Biocultural Diversity in Nepal

*Fall 2024 Field Program in the Nepal Himalayas*

*ESCI 437 – 15 credits*

ITINERARY

### Student working with person in the field in rural NepalEight students at the summit of a mountain in the Himalayas, NepalStudents backpacking through the Himalayas, Nepal

### Man weaving mat in rural Nepal

# TYPICAL SCHEDULE:

## Kathmandu (~7 days)

7:00-8:00 Birding

10:00-11:30 Visit NGO

12:30-1:00 Nepali language

1:00-4:00 Visit world heritage sites, museums, botanic gardens, etc.

5:00-6:00 Reading discussion

7:00-8:00 Reflection exercises

## Trekking (~28 days)

6:30-7:30 Natural Walks focusing on plant/bird/mushroom identification

8:30-12:00 Hike to the next location with stops for trailside mini-lectures on topics related to geology and ecology.

12:30-1:00 Nepali language

1:00-3:00 Finish hiking

3:00-5:00 Time to read and work on assignments

5:00-6:00 Reading discussion

7:00-8:00 Reflection exercises

## Homestays (~14)

7:00-8:00 Community Walks (themes include ethnobotany, sustainable agriculture, and pastoralism)

8:00-1:00 Help with home chores and meal prep

1:00-5:00 Group activity (blacksmithing, weaving, grain processing, etc.)

5:00-6:00 Reading discussion

6:00-8:00 Help family prepare dinner

8:00-9:00 Time to read and write

# ITINERARY

Following a two day orientation in Bellingham, the program proceeds to Kathmandu where we will spend four days visiting botanical gardens, non government organizations, world heritage sites, and scholars while residing in a Buddhist Monastery. Then we travel to the Everest/Makalus region for two weeks of studying the transition in biogeoclimatic zones as we trek up the Arun River Valley to the village of Chumusur. In Chumusur we will participate in our first homestay and examine the local subsistence economy that villagers recently began supplementing with the cultivation of Medicinal and Aromatics Plants for international markets. From there we will loop back towards the trailhead via the Everest Region. After a transit day to the Langtang Region, we will follow the Tamang Heritage Trek participating in homestays leading up to and including the village of Briddim, where we will more critically examine the homestay model for rural poverty alleviation. From Briddim we will cross into Langtang National Park and ascend the rugged Langtang Valley Trek. Climbing up the Langtang valley gives us an excellent opportunity to view wildlife and examine how the slow work of rivers and glaciers along with more rapid changes from seismic events have etched the landscape. At higher elevations in the valley we will explore the glaciology in more detail, and get a chance to see wildlife and plants adapted to life above the treeline. From there we will cross Kangja La Pass and reach our highest elevations and our best opportunity to see threatened wildlife while spending nights camping. Then we drop down to the village of Melamchigau, the subject of one of our major readings to reflect on how village life has changed in Nepal since the author first began collecting data in the 1970s. Our return itinerary includes a stop at the National Park headquarters where we can report our findings and ask questions of park staff.

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| **Tentative Dates** | **Place/Activity** |
| Sep 23-24 | Orientation, Bellingham |
| Sep 27 | Departure |
| Sep 28 | Arrive Kathmandu |
| Sep 29-2 | Kathmandu, visit NGOs world heritage sites, museums. Stay in Buddhist Monastery |
| Oct 3-7 | Fly to Tunmingtar Upper Arun Valley. Medicinal and Aromatic Plants study. Homestays. |
| Oct 8-19 | Makalu Base Camp Trek |
| Oct 20 | Fly to Kathmandu |
| Oct 22 | Drive to Gatlang |
| Oct 31-Nov 3 | Tamang Heritage Trail. Homestays. |
| Nov 3-12 | Gosaikunda or Langtang Trek. Wildlife study |
| Nov 13-15 | Kathmandu. NGOs cultural attractions |
| Nov 16 | Flight Home |

# Topics

Biodiversity of the Himalaya

Intro to the geology and climate of the Himalaya

Floristic zones in mountains

Plant morphology and adaptations that help plants survive in the mountains

Environmental disturbances

Bird ID and adaptations

Introduction to South Asia, Nepal, and the Tibetan Buddhists of the Himalayas

Cultural geography of a diverse region

Nepali language

Tamang ethnobotany. Basket weaving, farming, medicine, incense, etc.

Subsistence farming

Protected Areas Management

Habitat destruction, poaching

Endangered species conservation

Island Biogeography and park design

Climate change

Managing natural and cultural heritage- tensions between livelihoods and conservation

Stewardship principles and practices

Ethical study and travel

Kathmandu

Staying found, safe, and healthy in a developing country

Cultural heritage

Villages (Gatlang, Thuman, Briddim,

Medicinal and Aromatic Plant Cultivation

Participatory learning

Himalaya cultures: past, present, and prospective

Dynamics of economic and cultural changes

Village life: work, families, a sense of place

Ethnoecology, resources, and rights: health, food, water, fuel, shelter

Homestay Tourism

Team Building

Group processing

Overcoming physical and emotional challenges