue proceedings via helicopter (or any other means necessary) in situations of medical emergency without first contacting your insurance company for their approval, especially in urgent circumstances.

Visas

All foreigners require a visa for entry into Nepal. You can get a **Tourist Visa** from a Nepalese Embassy or consulate in your country or on arrival in Nepal at Tribhuvan Airport in Kathmandu. Many people obtain their visa on arrival to Kathmandu. If you do so, make sure your home country is on the list of nationalities permitted a visa on arrival.

If you find that you have accidentally applied for a visa that has too few days on it, you can get your visa extended at the Department of Immigration in Kathmandu or the Immigration Office in Pokhara. It is easy!

If you decide to get your visa on entry, go to the following website and fill out the details before you depart for Nepal.

nepaliport.immigration.gov.np

You will need the following fee on arrival:

- 15 days: USD\$30 or equivalent convertible currency.
- 30 days: USD\$50 or equivalent convertible currency.
- 90 days: USD\$125 or equivalent convertible currency.

If you decide to get your visa in Australia, please refer to one of the following websites for further information.

- Australian Capital Territory—Embassy of Nepal
necan.gov.np
- New South Wales—Consulate of Nepal
nepalconsulate.org.au
- Queensland—Consulate-General
nepalconsulate.com.au
- Victoria—Consulate of Nepal
nepalconsulate.net.au
- South Australia—Consulate of Nepal
nepal-consulate.net.au

Fundraising

In the past, participants have run fundraising events for the purpose of helping the school and community where they will be placed. Fundraising doesn't need to be difficult or take a huge amount of time and effort to arrange.

Fundraising ideas:

It's easy to organise simple fundraising events and friends and family are usually keen to support you when they know that you are going to Nepal to teach. You will find that someone has connections that can result in you running an amazing fundraising event. Participants in the past have successfully sought support from family and friends through crowdfunding websites such as gofundme.com which takes very little effort to set up. Other ideas include:

- Quiz nights, movie night or dinner event with entertainment.

- Raffles—contact local companies to donate prizes.
- If you work, how can your employer and fellow workmates help to fundraise?
- If you are a student, food stalls during lunch at university seem to be a good way of fundraising.

Raising funds before you depart adds enormous value to your placement experience and allows you to become more involved in helping the local community. By involving others as either participants and/or organisers, you are also raising awareness about disadvantaged communities and the ways in which everyone can contribute. Because you will be there to take part in any project, your friends, family and colleagues will connect with your journey and see how their contribution has helped because no doubt they will be seeing photos and updates from you.

Community consultation is an important skill, so take the time to discuss with the teachers at your placement school possible projects that your fundraising efforts could help support. Listen carefully to their needs and the problems that need addressing and offer your own thoughts and experiences to help shape the best use of your funds. In the past, we have installed solar panels for power supplies, refurbished and repainted classrooms to make them more child friendly, and provided technology for the classroom.

Oxfam has a great resource online, check it out:

groups.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Community-Fundraising-Toolkit_2016.pdf

Register

Once you finalise your travel arrangements, register your travel details on your government travel website. In Australia, it is smartraveller.gov.au.

This information is used by your government to locate you while in Nepal in the case of an emergency such as natural disasters or civil disturbances. It is also used to notify you in the event that travel advisories change during travel. This is especially important if you plan to travel before/after placement that is not part of your placement program.

It is recommended that you familiarise yourself with the travel advice provided by your government. These advisories

cover safety information including issues of security, the political situation, crime, and health. Please note that these travel advisories will tend to err on the side of caution so you should supplement this advice with additional reputable information from the internet and from your contacts in Nepal.

Paying for placement

If you are using volunteer placement service, the cost covers the time, effort and resources that goes into the planning and coordination of your placement. These costs ensure that participants are placed in a safe environment and have access to emergency contacts, accommodation, food and transport (as per your itinerary). If you choose a not-for-profit agency, profits usually goes back into helping underserved communities in Nepal.

Arrival and orientation

Arriving in a very different culture and a new country can be both an exciting and daunting experience. To help ease you into Nepal, make sure that a local representative meets you at the airport and transfer you to your hotel in Kathmandu and onto your placement location.

Reputable agencies usually provide a number of orientation sessions in the first few days in Nepal. It's important that you are ready to arrive by the prescribed date. In Nepal, you would want to meet local leaders who can discuss issues about teaching and living in a village (if you are placed in a rural school), health and safety, local culture, and about what activities you can do during and after your placement.

Important travel checklist



Make sure you have a current passport that is valid for 6 months after your return date back home.



Make sure you have a visa that covers the entire duration of your stay in Nepal; this can be obtained at Tribhuvan airport in Kathmandu when you land or at a Nepali mission.



At the end of your placement, make travel arrangements with local providers to take you to other parts of Nepal and to get you back to Kathmandu and the airport.



Make sure you have budgeted enough money for the duration of your placement. ATMs are readily available in cities and larger towns, and currency exchangers can be found in Kathmandu and other major locations.

Medical advice

Your health and wellbeing is very important! A big part of that relies on you taking appropriate measures before your departure and being vigilant in Nepal.

Make sure you seek medical advice prior to departure and that you have had all the appropriate vaccinations. A dental check-up is a good idea as there will be no dental facilities in remote areas. If you have a condition that puts you at higher risk, you may need a medical certificate to confirm that you have been assessed as fit to undertake the placement.

Not all GPs are well-practised in understanding the requirements for health precautions when travelling internationally. We suggest visiting a doctor who advertises specifically for travel health, especially if you have any pre-existing condition that could complicate your travel in Nepal.

Some conditions that require medical assessment and are particularly worth mentioning include: respiratory conditions such as asthma, heart conditions, diabetes or immunodeficiency disorders (this is not a comprehensive list).

See your doctor at least 6 weeks before you travel for an assessment of your condition, to discuss a management plan, and to obtain sufficient prescriptions for any medication to cover the entire trip.

Health issues

The health situation in Nepal changes, but we want to provide an overview of some important issues. Please consult a doctor who can give you accurate and up-to-date information and advice:

Immunisations

While visiting the doctor, make sure to discuss the required vaccinations for Nepal. We advise that you start with vaccinations **at least 6 weeks** before you leave. Travellers to Nepal are at risk of enterically transmitted diseases. Hepatitis A vaccine and typhoid vaccine are the two common immunisations. Your doctor may recommend other immunisations such as measles, polio, tetanus, diphtheria, Japanese encephalitis or rabies depending on where you go and what you intend to do. If you are going to the Terai, malaria prevention measures may also be required.

Gastrointestinal issues

Intestinal protozoal and bacterial pathogens are highly endemic in Nepal. Many visitors experience diarrhoea at some stage. Sometimes this is due to the change in water and diet.

Provided that you feel well and that you are not passing more than 2–3 stools per day, no treatment is required. Moderate stomach upsets are characterised by vomiting, abdominal cramps and loose, watery stools. General treatment consists of rest and plenty of fluid (consider using Gastrolyte to replace body salts. More serious cases are treated with antibiotics.

Respiratory issues

Pollution in Kathmandu can cause issues if you have respiratory disorders. At higher altitude, there will be less oxygen and this can cause respiratory distress.

Acclimatisation

On placements, you will usually not go higher than 2,500 metres and this will present minimal issues as far as altitude is concerned. But if you go higher than this altitude or go trekking in the Himalayas, you need to be well informed about altitude sickness and acclimatisation. Discuss the use of Diamox with your Doctor which can help you to acclimatise.

For more details visit:

treksafe.com.au/pac/altitude-illness

Rabies

Half of all tourist exposures to a possibly rabid animal occur near Swayambhunath, a beautiful hilltop shrine in Kathmandu also known as the monkey temple. Be extra cautious with dogs and monkeys in this area and anywhere in Nepal.

Evacuations

Helicopter evacuation from most areas is readily available. Communication has improved in remote areas because of satellite and cellular telephones, and private helicopter companies accept credit cards and are eager to perform evacuations for profit. If weather permits, evacuation can often take place on the same day as the request. Helicopter rescue is usually limited to morning hours because of afternoon winds in the mountains. Helicopter rescue is billed at around US\$2,500 per hour, with an average total cost of around US\$7,500.

If you require a medical evacuation, your insurance company may require pre-authorization for this course of action. Please note that if your local agents feels that your situation is serious enough to call for an immediate evacuation, they may do so without seeking pre-authorization. Your health and safety is of upmost priority.

Staying healthy

Your travel will take you to a place of very different customs and standards of living than your own. It is important that you are vigilant about your personal health and

wellbeing during your time in Nepal. Access to health care is often not at the level of which you are accustomed.

Minor illness while travelling overseas is not uncommon. Regardless of the nature of your illness or injury, make sure you tell your supervisor, fellow volunteer, or in-country contact person that you are ill or injured, however minor you think it is. They may be able to advise you on how to manage the situation. It is also important to keep an eye on your fellow travellers and help out if you notice that someone is struggling or appears unwell. Advise your placement agency of your concern as early intervention is always the best approach.

Your trip may be more physically demanding than your current daily routine and jetlag, a change to your diet, climate and culture may also take their toll. There is a good chance that you may be knocked about from a bug for a day or two so be prepared. It is therefore vital that you depart on your trip feeling fit and prepared for the challenges ahead.

Listed here is a general guide of Do's and Don'ts when it comes to your health and wellbeing:

DOs

- Take medication that is prescribed for you and not someone else's.
- Tell your guide/local contact if you are ill or injured even if it seems minor.
- Tell one of your fellow travellers before you take any medication.

- Wear a hat in the sun, wear sunscreen and cover up, **especially** at higher altitude where UV rays are more intense.
- Brush your teeth using bottled water.
- Make the effort to eat properly at every meal.
- Drink at least 2-4 litres of water per day. Drink and carry more water than usual at higher altitudes where the rate of dehydration is higher than at lower altitudes.
- Wear appropriate closed shoes **at all times**. Bare feet may result in cut toes/feet that become infected. When trekking, proper shoes that give your feet and ankles support are a must.
- Ensure that you wash your hands before handling food and after using the toilet. Be extra vigilant and carry a hand sanitizer at all times.
- Keep your hands away from your mouth and eyes to avoid infections.
- If you hire a scooter or motorbike, have an international driver's license with you, and make sure your insurance will cover you in case of any accidents, even if you are only a passenger. Insurance may not cover you for a scooter accident if your rider doesn't have a full motorbike license.

DON'Ts

- Don't eat at street stalls or places that seem unhygienic or risky.
- Don't drink unpurified water—stick to sealed bottled water.

- Don't over-expose yourself in the sun, especially at higher altitude.
- Don't go off on your own or take unnecessary risks.
- Don't get drunk.
- Don't use heavily perfumed toiletries and cosmetics in hot climates, which attract insects.
- Don't leave wounds open, dirty or uncovered. Any wounds **MUST** be treated with antiseptic and covered immediately, even just a scratch. Wearing open shoes with uncovered wounds on your feet is asking for trouble.
- Don't share water bottles, cutlery, bowls and other items of personal use.
- Don't get too close to animals—it's best to give them a wide berth. Don't have food in your hand or bag as you may get some unwelcomed attention.
- Avoid wet plates, cups and utensils. Remember, it's often the cup in which the tea or other drink is served (or the wet plate in which the food was served) that will cause you problems. Be totally sure that cups, plates and utensils are clean and dry. In the case of tea or other drinks, if in doubt, play it safe and refuse it—even in expensive restaurants.
- The natural water supply in Nepal is not fit for human consumption. Do not drink or wash your teeth with any water except for bottled or purified water—make sure that the seal is not broken! There are treatments available to make drinking of water safe if needed—boiling the water or purification via iodine tablets or other methods.
- For the same reason, ice should be avoided as there is no way to tell how the water was sourced.
- Make sure that meat has been cooked fully. If you see even a slight amount of rawness in the meat stop eating it.
- Local style foods are generally the best as they are cooked for longer times and so more likely to have any contaminants destroyed.
- Don't eat food that could have been exposed to flies before you came upon the scene, e.g., most breads and sweets. In other words, eat only food that has been cooked while you wait.
- Don't fall into the trap of being paranoid of offending your host at the expense of your health. If you're not totally sure—politely refuse it.

Food & drink

Pay careful attention to the things you eat and drink. Always wash your hands prior to eating. Avoid food such as salads, seafood, ice cream or food that has been left in the open or exposed to flies. Do not take ice in drinks and if necessary, ensure that you always purify the water in your water bottle immediately if you don't have bottled water. Furthermore (I may be repeating myself here):

- Everyone in a volunteer group has a responsibility to ourselves and to the group as a whole to try our best to stay healthy.
- Avoid raw fruits you can't peel and vegetables, including salads. Vegetable should be cooked thoroughly where possible.

- Make sure your teeth are in good shape before you leave. There are dentists in Kathmandu in case of emergencies, but quality and hygiene procedures can vary.

First aid kits

It's highly recommend that you have a first aid kit with you that includes medication such as antibiotics. It's also strongly recommend you have a medical practitioner prescribe any necessary medication before you depart.

Contents of your medical kit may include (most of this material can be purchased in Nepal for a fraction of the cost:

- Throat lozenges
- Antiseptic cream
- Ibuprofen
- Cold & flu tablets
- Sinus tablets and antihistamines
- Antibiotics
- Band-aids, sports strapping tape, blister pack, and crepe bandages
- Rehydration powder—Gastrolite
- Imodium/Loperamide to stop diarrhoea.
- Stemetil for nausea
- Tablets for travel sickness
- Mosquitorepellent
- Sunscreen (50+)
- Stingose or similar for relief of itch from bites
- Canesten cream
- Buscopan for the relief of stomach and bowel pain
- Antacid
- Scissors and thermometer

- Personal medication such as malaria tablets, Ventolin inhaler, antibiotics, EpiPen (anaphylaxis) and skin cream for allergies.

Don't forget to take spare pairs of contact lenses or glasses and a copy of your glasses prescription. Always keep a supply of essential medication with you, e.g. in your hand luggage rather than check-in bags.

If you require prescription medication for whatever reason, we recommend that you obtain enough of it to last for your entire trip, and some extra to carry in a separate bag as a safety precaution on the chance that one set of medication is lost. There is no problem with the availability of common medication in Nepal, but there may be issues with the potency. The availability of not so common medication will be an issue.

Confirm with your treating doctor if your medication is a controlled

substance, as having a letter from a doctor authorising you to carry your prescription is an important travel document.

A first aid course prior to departure is highly recommended!

Personal security

You normally have independence in all areas you are travelling so be aware of your own safety. Travelling in any form goes with a risk. Safety must be your number one priority at all times. The golden rule is **never go anywhere alone**, don't get drunk or take drugs, and never allow yourself to get into a situation that you are unsure about.

Please be sensible with your decisions while travelling and do not take unnecessary risks. Discuss your post-placement travel plans with your agency who may be able to offer some help.

- Take care of your belongings in crowded areas.
- Never go exploring at night.

- Don't wear jewelry or flash money—it is tempting to thieves.
- Avoid being out after dark, especially on your own. Keep to well lit, crowded streets.
- Adventure sports of all kind must be taken with absolute caution.
- We do not advise you to travel alone. If you do travel independently, please keep in contact with your family, friends and your in-country contacts.

If you hear of any civil unrest during your placement, seek local advice from your in-country contacts. In such circumstances, please ring home as friends and family will worry that you are caught up in it even if you are far away from the trouble.

To get up-to-date travel advice, please consult your government travel website.

If you decide to change your flight and come back later than your planned date, please make sure you extend your travel insurance.

Health & wellbeing checklist



Have a discussion with a travel doctor about your trip.



Discuss appropriate food and drink practices.



Get the appropriate vaccinations.



Ensure you have an appropriate level of travel insurance coverage.



Ensure you have enough personal medication for the duration of the trip and some spare and any relevant documentation.



Register with your government travel website and keep an eye on travel advice for Nepal.





Clothing & equipment

Suggested clothing and equipment list

A comprehensive list of suggested clothing and equipment for your trip has been included below. Experienced travellers will often take only a selection of these items based on what has worked in the past. Some of the items are really useful if you go trekking or travelling remote parts of Nepal.

You should consider bringing a backpack that is comfortable for you to carry, especially if you decide to trek after placement.

Don't feel that you need to buy all this equipment. You can purchase all of this in Nepal at a far cheaper price, although the quality may not be as good. Best buy good shoes in Australia as that is one of the items you don't want to go awry. Don't go walking at your placement location with sandals or fashion shoes.

Clothing

- Waterproof jacket.
- Down jacket, if you feel the cold, or a nice warm fleecy or other thick jacket.
- Trekking or comfortable trousers, long sleeve shirts and t-shirts. When selecting clothing, always best to get ones that wick away the sweat and are fast drying such as synthetic and wool so that they can be washed in a bucket and dry over night.
- Appropriate clothing for wearing at school.

- Micro-fleece and mid weight clothing.
- Thermals or base layer for top & bottom (merino wool or synthetic).
- Warms mittens and/or gloves.
- Wool or fleece hat.
- Sun hat, bandana or scarf if you plan on trekking.
- Head torch and extra batteries.
- Sunglasses.

Footwear

- Walking boots. A good pair of water repellent/resistant boots with ankle support.
- Wool and liner socks.
- Trainers/sneakers and sandals. Sandals can be used in the shower and around the hotel.

Gear

- If you are staying in lodges/hotels, a sleeping bag is not necessary, but they are on occasion handy if you feel the cold at night. If you need one, you can get it in Nepal.
- A backpack large enough to carry your equipment for the trip (50-75 litres). If you head up to a village during the week and are in town on the weekend, you can leave the material you don't need at the hotel. Bring or buy in Nepal a cheap zip-up bag or bring a second hard bag for you to leave at the hotel (depending on your placement location).

- Water bottle (especially wide mouth bottles).
- Sunscreen and lip balm with a high SPF.
- Insect repellent—if there are mosquitoes about.
- Water purification tablets (for emergencies).
- Favourite snack food.
- Books, iPod and cards etc.
- Camera with spare batteries and memory cards.
- Travel insurance certificate with emergency contact number.
- Earplugs, baby wipes and hand sanitizer.
- Day pack for small items to carry during the day.
- Casual clothing for air travel days and time spent on non-teaching days.
- Toiletry bag including toilet paper, soap, towel, toothbrush, etc. This can be purchased in Nepal.
- Fast drying underwear and socks (thick and thin)—ones used for sport as they can be washed and dry quickly—if you go trekking.
- Your first aid kit, medications, contacts and solutions, and hygiene items.
- Surge protector and battery pack—power in Nepal is not good and can be off for many hours a day. Power spikes will damage equipment. If you are bringing a laptop or other sensitive equipment, consider having a surge protector.

Threats & risks

Be aware that travelling in an emerging economy involves a heightened risk of personal injury or death. If you go to Nepal, you need to accept these risks and be responsible for your own actions and involvement.

Volunteering in rural villages requires an open and flexible attitude as well. You may experience extreme conditions, unpredictable weather and last minute changes to the itinerary that are beyond anyone's control. The ability to work as a member of a team, be considerate to others, and to be understanding in a difficult situation is important.

As a part of your planning process, consider a threat and risk assessment for your placement and for activities that you undertake after the placement period. By identifying the potential hazards, you can assess the level of risk and implement measures to reduce risk. Reputable placement agencies would have already done such an assessment for you to review.

Below is a summary of some of the significant risks and hazards:

- Falls and trips resulting in physical injury eg. twisting an ankle, slipping, or falling off the path (please always wear good trekking shoes that are completely closed at all times).
- Altitude illness if you go trekking at higher altitudes (see treksafe.com.au).
- Rock fall and landslides, particularly during and after rain.
- Severe weather and conditions such as floods, wind, extreme cold and heat.
- Climatic injuries (dehydration, sun burn, heat exhaustion, hypothermia or heat stroke).
- Crossing a river with no bridge resulting in drowning and/or a fall.
- Lightning strike.
- Wildlife, pack animals (eg. donkeys or horses) or stray dogs. Pack animals have been known to knock people off the path. Dogs can attack and bite.
- Earthquake—Nepal is in an earthquake zone and many buildings are not up to international standard for protection against earthquakes.
- Risk of fire in the hotel or lodge.
- Endemic local diseases (see pages 29-32).
- Road traffic or flight accident. Nepal's road and aviation safety is generally poor.
- Contaminated food and/or water. (see pages 29-32).
- Electrocuting due to unsafe wiring.

Access to good medical care in case of serious issues may not be available or could be delayed compared with what you are used to back in your home country. Please be aware of this if you have any pre-existing conditions.

Assess the location you are placed for your volunteer assignment and how far it is from medical facilities. Usually they are within a few hours by road. But if you go trekking, you could be far away from medical help. In case of a serious injury requiring hospitalisation, evacuation could take a long time and may impede your ensuing recovery. Helicopters are the most usual means of evacuation, however they are not always available or they may be hindered by poor weather and flying conditions.

If you think that you are more prone to risks for whatever reason, please consider how you and your placement agency can manage the risk.

While in Nepal, if you think you are being exposed to unnecessary risk, please discuss this with your agency.

Documents & money

Passports

Remember that your passport is a legal document that entitles you to international travel. It is a requirement that your passport is valid for a minimum of 6 months after your arrival back in Australia. If your passport is due to expire before this time, you will need to get it renewed.

Keep a photocopy of your passport in a safe place. This will ensure that if your passport is lost, getting a new one will be a quicker and easier.

Insurance certificate

Travel insurance covers the costs for emergency medical and associated costs such as doctors, hospital costs and transport costs if you are injured or sick. A agency usually requires all participants in the placement programs to have personal travel insurance cover.

Medical form and injury/illness report

You may be required to fill out:

- A medical form telling your agency of any pre-existing conditions. Should any changes arise in your medical situation, you must inform them of any changes.
- Illness or injury report that needs to be completed if you are ill or injured while in Nepal. Your guide/contact person will have one available on request.

Registration

As part of your pre-travel planning, we strongly recommend that you register with your government travel website. In Australia, it is the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and subscribe to the country updates that the government issues:
orao.dfat.gov.au

Before you begin the registration process, you will need the following information: passport number, full name, date of birth, travel dates, travel locations, and emergency contact details.

Money

The currency in Nepal is the Nepalese Rupee (NPR), not to be confused with the Indian Rupee. ATM machines are readily accessible in Kathmandu, Pokhara and large towns in the areas you are going. Ask your in-country contact for advice on how much money you need if you are not sure.

While travelling in Nepal, we recommend carrying a few hundred USD and AUD with you as a backup. A credit card with PIN protection is another backup, and a debit card that can be used internationally is also acceptable.

Learning Nepali

It is highly recommended that you spend some time before you depart learning a little Nepali. Your efforts will be appreciated by the locals who will try to help you to improve on your vocabulary and pronunciation.

You might find the following resources useful:

- Lonely Planet Nepali Phrase book.
- [youtube.com/watch?v=5WjxwkMSXgA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WjxwkMSXgA) for basic phrases.

- learn101.org/nepali.php
- ournepali.info
- www.ilanguages.org/nepali.php

Cultural considerations

Your local hosts and other people that you come in contact with will greatly appreciate any effort you make to learn their language and to respect their traditions and way of life. As with many cultures, like your own, politeness, respect and modesty are highly regarded.

Gather as much information as you can about local customs and traditions when you first arrive to ensure you are acting responsibly. It's an important part of your cultural immersion experience. Learning about other cultures is part of why many people go abroad.

Keep your cool and try not to raise your voice, however frustrating a situation may be. You may not offend your hosts but you are likely to look foolish. It is always wise to be mindful that showing affection in public is generally not accepted and try to avoid holding hands, touching, hugging and kissing.

Cultural learning & appropriateness

A commitment to learning about Nepali culture and then interacting, communicating and behaving in ways that respect the local values will be a great cross-cultural learning experience for you.

This may mean you need to dress differently, eat new foods, or new quantities of food. You may need to change certain concepts of time, personal space and privacy. You will certainly need to develop a new set of non-verbal behaviours and to give up certain things you value. Most importantly, you will need to develop tolerance and respect for many other things that you may not understand.

Committing yourself to this level of cultural learning and engagement is hard work, but the rewards are considerable and last a lifetime. The depth of your immersion experience and the character of the relationships you develop are dependent on your ability to make a serious attempt to understand and respect others. A commitment to cultural appropriateness:

01. Demonstrates that you care about what is important to the community and your hosts and that you are making an honest attempt to respect their values.
02. Has a profound effect on the type of experience you will have.
03. Promotes meaningful interactions and language learning.
04. Speaks well of your home country, your university, and your placement agency.

Sensitivity to another culture and developing cross-cultural competence requires more than understanding and mastering rules. You may learn cross-cultural techniques in your course at university and certain rules of etiquette in this guide and from online resources. These rules and techniques are important, but cross-cultural competencies cannot be learned in isolation from

actual experience. Reputable volunteer programs are usually designed to help you to appreciate what you have learned and extend your learning and competencies in real life situations.

The best way to prepare for upcoming cross-cultural encounters is to imagine the type of person you will attempt to be during the program. You will be actively engaged in learning throughout your experience and your behaviour and interactions will reflect this. People will see your respect for their culture and help you to learn. Even cultural blunders (which we all make) will be accepted by members of the host culture gracefully when you are at this level.

Respect for the host culture and your willingness to change could help you to think more critically of your own values and have a better understanding of your own culture. A conscientious effort will enable you to define a comfortable cultural boundary for yourself that neither compromises you nor offends those with whom you live and learn. It is important to realise that you do not need to discard your own core values to appreciate and tolerate the existence of different values in others. You will need to examine your values from a new perspective and be open to modifying your behaviour to

accommodate host culture values. Your placement is not just about teaching but is also a journey of self-discovery and a participation with the lives and experiences of others.

Clothing

The dress code is important for both men and women. Men and women should wear trousers/long skirts rather than shorts (unless in tourist areas where this tends to be acceptable).

Shoes are considered degrading so keep them on the ground and remove them before putting your feet on anything. If you enter a Nepali house follow the example of your host in deciding whether to remove your shoes but on entering a temple or monastery you should remove them.

Food

Hindus are concerned about the ritual pollution of food when it is touched by someone outside their caste or religion. Therefore, do not touch any cooked foods on display and when drinking from a container used by others avoid touching your lips to it. Do not eat food with your left hand and make sure you only give or receive food with your right hand. Locally, left hand is for the toilet, right is for food, and the two should not be mixed.

Shopping

Bargaining is acceptable unless you see a sign saying 'fixed price' or there are price tickets as in the more up-market stores or supermarkets. Approach it with patience and a sense of fun.

Have an idea before you start of the rough cost of the item you want to buy and even try to pick up a few numbers in Nepali—the vendor will be more than likely to drop their price! Don't be afraid to walk away if you feel uncomfortable or you change your mind. You don't have to bargain at all if you are happy to help out locals. Everyone will have their opinion on this matter so do what is comfortable for you.

Some other points:

- Carry a cotton carry bag or day pack for your purchases and daily items to minimise the use of plastic.
- Try to shop and dine in at community-supported projects. Purchasing locally produced goods and services will have a positive impact on the community. Ask your hosts where these places can be found or look for them in guide books.
- Be aware of your country's customs regulations when you shop as you may not be able to bring your purchases back home or you may need to pay for treatment (such as animal products or wood items).

Photography

Nepal provides wonderful opportunities for photography. In order not to offend please remember the following:

- Ask permission before taking photographs and respect a refusal.
- Show respect and be sensitive.
- If you promise to send a photo back, make sure you are sincere in your offer.

- Don't take pictures of monks, priest or sadhus unless they 'want' you to (sometimes for a fee), which is usually the case at Pushpatinath temple in Kathmandu.

Begging and donations

Nepal like many countries around the world has people begging in the street. This can be a bit of a shock and the desire to help can be overwhelming. However, begging can be a problem. Although it may not seem much by hand over a few dollars, you may be encouraging them towards a life of begging.

You may be taken by a local friend to an orphanage where you happily make a donation. Chances are they will take a cut of the donation as a commission for taking you there in the first place. Donations from foreigners is big business. But sometimes your donations will be put to good use and people's intentions are pure.

You may also be asked for sweets and pens by children in the villages. But again, by offering something for nothing you may be encouraging children to beg. You will find that village leaders will ask you not to give anything to the children if they ask.

Having said that, there may be situations where individuals are in need and you may want to help. It's probably been a situation you have faced in your home city many times. Weigh up the situation and make your own decision. If you are strongly motivated to help, talk to a reputable charity to ensure that donations are used to maximum effect.



It is customary to
take off your shoes and give a donation
when entering temples,
monasteries or gompas



In Buddhist areas
circumambulate in a clockwise direction
around mani walls,
chortens, and stupas.



Bargaining is often acceptable
so approach it
with patience and
a sense of fun





Left hand: Toilet

Do not mix them

Food: Right hand



**Remember
to ask
permission**

before taking
photographs and
respect a refusal



Political situation

The political situation in Nepal has been in transition since 1990. Political frustrations continue to this day but since the passing of the Constitution in 2015 and consequent elections, this has quietened down considerably.

If there is political unrest, the main effect on tourists can be

disruptions to their schedule because of demonstrations and strikes. None of the political tension has been aimed at foreigners—Nepal remains a safe destination to visit.

However, you should monitor the political situation and stay informed through your hosts, in-country advisors, and

your home government website. Political unrest can be very disruptive and there is the threat that tourist could be inadvertently caught up in demonstrations.

The advice of local people is usually the best and there may have to be changes to your travel and volunteering plans as a result.

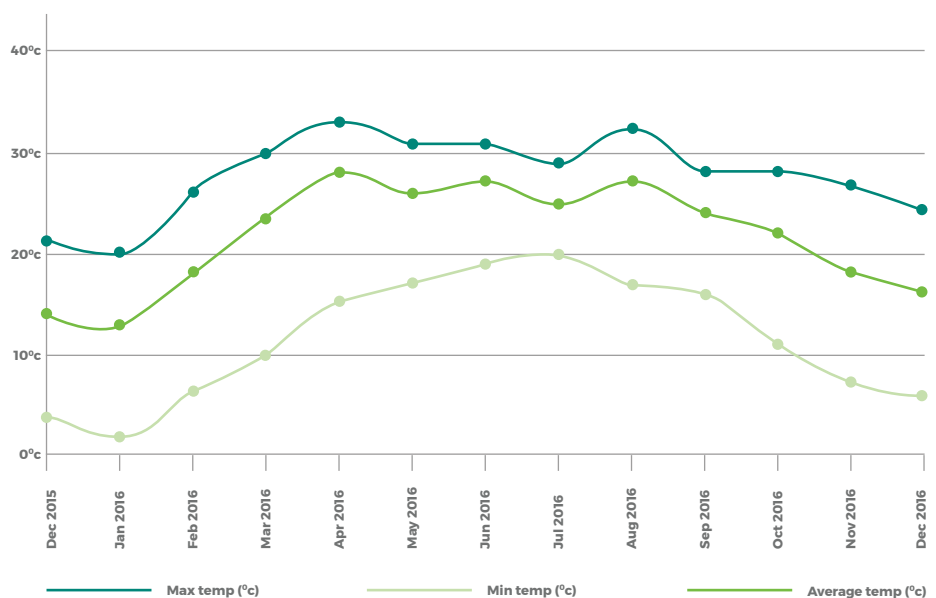
Weather

October to December is the most favoured period for trekking in Nepal. It's at the end of the monsoon season where everything is lush green. In the hill regions, there may be a little rain on some afternoons, maybe a downpour, some clouds about and the nights are a little chilly which makes it perfect to sit around a fire place.

There will be many days where there is clear view of the mountains and the autumn sun is wonderfully warming. It's usually a nice time of year, but we can't predict the weather!

The other favoured time to visit is March to June when it's dry and a little dusty. It gets nice and warm towards July and if you go to the Terai region—it's very hot. Early July is when the monsoons kick in and it can be a little risky with landslides, flooding and unsafe road conditions.

Kathmandu weather chart 2016*



* worldweatheronline.com/kathmandu-weather-averages/np.aspx

Support

You will tend to find that your placement agency, local businesses and especially your host guest house or family are incredibly helpful should you need assistance or advice during your time in Nepal. Also, hotels or guest houses tend to be run by families who are committed to supporting you and at the same time helping grass-roots and community development projects.

It is recommended that you deal with qualified and experienced people from the area you are volunteering for general information and travel arrangements.

Have with you at all times emergency contact details for: local support personnel; your placement agency; your home country embassy in Nepal; and your insurance emergency hotline.

Give your friends and family contact details of your support people in Nepal. If someone back home is trying to contact you and are unsuccessful, then they have option to get in contact with you. Let family know your plans, especially if you deviate from your itinerary and stay in frequent contact.

Please let your placement agency and loved ones back home know of any independent travel arrangements you make outside of your placement itinerary.

After placement

At the end of your placement, you may choose to stay longer in Nepal to soak up more of this amazing country. Relax for a few days at Lakeside in Pokhara or head back to Kathmandu; visit the birthplace of Buddha at Lumbini; check out the wildlife at Chitwan or Bardia National Parks; or, if you're feeling particularly adventurous, perhaps paraglide or do some trekking!

Local travel agencies will be happy to go through all the options with you and take

care of everything. If you want to stay on longer, we advise that you do some research before you go to see what great things are on offer. Try the following websites:

- welcomenepal.com
- lonelyplanet.com/nepal
- tripadvisor.com.au/Attractions-g293889-Activities-Nepal.html
- www.stunningnepal.com

Your local contacts and agents will sit with you and arrange transport, permits and/or guides for any activities. Please note that all activities after the end of your teaching period will usually be at your expense.

Ensure your travel agents and guides (if you are trekking) licensed in Nepal, have all the government registration requirements met, are insured, and are experienced in making travel arrangements. Ask your hosts for recommendations as they have had a long relationship with travel agents and so can always keep track of where you are, deal with issues quickly if they arise, and can get in contact with you in case of any emergency. If you are having issues during your pre-booked arrangements, calling your hosts usually gets things sorted quickly.



04

Preparing to teach

You have the opportunity to make a positive impact in the communities where you will be teaching. Keep in mind that the best outcome is one where all stakeholder will benefit from the program—the children, the school and community, as well as you who are giving so much of your time and effort.

Effective communication and feedback from the Principal and local teachers will ensure that your efforts are helping the students at the school. It will also help to ensure that you will benefit from your teaching experience and develop the capabilities that will be important to you as a teacher.

Making a difference

A substantial number of volunteers go to Nepal every year to find inspiration and experience, and many teaching and development professionals are supportive of this endeavour. However, volunteer placements are a large industry and priority can focus on commercial outcomes, responding to Western tourism demands, and making volunteers feel good about their contribution without proper consideration of the schools in Nepal. You could be causing more harm to the students than good by holding them back from completing their prescribed curriculum or confusing them with unfamiliar teaching practices.

Your presence must be a benefit to the community and if you choose a volunteer placement organisation, choose wisely to ensure that your efforts are helping the students where you are placed. There are a number of approaches we used when placing volunteers that were aimed at making a positive impact in the schools.

1. We sought suitably qualified people who have the necessary training and experience that will allow them to contribute to the teaching objectives of the school. Most teaching volunteers were education students in the final years of university or were professionals with many years experience.
2. There was a strong community consultation and review process. School exam results and interview of volunteers, children and local teachers were collected and assessed to ensure that the program was having a positive effect and to further improve the program.
3. The outcomes and collective experiences of participants were used to build a knowledge base for the benefit of future participants.
4. The volunteer program did not detract from the important work of building capacity amongst local teachers and members of the community. We encouraged ways of integrating volunteer's efforts with those of local teachers with the view to having a positive influence on teaching that will continue long after volunteers have departed.





Desired outcomes

Ensure that the outcomes from your efforts stimulate positive change for all stakeholder. Aiming for excellence in three core areas:

1. Your own professional and personal development.
2. Positive and lasting impact on schools, their students and teachers.
3. Meeting the development objectives of the community or your placement organisation so they can grow their program of assistance to under-served communities.

Cultural immersion: Preparing to learn, create and grow

In our experience, participants in volunteer programs have developed personal and professional skills that can come from the challenges of being completely immersed in a different educational, cultural and linguistic environment. These challenges have allowed participants to put theoretical knowledge into practice and to develop a personal and cross-cultural understanding that comes from reflecting on their preconceived notions.

As a teacher, you will have the additional challenges of navigating a native educational system utilising teaching methods that you may have only recently began to appreciate yourself. Learning about the local education system and what it takes to teach in a resource poor environment have, for many participants, contrasted with previous teaching experiences and challenged their training.

These experiences have helped to loosen certain stereotypes and encouraged critical reflection on sensitive and appropriate pedagogical approaches that can be implemented in the classroom. It has also helped to further develop a capacity for cross-cultural

sensitivity and understanding, and personal resilience and initiative that is required to rise to the challenge of living and teaching in a different country.

Over the years, we have found positive outcomes were achieved by those who have had the capacity to:

- Communicate effectively with students and teachers in a diverse and culturally different environment.
- Cultivate meaningful and productive relationships with students, teachers and members of the local community.
- Decentre preconceived ideas about what they believe constitutes the best pedagogical methods.

- Be innovative in identifying simple and powerful ways of teaching and integrated this with the local curriculum.
- Be prepared to be unprepared and respond to the situation and the demands of students and local teachers.
- Quickly craft lessons that engaged students with various abilities in the classroom with limited time and resources.
- Constantly ask themselves the question ‘what positive outcomes were achieved for the children today/this week/ during my placement?’

Working with local teachers, supervisors, and members of the community has allowed many participants

In Australia, cultural diversity is evident in many schools with

45%

of the population either born overseas or with a parent who was born overseas.



Teacher training institutions have a focus on preparing pre-service teachers for the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse school systems. Understanding the need of students and their home institutions, we have created a program that provides unique opportunities for students to expand their experiences and develop skills in working with diversity.

Working effectively with all stakeholders
and being completely immersed in a
different educational, cultural and linguistic environment
have helped shape beliefs and reinforce behaviours for
some participants that are consistent with building
personal resilience and leadership.



to overcome challenging situations faced in the classroom and, on a personal level, make the self-adjustment required to work and live in Nepal. Participants who entered the program as a group in particular have adapted and bonded through sharing ideas and experiences and working as a team in crafting their teaching materials and approaches.

It is important to be aware of how your own attitudes and behaviours can be interpreted by others during your placement time and the effect this can have on working relationships with fellow participants and members of the community where you will be placed. Living and working in a culture very different to your own can be a steep learning curve and it is no easy task to try to understand and make sense of your experiences with the limited time that you have. Some key points:

- Try to be aware of your own preconceptions and assumptions. Be open-minded and ready to question and adapt your ideas.
- Take time to observe and reflect on what you see and are told. Situations and relationships are complex and your understanding will become deeper as you get to know more about the background and history involved in any situation. Try not to jump to conclusions too quickly without knowing and weighing up the facts. Discuss ideas and assumptions with members of your placement group and local supervisor to help deepen your appreciation and understanding of your experiences.
- Try to build on your own learning and positive practices and look at encouraging other people's self-confidence and knowledge. Be aware of people assuming that you are the 'expert' or you can fix things or take control in the classroom. Focus on the idea of working in partnership to share skills and ideas together. **Do not forget you are there to learn as much as teach.**
- Talk to the members of the school community about your experiences, feelings and reflections as someone who is a student, new to the culture, and eager to learn and share whatever understandings you have.
- Try to communicate as effectively as possible with others and be aware of your own and other people's working styles and approaches.
- Hold regular group meetings that focus on discussing your own perceptions as well as the approaches you want to take in the classroom.
- Try to learn some Nepali and think of ways to minimise language barriers—visual aids, translations and asking for help from local teachers.

General expectations of you

You have the opportunity to challenge preconceived ideas and training about what constitutes the 'best' pedagogical methods and identify simple, powerful and 'appropriate' ways of teaching that engage and resonate positively with students and their teachers. When it comes to teaching in Nepal (as a non-Nepali teacher), there are three simple rules you should follow: be committed to work under the direction of local teachers/supervisors; be committed to the principle that by working in close collaboration with local teachers, there will be a lot to learn about appropriate teaching techniques from each other; and, follow the local curriculum.

Preparation

Prior to your departure, try to access copies of textbooks for the grades and subjects (normally English) you will be teaching and try to find out the section the students will be on around the time of your arrival. This will help you to appreciate the learning objectives and for you to prepare your lesson plans and any teaching material you may wish to bring to Nepal. Please become familiar with textbooks as they encompass the curriculum that you will need to follow.

Government school textbooks are available under Course Materials > Textbooks at:

pustakalaya.org/en/community/course-materials

There are also other wonderful teacher, text and curriculum resources on this website. Please note that government schools generally have different textbooks from private schools in Nepal.

Different teaching systems

Rote learning is the most-used methodology in many government schools, especially in remote areas. It is based on the textbook and can be characterised as rote memorisation of material selected for learning, recitation of selected material in unison in class, and the

use of review techniques rote in nature. The style tends to be teacher-centred and lecture-based where students don't often get opportunities for independent learning in the classroom.

Limiting learners to the textbook and teacher-centred lecture methods is generally understood in international education circles to be unable to fulfill the needs and demands of 21st century learners. The Continuous Assessment System (CAS) is a new system being introduced in Nepal that focuses more on individualised teaching and continuous assessment through the year as a tool for improving the quality of teaching and learning. It's effects are yet to be felt in many areas. Also, many government schools have introduced student centred learning techniques, so you may find yourself at a school where there is minimal rote learning. Be prepared to be flexible and respond to the situation at the school where you are placed.

I understand the perspectives of educators from affluent countries when they critique the local education system, but be aware that different cultures impart different values to educational approaches and concepts. There are exhaustive discussions amongst educational specialists regarding cross-cultural teaching methods a number of them have been considered during placements over the years. A good

resource on this matter is at:

unesco.no/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/p5.pdf

Don't forget that schools in many instances, especial remote government schools, lack access to teaching resources, adequately qualified teachers, and teacher professional development opportunities. Teachers themselves may not have the luxury of spending an adequate amount of time to prepare lessons because outside of school hours there are livestock to feed, the garden to tend to and family meals to prepare over wood fires.

Respect the local education system. Therefore, work in collaboration with local teachers to deliver simple and effective education programs that are targeted at improving the results of students.

This is a collaborative learning process. By working with local teachers, you can introduce skills and techniques that they may be able to integrate into their own teaching and you may learn pedagogical approaches that are appropriate within the local educational and cultural environment. Through this rich collaboration, you will also be afforded the opportunity to deeply reflect on the beliefs and capabilities that will be important to you as an emerging graduate teacher.

Participants in the past have tended to focus on learner-centred projects where children have been empowered to become active in their

own learning, with teachers supporting their endeavour and fostering their comprehension, problem-solving and critical thinking skills. These projects have occurred in parallel with existing rote learning methods which are commonly practised in the classroom.

Technology in teaching

There is a capacity for special projects during your placement that can involve a mixture of in and out of class activities. For example, in one project students were asked to create the school's first webpage. They were divided into working groups and asked to take photos and write about their life at home, in the village and at school.

The project focused on improving digital literacy and communication skills and the value of working together as a team. When they completed their task, the groups came together to prepare their text and pictures in the school's computer lab and then published what they collectively created online.

After the site was launched, it took some convincing that what they created was available to everyone in the world through the web. Around 70% of households in the region have at least one member of the family overseas who had permanently moved or had temporarily immigrated for employment. So following the publication of the website, we observed via Facebook the accolades and congratulations that were sent to

students from their families, friends and Nepali people internationally.

The sense of achievement when they realised that they were capable of publishing this type of material about their village and school for a global audience and the fact that they were more than capable of doing so was palpable. This project was not just about learning to use technology and practicing their English skills, there is also the hidden curriculum—inspiring children, building their confidence, and expanding their perspectives on the world.

The charity that I lead for nine years provided computers to the communities where we placed teachers. So we ask our volunteers to integrate the use of technology into their teaching where appropriate for a few hours per week.

The power of technology-driven, student-centred approaches to education for inspiring and building confidence, especially in an environment where rote learning is the norm, is clear. Using computers, cameras, LED projectors and other technology opens up new and powerful avenues for learning and creativity as well as allowing children to showcase their talents for others to appreciate.

Technology is also a powerful way of delivering rich content especially when students' textbooks are black ink on white paper and the use of chalkboards is the norm.

However, using technology has been a small part of an overall teaching strategy that participants have used during the placement period.

Teaching is about, amongst many things, supporting the development of the teacher-students relationship and having a good positive feedback loop in this relationship. Post-it notes/cardboard cutouts and plastic blocks have been used to great effect!

Analogue tools

Whiteboards/blackboards are still the mainstay of education in the classroom and participants have found activities that involve their use in interesting ways. Teachers in the past have thrown bean bags in the classroom where whoever caught them had to say their name and tell one fact about themselves and then write it on the board. "Head and Shoulders, Knees and Toes" and "Hokey Pokey" have been used to learn body parts alongside using charts and drawings on the blackboard. BBC documentaries have been shown using LED projectors which formed the basis for lessons on the development of English listening and comprehension skills.

In the past, we only allow student or professional teachers to teach in our volunteer program, so we did not provide prescriptive teaching guides. We wanted participants to use their skills and experiences in assessing and delivering appropriate and enriching experiences to the students. This guide and support that we provided prior to departure and in-country helped put our participants on the right path so they could have the best possible outcome from their limited time in Nepal.

Overview of education in Nepal

School system

Formal school education in Nepal starts from around the age of six years and officially spans a period of 12 years with schools either community funded, state funded or private.

Primary school has five years of study from grades 1 to 5 and lower secondary and secondary levels have grades 6 to 8 and 9 to 10. The final examination, known as the School Leaving Certificate (SLC), is given at the end of the 10th grade of high school and is the 'iron-gate' to be crossed for entry into higher levels of education.

After passing the SLC, students have the option of studying two more years at the 11th and 12th grade to complete the Certificate of Higher Secondary Education (+2), or undertake a two-year course called an Intermediate or Proficiency Certificate in a chosen subject.

At both primary and secondary levels, the curriculum is set by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology along with the Curriculum Development Centre (moecdc.gov.np) and there is a prescribed standardised textbook for each subject across all the grades. Students will take a prescribed exam at the end of the year set by the school, except for year 8 where the exams are set at the District level and taken by

all grade 8 students in the District; and the year 10 SLC exams that are set nationally by the government.

Subjects taught at primary schools include: Nepali, mathematics, English, social studies and creative arts, mother tongues and local studies. The mother tongue is defined as the first language spoken by the majority of the students, if it is a language other than Nepali. In schools where the mother tongue is Nepali, these lessons are replaced by local studies, which may include specific vocations, moral education, environmental studies or culture.

Subjects taught at secondary schools include: Nepali, maths, English, social studies, science, health, computer science, population and environment. In addition to these core subjects, students can do additional subjects such as additional maths and English or Nepali or a humanity subject. Other subjects can include education, business and technology or agriculture for example.

There are large disparities in the quality of education in rural government schools compared to their private counterparts and schools in the cities. The growing trend is for more well-off families to send their children to comparatively more expensive private schools since they

generally have better facilities, they teach predominately in English, and have more class time within the teaching year. Students also tend to have higher performance levels in the SLC examinations.

The effectiveness of any school is to a large extent determined by the strength of its leaders, the quality of its teaching, and the skills and motivation of its teachers. Despite the Nepal Government's efforts to improve the quality of education in public schools through the implementation of a number of professional development programs, their performance is generally low when compared to their private counterparts. For instance, in recent years less than 50% of students pass the SLC examinations with the failing rate for public schools, which still which accounts for around 75% of SLC students, was 72% compared to 7% for private schools.

The percentage of fully trained teachers in public schools at primary, lower secondary and secondary level are 79%, 58% and 85% respectively (Department of Education, 2009). Absenteeism of teachers, low motivation and morale, poor employment conditions, lack of professional development opportunities, lack of participation of parents in the schools affairs, lack of accountability of members,

Level	Stage	Major area of learning	Subject
Basic Education Grade 1-8	First stage Grade 1-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Mathematics • Social Studies • Creative Arts • Local need based education 	Based on an integrated curriculum with a textbook for each subject covering the major areas of learning.
	Second Stage Grade 4-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nepali • English • Mathematics • Social Studies 	Compulsory: Nepali, English, Mathematics, Social Studies. School can select two local need based additional subjects. The curriculum for Social Studies is local need based and integrated with subjects like Science, Health and Physical Education.
	Third Stage Grade 6-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Mathematics • Social Studies • Science • Local Subject 	Compulsory: Nepali, English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Computer Science. Optional first: Language/ Others. Optional second: Local subject (vocation, business, technology and trade and others).
Secondary Education Grade 9-12	General Stream Grade 9-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Science • Mathematics • Social Studies • Local subject 	
	Vocational stream Grade 9-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture • Forestry science • Medical science • Engineering / business 	

poor infrastructure, and the lack of teaching resources are some of the reasons for the low performance of public schools.

There tends to be negative parental perception of the quality of government education and private schools are accountable to parents who are paying fees. Private schools tends to have strong leadership and school management which are important factors for performance.

Facilities at private schools are not always significantly better than public schools. However, teacher absenteeism is low and there is more teaching contact hours in the year. Private schools have introduced additional educational programs and textbooks. The textbooks that are used are different from the government schools and are usually of a 'higher' quality. There is also more funding for

libraries, laboratory equipment and computers. Accountability and commitment are stronger and there is an autonomy in recruiting teachers and in the general running of school operations which has been attributed to an overall stronger performance.

If families can afford the fees, they will usually try to send their children to a private school. However, there are government quotas to give public servant jobs

to government school educated children. I have seen situations where children are sent to private schools in the earlier years of education and then sent to government schools for the final years of schooling so they have the possibility of government employment.

The popularity and growing number of private schools has given rise to a two-tiered system of education with children in government schools usually being from the poorest and most marginalised groups in society. These groups lack power and influence to demand results and improvements in government schooling.

Teaching English

Nepal has not had an English colonial history nor has it recognised English as an official language in its constitutions until now. Yet, the English language has already become a principal component of the Nepali education system.

With many Nepali people seeking work overseas and the tourism industry being such an important part of the economy, parents and teachers are realising the importance of English and public schools are gradually shifting their medium of instruction from Nepali to English. In fact, many schools are introducing English medium in order to attract more students since having a good command of the language can mean better job prospects.

This is ambitious for some government schools as English

teachers' language skills may be lacking and the style of teaching is rote in nature. You may witness in the classroom a situation where students are reading from the text in English quite well, but their ability to understand what they have read, what words and phrases mean, is usually lacking. Most of the demand for volunteers is for English teachers, so you can make a positive impact in this area especially if English is your first language.

Teacher's conditions

Less than 60% of public teachers have permanent positions. There is a Teachers' Service Commission (TSC), which is responsible for the issuing of teaching licences and the selection and recruitment of public school teachers at central level through a process of competitive examinations.

In 2012, 25% of all public schools, or over 29,000 schools, were managed by local communities, through School Management Committees. As a consequence, there has been an increase in temporary and other forms of contract teachers. In 2014, there were 26,000 temporary teachers, with 13 different types of contract, and 25,000 of these had worked as a teacher for over a decade.

There is considerable variation in pay and conditions for teachers within the public education system and often within the same school. The pay scale of public school permanent teachers is established by the government. Permanent teachers are entitled to an annual grade increment, pension and medical allowances, and other

benefits. Female teachers are granted 60 days maternity leave but only on two occasions.

Teachers who are on temporary contracts lack rights, pensions and privileges of those on long term contracts. There is uncertainty about long-term career prospects and these teachers tend to receive a low salary. Permanent full-time teachers in government schools can receive around US\$150 to US\$200 per month depending on location and community-employed teachers receive around US\$80 to US\$150 per month. There are situations where teachers may go for many months without being paid. Principals in rural schools get around US\$300 per month.

In rural areas, there may be a lack of availability of trained teachers to work in schools. Schools will receive permanent government teachers who are placed by the government but to have a full complement of teaching staff, they are required to recruit independently. It is sometimes very difficult to attract qualified teachers to remote areas so schools need to hire irrespective of their qualifications.

There is a lack of transparency in postings and promotion of teachers that is often based on politics and nepotism. Hard work and merit may not lead to career progression and recognition. Appointments and the distribution of resources to schools are sometime caught up in regional and national politics.

Poor working conditions, lack of resources and infrastructure in many schools, inequitable access to training and professional

development are all factors that can result in low morale and motivation amongst teachers. As a short-term placement teacher, there is little that you can do to help except appreciate the situation that the teachers you work with may experience. We encourage you to share your experiences and create a relationship where you learn from each other. Think of ways of sharing techniques and ideas during your time in Nepal. But be understanding if there is a lack of interest in your efforts.

There is an under representation of teachers from marginalised groups and women tend to be under-represented in teaching roles. Fewer women than men hold senior management level

positions in education either at school or at higher levels of the education system.

While schools now have to have a female member on the management committee, they are usually outnumbered by men from 'higher' castes.

If you think that there are ways to help ensure the voices of women teachers are heard and represented, chat to your placement agency if they undertake teacher professional development programs at the school. They may be interested in hearing your ideas for empowerment programs.

Nepal education resources

Education overview:

unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002113/211309e.pdf

Education Statistics for Nepal (NationMaster)

nationmaster.com/country/np-nepal/edu-education

Strengthening Education in Nepal (UNESCO)

www.ibe.unesco.org/en/resources

Curriculum for Nepal

(Search 'Nepal' in the database)

www.ibe.unesco.org/en/ibedocs/curricular-resources

Also

nepalindata.com/resource/national-curriculum-framework-for-school-education-in-nepal-2007

Four facts about education in Nepal

- 01.** The current education system in Nepal is one of the youngest in the world. Until recent years, Nepal followed a three-tier education system based on the traditional Indian system.
- 02.** Education in Nepal is improving rapidly. In 1951, Nepal only had 9,000 students in primary school, 1,700 in secondary school, 100 in two undergraduate colleges, and there was no university. From 1971 to 2001, primary school numbers grew from 400,000 to 3.9 million, secondary school increased from 120,000 to 1.5 million and post-secondary level increased from 17,000 to 210,000. Adult literacy rates improved greatly, from around 20 percent in 1981 to around 60 percent in 2011.
- 3.** School attendance has been unequal across income and gender groups, due to poverty and the perceived lack of value of education. As of 2006, 76 percent of the Terai Dalits, 62 percent of Muslims and 45 percent of the Hill ethnic group had not been to school. The national enrollment for females between the ages of six and ten is 67 percent, compared to 78 percent for males.
- 4.** The existing educational system in many schools is based on traditional textbook, rote learning, and teacher-centred lecture-based methods where students don't often get opportunities for independent learning in the classroom. Although published in 2007, this paper has a good overview of the educational challenges in Nepal: himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/ebhr/pdf/EBHR_31_04.pdf



The Nepali Calendar

is based on Bikrami Samwat and differs from the Gregorian calendar. The year 2020 is 2077 in the Nepali calendar.

For date conversions, visit: ashesh.com.np/nepali-date-converter.php



Tiffin

is a light lunch, sometimes served at schools.



70%+

of drinking water in Nepal is contaminated with faecal bacteria.

What to expect during your placement

We have made some important observations and identified a number of challenges that will help you to prepare for teaching in a government/community school in Nepal, especially in resource poor rural areas. This list is not exhaustive, but is a summary of some of the key issues and we suggest how they might be understood and/or addressed. Some of the facts present are ‘biased’ from the perspective of someone who is going to Nepal from a more affluent country and we apologise for this. Our aim is to provide a framework for you to prepare and commence your engagement in-country from which you can adapt based on your interactions and experiences.

There can be significant regional differences on matters discussed in this section as there are numerous geographical, racial, cultural, and linguistic groups in Nepal that are often divided into three broad categories: Indo-Nepalese, Tibeto-Nepalese, and indigenous Nepalese. Therefore, issues that are problematic in one school in a District may be less of an issue in another District. There is also variation between schools depending the strength of leadership, the quality of teachers, the availability of resources. Schools also vary in terms of timetable, language in which lessons are delivered, and facilities available.

School resources

The quality and availability of teaching materials can affect what teachers are able to achieve.

Many classrooms are very bare and not what you may consider to be child-friendly, with poor furniture and lighting, a chalkboard and little or no other learning aids. Most classrooms will have a collection of posters or the alphabet with symbols and animals painted on the wall for younger children.

Each subject will have a core curriculum textbook printed in black ink without colour. Children are usually expected to provide their own note pads, pencils and pens.

We have often seen schools keep whatever resources they have locked away in cupboards and rarely used. Libraries may be set up, but they are locked up most of the time and children rarely have access to the books for any sufficient amount of time.

Donors and previous volunteers may have provided materials but teachers have not been given the necessary guidance, inspiration and training on how they can be used to support their teaching or how they can benefit their students' learning.

Also, resources may be stored in ways that they are not accessible to all teachers or they are not well-maintained.

Suggestions

- Survey what teaching resources the school has and think about how this material can be used during your teaching. You may be bringing your own resources that can be left behind for the school to use.

- Develop low or no cost resources using cheap or free locally available resources. Simple cards/notes, real life objects that are locally available, handy crafts, natural materials etc. Feel free to bring some books for the school.
- Maybe the school has a computer or you have a laptop that you are prepared to use. Bring documentary/educational films, software and other simple digital material that can be shown to students. Some of the schools have printers as well so simple materials can be printed—usually in black and white.
- Participants in the past have addressed the lack of materials creatively. Making simple and effective teaching material has sometimes been influential on local teachers who have become involved in the process. It has also stimulated them into developing their own resources. Support this process if teachers express interest.
- Laminators can be great but because of power issues and potential difficulty in finding plastic covers, they have often been lost or left unused. You can buy laminators in Nepal as well.

- In relation to materials you have pre-made or existing resources in the school, invite teachers to participate in their use **with you** and provide support and training if they are interested. Do this more than once during your time and encourage an ongoing use of resources. Suggest a weekly, monthly or annual use cycle.
- Store resources so they are easily accessible and well maintained. Creative accessible storage solutions may help to promote regular usage.

Teacher/student relationship

In general, children may be accustomed to being passive listeners and lessons are strongly led by the teacher so there may be little dialogue between teachers and students. Lessons may focus on handwriting and copying as opposed to a play based approach. Children are taught to memorise and chant letters and numbers, with little time spent developing a good understanding of numbers, pronunciation, comprehension and sound concepts.

There is also a general lack of individualised support, especially for children who are experiencing any learning difficulties. Behaviour can be poor and may be dealt with by the use of corporal punishment which has been confronting for some volunteers. Alternative behaviour management strategies and positive re-enforcement and praise during lessons is not often used, but again this can depend on the teacher.

Teachers may lack knowledge of alternative effective teaching methods other than rote which they themselves experienced while students at school.

Some suggestions:

- Depending on the nature of your teaching assignment, you may be asked to support local teachers or take control of the classroom, so how you develop the teacher/student relationship will differ.
- Use positive reinforcement methods and be clear about boundaries, rules and expectations.
- Making sudden shifts in teaching methods and relationships can cause confusion so be gradual and respond to students' capacities accordingly. Encourage creativity, independent learning and thinking in a gradual way and accept the possibility that it may be a difficult process and not possible in the short term.
- Speak to the Principal or your assigned supervisor about student behaviour if there are any difficulties.

The learning process

You may find that teachers often promote memorisation and repetition rather than focus on comprehension. For example, students may be reading a story in English from their textbook competently, but when they are asked what they think will happen next in the story or what they find appealing about the story, they may struggle to give an answer.

Nepal's education system tends to be exam focused and the curriculum is designed to pass tests and

memorise facts rather than to increase the ability to generate ideas, stimulate creativity and improve learning skills.

You may find that there is not a great deal of engagement between teachers and students, little questioning, or checking of children's comprehension of texts. Blackboards may be the focus for most of the lesson with students doing little more than copying or chanting. In essence, there is a lack of child-centred teaching methodologies or methods that focus on learner's needs.

Some suggestions:

- Don't deviate too much from what children are used to during the placement program. They have been following a particular mode of learning for some time, but there is a capacity to introduce other methods that you are more accustomed to using in the classroom. Having said that, children are quick learners so work with local teachers, be flexible, try different techniques and see what works the best.
- Start off using simple resources to support the learning process and build up from there.
- Use individual, paired and small group work and look at developing play based activities, especially in early primary classes.
- Introducing learner-centred projects has been successful. Children have been empowered to become active in their own learning, with teachers supporting their endeavour and fostering their comprehension, problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

What can you leave behind?

Think about ways of developing relevant and useful local curricula material that addresses local community and children's needs and educates children about local culture. Towards the end of your placement you may have developed enough knowledge to be able to produce material that can be left behind for the school. This will be a good exercise showing what you have learned about Nepal and the people and culture of the community during your placement time.

These projects have occurred in parallel with existing rote learning methods that have been delivered by local teachers.

- Work with local teachers and introduce frequent and continuous assessment of progress during your placement time. Give students regular feedback about their progress and guide them to set their own goals for improving where practical.
- In the past, volunteers have introduced very creative ways of teaching that have involved play-based activities that have taken days to complete. The backlash from parents is that they understood these activities to be play and not learning which has caused issues for the school. Proper ongoing consultation and planning with the school is important.

Teacher preparation

There is generally a lack of lesson planning and students will enter the class and start where they last left their previous lesson in the textbook. Lessons may consist of reading the next chapter in the text and there may be little in the way of prepared resources to enhance learning.

Many teachers lack the training to create lesson plans with clear objectives and ideas for lesson structure. As explained earlier, teachers themselves may not have the luxury of spending an adequate amount time to prepare lessons.

What you can do:

- Have your lessons planned and share your plans and outlines with the subject teacher. Encourage the sharing of ideas and how to share the workload. Encourage feedback from your teachers as they are responsible for the class. Don't try to teach them lesson planning, but they may appreciate and be inspired by your efforts.
- If you are supporting the teacher in their lesson, have some ideas about how you can contribute and share this with them before class starts. Ask them for guidance and if there is interest plan lessons together.
- Think about class group involvement and seating that can facilitate learning.
- Encourage reflecting back on lesson planning each day. Discuss what you taught and your preparations for the week during staff meetings that are usually held at the start of each week.

- You will most likely undertake your placement as a group and chances are you will be spending a lot of time working together sharing ideas and experiences and how you have overcome any challenges. This has been an important part of the placement experience for past participants and planning lessons has been much easier when working as a team.

Punctuality, school openings and attendance

Local teacher attendance in class and punctuality in school can be a real issue. Also, the 45–60 minute lessons are often much shorter and transition from one lesson to another can also be a source of wasted lesson time.

Festivals and weather conditions can also mean that schools are closed and children miss many days of schooling. Political strikes used to be a frequent problem, but since the passing of the country's constitution in 2015, this has become less acute.

All these factors means that at the end of the teaching year children have not completed the entire curriculum.

What to do?

- Don't wait! Go ahead with what you have prepared or if you need the local teacher to commence, start a simple learning game.
- Chat to your supervisor(s) or the Principal about how you feel in a VERY respectful way.

School infrastructure and facilities

Many schools do not have what you may consider to be child friendly learning environments. Buildings tend to be in a poor state of repair. Rooms may be poorly lit and have a leaking roof, broken or inadequate furniture and no floor covering.

Windows tend to be wooden shutters without glass which doesn't keep out the cold air or the dust.

Having said that, many are new schools being constructed from reinforced concrete that is earthquake resistant and can be in a very good state but the internal aesthetics can be very basic.

Toilets are often unclean and the lack of proper handwashing facilities can also lead to health problems. The provision of safe water for children to drink may also be an issue in some locations, particularly in the dry season. Access to pathogen free water in rural areas can be a challenge at the best of times.

You may find playgrounds to be unsafe or in a bad state of repair. If you are teaching in hilly and mountainous areas, care must be taken when walking to and from school as there are usually some steep sudden drops.

Important tips:

- Take care when walking to and from the school and within the school grounds. Occupational health and safety requirements in Nepal don't quite exist to the levels you are accustomed to at home so you need to be extra vigilant at all times.
- If there is a capacity for you to do so, respectfully make the classrooms safe and welcoming.
- Feel free to make children and staff aware of safety and sanitation. You could do an in-class activity about good health and safety practices with the children if your supervisor agrees.
- Encourage the use of students' work for display to increase ownership of the room. Use charts that you can either buy or create to put around the room.
- Let your supervisor, Principal or placement agency immediately know of any genuine concerns about your own and fellow volunteers' health and safety. Work to help minimise risks.

School management

Successful schools anywhere in the world need strong leadership. Where there is strong leadership from the Head Teacher and/or Principal you will tend to find good order and standards within the school.

In some schools, there can be low level of skills management and lack of monitoring of staff with frequent teacher absenteeism. You may also find a lack of monitoring of teaching and learning standards

and outcomes and teacher performance outcomes can vary greatly (please refer to our section on Teacher's conditions).

Suggestions:

- Work with school management and placement agency to make your roles and responsibilities and those of the staff that you will be working with as clear as possible.
- Weekly meeting between you, your fellow volunteers, the Principal and teachers should be encouraged. Discuss how your placement is progressing and discuss the activities in the week to come. If the situation is comfortable, concerns or issues can be discussed respectfully.
- Dealing with staff issues can be difficult so please speak with your placement agency or Principal about any concerns.

Barriers to a quality education

Attendance

In the morning, most schools will conduct an assembly before they start classes. You will tend to find that the official number of students you have been given won't quite match the students you count.

There can be a number of reasons for absenteeism:

01. Duties at home in rural areas can be demanding and children may miss school days to support the family at home. This is intensive during the harvest times where you will find that there are scheduled holidays. But the weather can be unpredictable and all family members need to become

involved with agriculture, even during school times.

2. Children, particularly from poor and marginalised communities, can experience health, nutrition and livelihoods issues. There can be high drop-out rates for marginalised groups where children can stop going to school.
3. A 2011 government survey found that 82% of drinking water supplies in Nepal are contaminated with faecal bacteria. About 11% of Nepali children have diarrhoea at any given moment, which contributes to the stunting that affects more than a third of the nation's children and absenteeism (UNICEF Nepal WASH Annual Report 2014).
4. Because of children's lack of attendance/not passing a grade, you may find a big group of ages in classes. This can sometimes be difficult for the older students who may be too embarrassed to attend classes.

How you can help

- You are limited by the time you have in Nepal and your responsibilities in the classroom, but there may be ways to can help. Do your best to help the children you teach to meet their learning objectives.
- Be prepared to develop accelerated learning activities for students who are struggling for whatever reason or have missed classes if this is practical.
- Make suggestions about ways of building basic social, emotional and educational competencies in children.

There may be a capacity to work with children in need of this level of development during your time.

- Consider introducing simple health programs in the school either in class or during break times.

Inclusion

Teaching is usually by rote so the classroom is treated as one large group. We have worked in schools where classroom sizes have exceeded 70 students and supervised by one teacher which makes inclusive teaching practices difficult.

Although caste discrimination is outlawed in Nepali law and the children know little of it except as a historical fact, gender and caste discrimination can still be 'felt', especially in more remote areas. Girls and lower caste children can be treated unfairly or marginalised in subtle ways and parents of lower caste children may feel uneasy in some schools.

The treatment of children with special needs can be unsettling. There is a lack of knowledge on how to support children with special needs and they receive little to no additional assistance. Children with disabilities are usually ignored and nothing is provided for their assistance. Many teachers have not had appropriate training and schools are usually not equipped to provide the necessary facilities. There may be shame associated with children with special needs and this may prevent parents from bringing children to school.

Children with special needs can be seen as 'slow' and expected to

keep up with the rest of the class during lessons. They general don't have the capacity in this system to learn and develop their skills to the best of their capacity.

How you can help

- Introduce your own active teaching methods for children that need the assistance if practical given the time you have.
- Think of ways inclusive practices could be implemented in the school. This is a long-term goal that the Principal may help to introduce. The Principal may suggest having a workshop as a way of raising awareness?
- Be a shining light. It's amazing what affects you can have when you lead by example. Humble, simple and powerful gestures tend to affect those around you and let this be part of any strategies you implement to support children.
- When you work with local teachers, explore ideas and attitudes that may underlie discrimination with them, but please be sensitive and tactful. Understand that this may be beyond your volunteer brief.

Hunger

Children may be sent to school without food and in poor communities you may come across children that are malnourished (although unlikely in the areas where you will be working). It is hard for hungry children to concentrate and learn.

Some schools may provide a light lunch for children—they call it tiffin.

If you feel that hunger is an issue for your students, think of creative ways to provide food and discuss this with us and the class teacher.

Education priorities

Girls' education may be a low priority for some families. You will find that girls carry out most of the domestic duties. Girls are less likely than boys to complete schooling and when families have enough money to send one of their children to a private school, boys will invariably be chosen over the girls. You may walk into a government school classroom and think 'there are more girls than boys, that's positive!' but one possible reason is that the boys in the area have been sent to a private school.

Depending on the ethnic groups and the area in Nepal, there may be restrictions during menstruation and girls could be married at a young age. Given their 'traditional' responsibilities, the need for education for girls may not be seen as a priority. These factors add to a higher drop-out rates for girls.

Your placement agency may be active in advocacy work in the community. Please approach them and suggest how you think they can help in the long-term.

Parental support and community participation

Many parents may not have had much of an education and many grandparents of children from the

Sudra (working) Caste were not permitted to go to school. This has created an intergenerational disadvantage with parents unable to provide support for their children during homework times. Because of this lack of education, appreciation of the relevance of education can sometimes hinder parents sending their children to school or not encouraging them to do well and go onto higher levels of education.

As previously mentioned, there are challenges when parents may have a negative view of child-centred pedagogies, thinking that children are playing and not learning because of their understanding of what constitutes teaching and learning. Increased parental awareness about the benefits of child-centred teaching methods is something that can be achieved over time.

If there is a possibility of engaging parents during your time at the school, the Principal may invite them to events or have them involved in school activities.

Other issues affecting schools

On a District and National level, a lack of policy continuity over time has led to confusion and poor channels of communication between the different levels of the education system. Changes in political leadership result in

changes of local and national education office staff that makes implementing policies difficult.

District Education Offices can be overburdened with a lack of effective inspection, monitoring and evaluation of schools under its jurisdiction.

Delivery of accurate school data that are not positive, such as attendance, can be an issue. Negative data may cause problems for staff or schools so situations are not reported or dealt with transparently and effectively.

Educational reporting and evaluation focuses on quantitative data such as exam results, attendance, etc, rather than qualitative aspects such as the quality of teaching and learning provided or measuring the success of certain pedagogical approaches.

Distribution of educational resources can be ineffective and inequitable. Resources must be distributed to all schools, including the most marginalised areas, equitably and transparently for education to be inclusive for all children.

Don't forget to do your own research in addition to this guide so you can be well prepared before you go. Don't forget that when you get to Nepal, local knowledge and expertise should be highly valued.



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