



Basic Etiquette in Nepal

Nepalese culture is a blend of many different ethnic groups and is very similar to that of Tibet and India. Many traditions and customs come from Hindi or Buddhist culture.

Should you have any questions about etiquette during your time in Nepal, it is always best to error on the side of caution, and seek advice from your Program Director or those with whom you are working.

Daily Interactions

The expression of greeting in Nepal is "Namaste" and is accompanied by joining the palms together.

You may accept a handshake offered by males or females, but a man should never offer his hand first to women. It is considered rude for a man to touch a woman, including shaking hands, especially if the woman is married.

When a person slightly dangles his head from left to right, he means "Yes". When he shakes his head, he means "No".

Conversations may include moments of silence or "dead" spots. Keep in mind that Nepali people are not uncomfortable with silence.

Pointing your finger at people is considered rude. If you have to point at someone, use your upturned hand (all fingers out, as though you're going to shake someone's hand) or point your chin at the person.

Remove your shoes before entering a temple or someone's home.

Never touch anything with your feet – this is considered offensive.

Left hands are used for cleaning oneself after using the toilet. Never use your left hand to pass or accept things, whether food at the table or money with a shopkeeper.

Public displays of affection between a man and woman are frowned upon.

Gifts are rarely given and seldom opened in front of the person who has given it.

Heads are sacred and should always be treated with respect.

Invitations often arrive at the last moment. Don't be surprised or offended. It happens to everyone. If you're busy, even a short appearance is enough.

If someone says you are fat, it is a compliment. It means that you look healthy, well-fed, and that you are probably wealthy.

Meals

Be careful not to use your spoon, fork, or hand used for eating to touch another's food, plate, cooking utensil or the serving dish.

Do not drink from another's bottle or glass. 'Jutho' refers to food or material that contains another's saliva and is considered impure by Nepali people.

Keep in mind that Nepali people do not eat beef. Many Nepali people are Hindu and worship cows. The cow is also the national animal of Nepal.

Clothing

Nepali men and women dress conservatively, and so should visitors. Men should not go bare-chested and shorts should be conservative. Women usually cover their shoulders and their legs, especially in villages. Female volunteers should avoid bare shoulders, halter tops, tank tops, midriff-baring shirts, and shorts.

Visiting Temples

When visiting a Hindu temple, be sure to ask permission before entering. Many Hindu temples do not allow Westerners or non-Hindus to enter.

Leather articles are prohibited in temple precincts. Walking around temples or *stupas* is traditionally done clockwise.

Photographs

Taking photographs inside most temples is considered illegal.

Always ask for permission before taking photographs of Nepali people.

Superstition

Superstition is common in Nepal. Some highly superstitious people will only travel on specific days of the week when leaving home in a specific direction like north or south. The number three is considered unlucky. When three people leave the same location they leave one after another but not all at the same time.

It is common to pray before traveling, especially on long journeys.

Dried red chilies are hung in homes, restaurants and buses to provide protection against bad spirits.

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