

INDIA NEPAL



India, a nation so gargantuan it resists pithy descriptors, and its northerly neighbour Nepal, make for an intoxicating travel pairing.

THRILLING CITIES

The intensity of urban life in both Nepalese and North Indian cities can come as a surprise to even the most experienced travellers. Parts of Kathmandu and Delhi make rush-hour London look positively peaceful by comparison.

From the nostril-tingling air of Delhi's Khari Baoli spice market to the relentless reverberating ring of singing bowls on Kathmandu's Thamel Marg, you'll experience endless jolts to the senses. But when you need a tempo change, there are pockets of zen. You can get some much-needed time out at Delhi's Humayun's Tomb or at the flag-strewn stupa of Swayambhunath, which crowns a breezy hill west of Kathmandu's centre. And yes, there is a knack to crossing the free-for-all streets. Our top tip? Do it in a crowd. We'll show you how!

WONDERFUL WILDLIFE

Both Nepal and North India are home to protected sanctuaries teeming with wildlife. Just a couple of hours from Kathmandu sits Chitwan National Park. Here, you can paddle up rivers in search of crocodiles, track one-horned rhinos and Bengal tigers, and look for nocturnal sloth bears and leopards in the fading evening light.

Over in India, between Agra and Jaipur, lies one of Asia's best birding spots, Keoladeo National Park. Every winter,

more than 300 species of feathered fliers touch down in these wetlands. If you're patient, you might get to spy some notable species. Look for the imperial eagle, a rare raptor with an impressive two-metre wingspan and the human-height sarus crane, the world's tallest flying bird.

NATURE'S SPLENDOUR AND MAN-MADE MARVELS

While exploring Nepal and North India, you can expect to encounter jaw-to-the-floor wonders, both natural and man-made. Some, such as the Taj Mahal and the Amber Fort, need little introduction. Others, such as the ghost town of Fatehpur Sikri, a 16th century imperial citadel near Agra that was abandoned mere years after completion, are less well-known but equally impressive.

In the Kathmandu Valley, there are yet more incredible constructions to be found in Bhaktapur. Ornate temples dot the main square here, showcasing some of the finest craftsmanship in Nepal. And though these constructions will have you reaching for your camera, they can't quite stack up to the stop-you-in-your-tracks beauty of the Himalayas. We think one of the best places to soak up the scenery is from the village of Naudanda. From here, the views of the Annapurna peaks are nigh on impossible to turn away from.

FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD

Nepalese and North Indian cuisines have many differences but they do share one defining characteristic: deliciousness. Delhi is best explored with an empty belly, so you can fill up on various snacks cooked street-side. Chole bhature (fried bread with spicy chick peas), aloo chaat (spicy potatoes) and jalebi (a syrup-drenched spiral of fried batter) are all worth trying.

Less well-known in the UK, Nepalese cuisine is usually a revelation for first-time visitors. Add dal-bhat (rice with lentils), momos (dumplings, typically served with a fiery chilli chutney) and thukpa (a noodle soup) to your must-try list.

With Nepal and North India so close, these next-door neighbours make a dream pairing for an epic multi-country adventure.

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