

GAP SEMESTER



**pacific
discovery**
inspiring educational adventures

Nepal & Tibet Gap Semester Program

TREKKING, RAFTING & YOGA
RETREAT

www.pacificdiscovery.org



Overview

On this extraordinary gap year program, you will immerse yourself in the rich cultural heritage and dramatically diverse environments of Nepal and Tibet.

Imagine soaring Himalayan peaks, fluttering prayer flags, big skies and stunning Buddhist monasteries. Nepal and Tibet are known for its rugged and spectacular mountain environment combined with its sparse population and stunning historical sites. This makes any overland journey across the Tibetan Plateau and Nepalese countryside both a spiritual and epic travel experience. On this gap year semester, you will travel across the roof-top of the world between Kathmandu and Lhasa, the spiritual heart of Tibet, through incredible landscapes, amazing historic sites, and a visit to Everest Base Camp.

Experience Nepali language and culture immersion while home-staying in a rural village and volunteering on a valuable community development project, trek the Annapurna Circuit in the shadow of Himalayan giants, study yoga, meditation and Tibetan Buddhism while living at a small monastery, and raft one of the world's top river journeys down the Kali Gandaki River.





Safety

With our 20 years of operation and more than 100,000 student days in the field, we have an excellent safety record.

We even got voted as one of the Top Gap Year Providers for Safety by students on Go Overseas! Safety is something we pride ourselves on at Pacific Discovery, so it feels amazing to be recognized for the efforts we go through.



Accreditations

We have had our safety management systems assessed and accredited by the Gap Year Association (USA), Year Out Group (UK), and OutdoorsMark (New Zealand). Assessors have commented that our systems are among the best they have observed.



Who We Are

We are an accredited gap year provider that offers experiential gap semester and summer programs to some of the most amazing places on earth. Our programs are deliberate overland journeys, blending authentic immersion in diverse cultures, meaningful service-learning projects, rewarding adventures, wilderness exploration, and personal development.



Our Programs

Our programs are more than simply a travel, time-out or study abroad experience. Each is instead an overland journey of discovery, where students are immersed in a facilitated learning environment, designed to maximize the educational and life-skills potential.



Our Philosophy

We want to make the world a better place by providing extraordinary learning adventures that assist students in gaining the skills, confidence and insight to realize their potential in an increasingly global society; developing empathy for other cultures; furthering understanding of international issues; and heightening appreciation for the earth's wilderness and diversity.

Core Educational Components

Our programs are as much a journey of personal development as they are a physical journey, and participants are supported in reflecting together and thinking about their values, goals and what they wish to gain from the program experience.

PRE-PROGRAM

Prior to program start, participants are asked to create some goals for the program – this is personal and unique to each individual group member. Participants are given a suggested outline of skills and competencies that they can choose to focus upon.

DURING PROGRAM

At program orientation, goals participants have identified are discussed in a meeting with the program leaders. Throughout the program, ideas, tools and strategies are discussed that can be useful to help participants achieve their goals both on the program and for the rest of their lives. Participants are encouraged to journal during the program to assist them in clarifying their thoughts and define what they are learning.

TRANSFER AND FOLLOW UP

At the conclusion of the program, participants give a presentation to their group and leaders, summarizing how they've been challenged, what they've learned, how they've grown and how they intend to apply what they've learned to their lives after the program.

Towards the end of the program participants are also asked to write a letter to themselves imagining where they want to be in 6 months' time and identifying behaviors, habits and changes they wish to put in place. These letters are sent to them 6 months after program conclusion, helping reinforce the learning that has occurred.



Program Design

Each of our programs incorporate the following six core program components. These six interdependent components, provide immense opportunity for students to learn about themselves, to push their boundaries, question their assumptions, to stimulate problem solving and inquiry skills.



EDUCATIONAL FOCUS

Our programs are experiential education programs, meaning that learning is hands-on and tangible. For example, students will learn about a country's history and culture by immersing themselves in it, meeting local people and hearing life stories.



ETHICAL TRAVEL & SUSTAINABILITY

Students show respect for local customs, develop meaningful cross-cultural relationships, learn minimum-impact grassroots travel techniques and come to understand social and ecological issues on a deeper level.



OUTDOOR EXPLORATION

Immersion in the wilderness is an opportunity for students to become grounded, teaches appreciation for wild places and provides us the opportunity to explore local environmental issues and relate these issues to global environmental themes



SERVICE LEARNING

Volunteer elements built into our programs allow students to really immerse themselves in a place and share an experience with local people, bridging the gap that often exists between visitor and host.



CULTURAL IMMERSION

We immerse students in the local culture, through homestays, volunteer projects and language study. Students learn empathy for other cultures and build bridges of shared understanding.



PERSONAL & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the program, students are given leadership opportunities from facilitating reflection to coordinating the daily schedule.



Sample Itinerary

***This is a guide to what you can expect to do on program.
The order in which the activities occur might vary***

WEEK 1 | KATHMANDU AND YOGA RETREAT

On arrival in Kathmandu you will be met and welcomed by your Program Instructors. We travel to a peaceful village in the foothills of the Himalaya for a comprehensive program orientation with all program participants. There will be time to go hiking in the hills and begin forming the all-important bonds with our group mates.

We then travel to the outskirts of Kathmandu, to a monastery for a fantastic 3-day yoga and meditation retreat. We'll also have an introduction to Tibetan Buddhism and gain insight into life in a Buddhist monastery.

WEEKS 2 - 3 | LHASA, TIBET AND EVEREST BASECAMP

We fly to Lhasa, Tibet to experience the birthplace of Tibetan Buddhism and its ancient cultural heart. Lhasa, meaning 'place of the gods', is one of the highest cities on earth, nestled on the Tibetan Plateau surrounded by mountains. Since the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950, change has been dramatic, with many Tibetans now living in exile, and as a minority in Lhasa. During our time in Lhasa we will be staying in the Tibetan quarter and visiting the historically significant Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple, Sera and Drepung Monasteries.

Departing Lhasa we take an incredible road trip across the 'roof top of the world' as we traverse the Friendship Highway back to Nepal. We overnight at small villages and towns along the route. We'll visit stunning turquoise Yamdrok Lake, Gyantse, Shigatse, Rongphu Monastery, and Everest Base Camp at 5150m (16,900ft). Our final day on the road takes us across the border back into Nepal, to a welcoming riverside lodge in the mountain foothills, before returning to Kathmandu.



WEEKS 4 - 5 | **TREKKING THROUGH THE HIMALAYAS**

From Kathmandu we drive west towards Pokhara in central Nepal. This is our gateway to Annapurna National Park, and an incredible journey trekking the Annapurna Circuit through the rugged Himalayas. Over two weeks we make a gradual acclimatization to altitude. We trek through glacial carved valleys, overnighing in small lodges and tea-houses with Sherpa and Tamang families. The trail takes us through rhododendron forests, steep gorges, past glaciers, breath-taking lakes, and some of the highest mountains on earth.

WEEK 6 | **EXPLORATION IN POKHARA**

Pokhara is nestled on the banks of Lake Phewa Tal at the foot of the mighty Annapurna mountains, and once an important town on the trading route between Tibet and India, it was accessible by foot only until the late 1960s. Today, Pokhara is one of the most popular places to visit in Nepal, and is home to the World Peace Pagoda and several Tibetan communities. It has unbeatable views of the towering mountains nearby.

We spend several days in Pokhara exploring the sights, doing a cycling daytrip, and learning about issues facing disadvantaged women in Nepal, at a local NGO (non-governmental organization).

WEEKS 7 - 8 | **CULTURAL IMMERSION & COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER PROJECT**

Our time will be spent in a small village in the foothills of the Himalayas, west of Pokhara. There are few roads in the area, and we will walk 30 minutes from the nearest road to our village. We will be homestayng in pairs/small groups, in the homes of local families, immersing ourselves in Nepali culture and language, and assisting the community on a development project they've initiated. This is particularly valuable to the community in the wake of the April 2015 earthquakes.

During the day we will be working with community members on the project. There will be wonderful opportunities for cultural exchange, including helping cook meals, learning about local food production, learning the Nepali language and gaining experience in grassroots development.

WEEK 9 | **RAFTING EXPEDITION**

From Pokhara we embark on a 6-day rafting journey down the lower Kali Gandaki River. Named after "Kali" the goddess of destruction, the Kaligandaki is said to be one of Nepal's most holy rivers. Beginning its journey high on the Tibetan Plateau in Mustang, the "Mighty Kali" plunges down through the Himalayas, carving into one of the deepest gorges in the world between Dhaulagiri and Annapurna.

With exciting white water rapids, spectacular mountain views, traditional villages, endless suspension bridges, waterfalls, a jungle corridor rich in wildlife, deep gorges, cultural temples and beautiful white sandy beaches for camping, this has to be one of the best all round river adventures in Nepal. We come ashore near Chitwan National Park.

WEEK 10 | SPOTTING RHINOS IN ROYAL CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK

Our last week in Nepal sees us visit Royal Chitwan National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We will learn about the significant threats facing Nepal's wildlife and habitats, try spotting endangered rhino, and spend time learning about the local Tharu culture through working alongside local villagers.

We return to Kathmandu, then out to a low-key resort to celebrate and reflect upon our learning and growth throughout the program. You will depart Nepal a different person, touched by the people, places and experiences you've encountered, and with an intimate understanding of the complex issues facing our environments and indigenous cultures.

**Each week there will be some designated free time so that you can catch up on email, do laundry, rest, and explore independently with others in the group.*

***Pacific Discovery reserves the right to alter and/or change the order of the itinerary, the focus of the projects, or the activities themselves due to dates, availability, and safety precautions.*



Program Highlights

- Rewarding volunteer project and village homestay with language and cultural exchange focus, located in the foothills of the Himalayas
- 16-days trekking the Annapurna Circuit, one of the world's top treks through spectacular Himalayan mountains and villages in Annapurna National Park
- 3-day yoga, meditation and Buddhism immersion at a wonderful monastery near Kathmandu
- Visiting the Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple, Drepung and Sera monasteries in Tibet
- 7-day journey across the rooftop of the world from Lhasa back to Nepal, visiting Mt Everest base camp and incredible monasteries
- 6-day rafting journey on the Kali Gandaki, one of the holiest rivers in Nepal
- Royal Chitwan National Park – home to endangered rhino, elephants, tigers and crocodiles.
- Kathmandu's World Heritage historic sites: Durbar Square, Patan, Boudnath, Swayambhunath, Pashupatinath
- The lakeshore town of Pokhara, the World Peace Pagoda, and options for adventures and exploring





COUNTRY INFORMATION

Nepal

For a relatively small country Nepal has astounding diversity – in environment, ranging from the semi-tropical Terai in the south to the mountainous Himalayas in the north, home to eight of the world's ten highest mountains, including Mount Everest. Nepal is a multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, multi-religion country. Hinduism is practiced by a huge majority of the people, but the country also has a strong Buddhist tradition - Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha is located in Nepal. Nepal is a country in transition (changing from a monarchy to a federal democratic republic) and recovery (since the April 2015 earthquakes).

Tibet

Imagine soaring Himalayan peaks, fluttering prayer flags, big skies, and stunning Buddhist monasteries. Known as The Land of Snows and the mythical Shangri La, Tibet has historically been isolated by its mountainous geography. This isolation has, for centuries, fired people's curiosity about the kingdom which has only been possible to visit since the 1980s. The country's rugged and spectacular mountain environment combined with its sparse population and stunning historical sites make any overland journey across the Tibetan Plateau both a spiritual and epic travel experience.



CLIMATE

Nepal's climate varies with its topography and altitude. It ranges from the tropical to the arctic. The low-land Terai region lies in the tropical southern part of the country and has a hot and humid climate. The mid-land regions (Kathmandu and Pokhara) are pleasant almost all the year round. The northern mountain region has an alpine climate with freezing temperatures likely overnight. This program runs during the Nepalese Autumn (September to November) and Spring (February to April). These are the preferred seasons to travel in the region.



MEALS

Generally there will be the opportunity to eat Nepali, Tibetan or Western style food.

Special dietary requirements and vegetarians are catered for. All meals are included in the program cost.



TRANSPORT

The itinerary has been designed to maximise comfort and safety whilst also giving you the opportunity to experience local transport and take part in daily life. We take an international flight from Kathmandu to Lhasa return.

SUITABILITY

Gap programs are intended for students aged 17 - 22. This program is suitable for anyone of average fitness with an enthusiasm for conservation and new experiences. There is always a volunteering component in our programs, so we can give back to the places that give so much to us. You need to be prepared for some physical work during this volunteering portion of the program; i.e. trail building, tree planting or painting. You don't need to have had previous experience with travel or any of the activities offered.

ATTITUDE

The program is a shared group experience. We would like you to join the program with an open mind and a willingness to work together with your group mates to make the program an amazing experience. The programs focus on group cohesion. We appreciate you for being open to learning and challenging your ideas and assumptions in order to get the most from this summer abroad experience.

GROUP SIZE

Group sizes vary per program and are generally 12-14 students, accompanied by two experienced and qualified Pacific Discovery program instructors. Local guides assist with interpretation of some historical sites, cultural experiences, and activities.

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

We have selected a dynamic team of inspiring, supportive, resourceful, and highly experienced instructors to lead our programs. Our program instructors are committed to putting your welfare and safety first. They are people in whom you can trust and confide, who remain objective whatever the circumstances, and who take a genuine interest in your well-being. They implicitly understand the importance of balancing the needs of individuals with group objectives, facilitating a high level of group cohesion, inspiring a genuine appreciation for the areas visited and an awareness of minimum impact travel ethics. All of our instructors have Wilderness First Responder (WFR) first aid certification, and extensive group leadership and risk assessment/management training.

ACCOMMODATION

Our accommodation will be a mixture of comfortable and clean hostels, lodges and campsites. Accommodation is diverse, comfortable and carefully chosen to fit our needs and varies per program.



FREE TIME

Programs are heavily scheduled so that we are always on the move and having lots of structured fun; but we highly value rest and reflection. There will be some designated free time in a town or city each week so that you can catch up on email and laundry and rest.



HEALTH

One component of all of our programs is outdoor adventures like hiking, biking and kayaking, so while you don't need to have done any of these before, you will need to be prepared and have the fitness level to give them a go. If you have any queries regarding health recommendations for travel, please contact your doctor, or a travel doctor, to discuss this. For further information refer to: [http:// wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/) We also recommend you be up to date on specific vaccinations that are required to travel in this region.

We recommend that you carry a personal first-aid kit as well as any personal medication. Please be aware that for legal reasons, our program instructors are prohibited from administering any type of drug. Please ensure that you are adequately prepared.



SPENDING MONEY

Spending money usually goes towards drinks and snacks, personal shopping, laundry, email, entertainment, and optional activities. We recommend you budget approximately \$100 a week for this, but this varies per student and per program. The amount of spending money you bring depends on your budget and shopping habits. You need to bring this money yourself.

Optional activities are available on many programs that can add to this cost, such as skydiving, bungee jumping, extra surfing lessons, etc.



KEEPING IN TOUCH

Our students value the opportunity to wind down, immerse in their surroundings and talk to each other. We encourage students to self manage their phone use, and we strongly encourage flight mode. This allows students to still take photos and send updates to family when in wifi, but allows them to be fully connected to the locals, service work and community when they're out and about. You are able to purchase a SIM or use international roaming plans if you wish. The easiest option is to use the WIFI available at places we stay in main cities and towns. Family and friends will also be able to keep in touch and follow your adventures through Pacific Discovery's social media pages, and through an online Facebook album for your group (which your instructors will upload photos to each week).



PASSPORTS AND VISAS

Travel abroad requires a passport. If you don't have one, you need to apply for one as soon as you apply for this program.

US Government Passport website: <http://travel.state.gov/passport/>

If you already have a passport, it must be valid for more than 6 months after program end, otherwise you need to get a new one issued before joining the program. Pacific Discovery will contact you regarding visa requirements and arrangements after you apply for the program.



TRAVEL INSURANCE

Pacific Discovery requires all students to purchase a comprehensive travel insurance policy for the duration of the program. Travel insurance provides cover in the event of medical expenses due to illness, injury, and emergency medical evacuation. Travel insurance may also include cover for loss of baggage or personal effects, and trip cancellation or trip curtailment.

To arrange your policy, [click here to go to our website](#).



COVID-19

COVID-19 has impacted all of our lives greatly, and Pacific Discovery has developed rigorous policies for safety based on professional advice and endorsement. The health of our students is of the utmost importance at all times. We are working closely and regularly with health professionals on our COVID-19 policy, as the situation continues to develop.

[Read our full COVID-19 policy here.](#)



PEACE OF MIND

Pacific Discovery is an educational travel organization accredited with American Gap Association (USA). Since its inception in 2001, Pacific Discovery has taken several thousand students, graduates, faculty, family and special interest groups, on experiential travel and volunteer programs, utilizing a staff of experienced and qualified program instructors. We have an exemplary safety record, comprehensive Risk Management Systems and a database of alumni, parents, advisors and faculty, who are happy to be contacted for feedback. The program carries public liability insurance, and student funds are held securely until disbursement.

Program Tuition & Costs

A \$500 application fee is due when you apply. Upon acceptance onto program, a deposit is due within 14 days. Balance of program cost to be paid 60 days prior to departure.

Included in Program Tuition

- All in-country travel and transport
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All activities, excursions, entry fees and adventure travel as described in the itinerary
- Informal lectures from resident experts on conservation and sustainability, history, and culture.
- Experienced program Instructors and local guides.

Not Included in Program Tuition

- Travel (international flights) between your home and the program
- Internal flights
- Visas
- Spending money (we suggest allowing \$15 per day for drinks, snacks and personal expenses)
- Travel insurance
- Optional academic credit
- Optional activity costs ie skydiving, bungee jumping, and additional surf lessons.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Students should not book their travel until after they have received the flight confirmation email from Pacific Discovery with the program flight requirements and travel agent details. This is sent out 2-3 months ahead of program departure. This information is also made available in the student portal login section of our website.

Our preferred groups travel agent, [The Travellist Co.](#), can assist you to arrange international flights from your nearest regional airport, and return home. We prefer you to arrange your flights through our group travel agent to simplify arrival logistics, and so that you are traveling to and from the program with others in your group.





College Credit

Our programs are a structured syllabus with clear learning outcomes that offer true personal growth and global awareness. As a reputable gap year provider since 2001, we have developed strong industry connections, including two educational institutions which we offer college credits through for our programs.

Pacific Discovery partners with Seattle Central College to offer college credit, a recognized educational provider who offers exceptional study options for students. We have been running college credit options for students for several years now with this provider, and as long as requirements are completed, the system has been an excellent option for students in regard to continuation of study, deferment and easy transfer to other institutions.

If you're keen to explore this option further, please reach out to us using the contact details provided at the end of this catalogue. We'd love to help you identify what options are available to you and support you throughout the process.

Scholarships & Financial Aid

We want to make our programs as accessible as possible. Although we charge the minimum we can for our programs, we recognize that they can still be difficult to fund for many families. Please note that these scholarships go directly towards the tuition costs for the program and do not include assistance towards the cost of international flights. We expect scholarship recipients to demonstrate their commitment to this opportunity by fundraising for their international flights, personal spending, and the balance of tuition.

Our students supplement the program costs in a variety of ways. We encourage you to get creative! Create a Kickstarter, find a part-time job, fundraise. Think big and small. Each dollar adds up to one amazing adventure abroad.

- Exploration Scholarship
- Diverse Voices Scholarship
- Financial Need Scholarship
- Gap Year Ambassador Fellowship

To apply, please go to pacificdiscovery.org/need-to-know/scholarships-financial-aid



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