

The ultimate high

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Described succinctly and accurately by *Lonely Planet* as “Your ticket to a natural high”, Nepal offers magnitude at every level ... all the way up to the summit of the world’s highest mountain.

Draped across and nestling beneath a backdrop of the highest peaks on the planet (eight of them, and they are still growing), Nepal has fascinated for centuries. Embracing some of the world’s most extreme terrain, this is the place where glacial waters rage from Himalayan origins through steamy plains towards India and the Bay of Bengal. Nepal is a land of colour and magnificence filled with vibrant and varied culture, spectacular scenery and some of the world’s rarest wildlife; a land that lifts the spirit and sharpens the senses.

Whether you wish to experience the thrill of the most extreme white water rafting the world’s rivers have to offer, trek beneath or climb the Himalayan peaks, relax in the comfort of a jungle lodge or ride an elephant through the grasses of the Terai plains at dawn in search of tigers, Nepal spoils its visitors with a plethora of choices that captivate and enthrall.

As pioneers of tourism in Nepal, with over 40 years of experience, Tiger Mountain has become synonymous with first class travel throughout this diverse country. Tiger Mountain’s famous environmentally responsible and sustainable conservation tourism operation was launched long before ‘eco-tourism’ became a buzzword and the company’s operations continue to lead the drive to let us experience the planet without destroying it.

Nepal’s pioneer wildlife safari lodge, Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge, lies in Chitwan National Park, home (according to 2000 statistics) to 544 rhinos, an estimated 100 tigers, 50 other species of mammals and more than 450 different types of bird. Lying

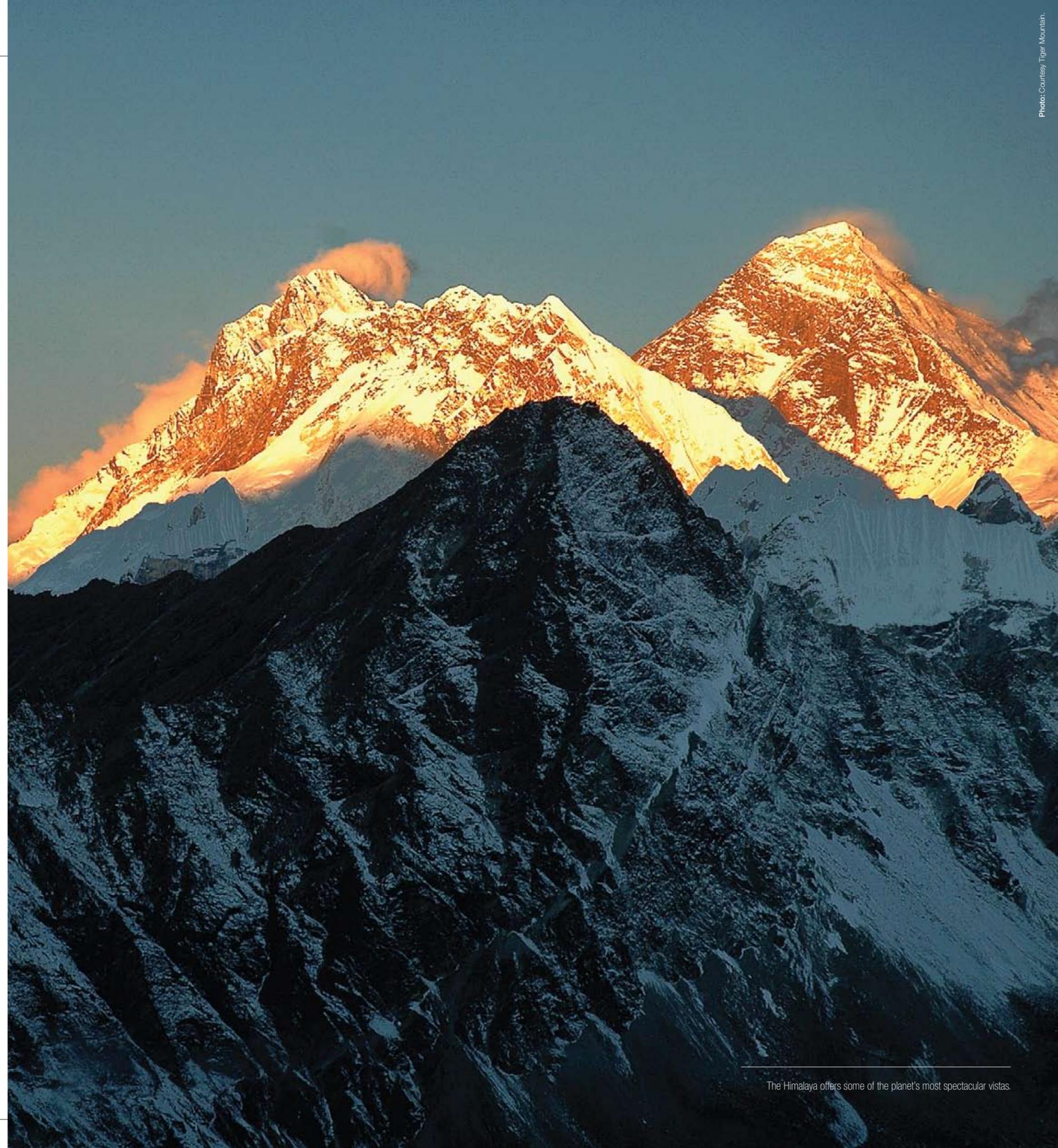
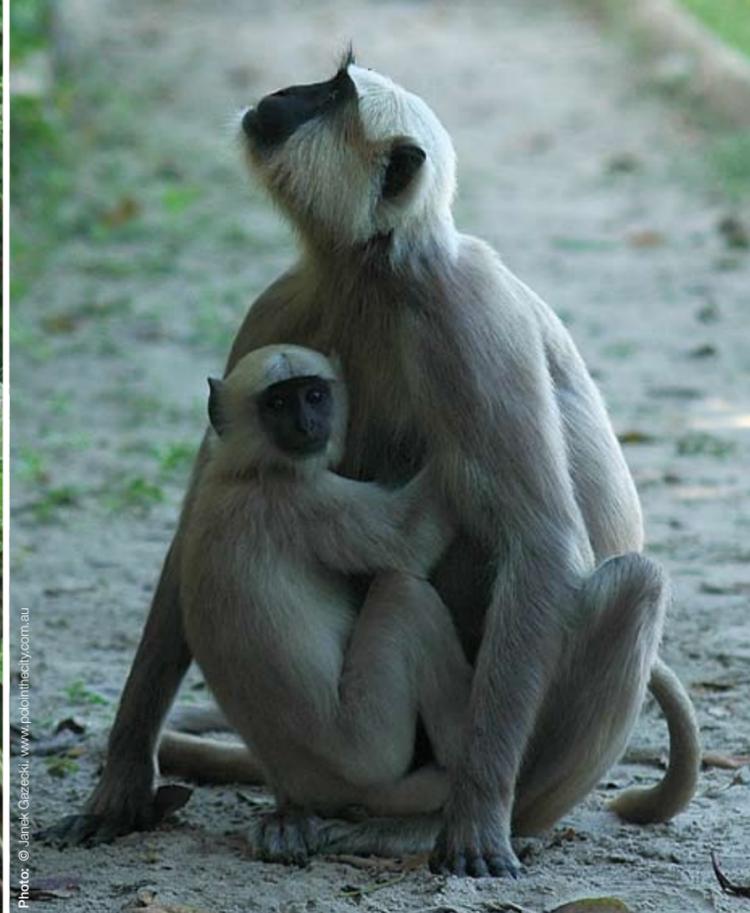


Photo: Courtesy Tiger Mountain.

The Himalaya offers some of the planet’s most spectacular vistas.



deep in the jungle south of the mighty River Reu in the Chitwan Valley, Tiger Tops offers the original tree-top living experience in rooms built from locally available materials overlooking what is possibly the most beautiful lawn on the planet beneath which rhinos and tigers roam against a Himalayan backdrop that turns burnished rose in the setting sun.

Simply getting to Tiger Tops is an adventure. Guests and luggage are ferried between waiting Land Rovers across the River Reu on a traditional punt-style boat before being driven along winding trails through impenetrable jungle in which spotting a tiger is a constant possibility. Foot, elephant and boat safaris are available and one should not be forsaken for another - Tiger Tops is a place at which each experience on offer is so unique and so rich that all should be grasped and savoured until the last sad moment that a journey home begins.

Also in the Chitwan area, on the edge of the park, Tiger Mountain Tharu Lodge enjoys a tranquil garden setting on high ground overlooking lush green forests and villages. Inspired by the lifestyle and rich culture of the indigenous Tharu people, Tharu Lodge is a living diorama constructed in the traditional longhouse style, and built from local materials. The spacious and comfortable double rooms have en-suite bathrooms with solar-heated water and are stocked with hand-made herbal soap.

The lodge offers the best of both worlds: wildlife plus cultural and resort activities, including birdwatching, jungle walks, sunset strolls, ox-cart rides and walks into a variety of ethnic villages (Tharu, Bote and Mushyar), swimming, tennis, badminton, and pony rides for children. The lodge's grounds are home to some 200 bird species and frequent visitors to the area include the greater one-horned rhinoceros, wild boar, leopard, sloth bear, civet and jungle cats, and the king of them all - the elusive Royal Bengal tiger. Only the keenest and luckiest eyes will spot a tiger, but rest assured... they are there! High above the plains and

ABOVE LEFT: The Great One-horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros Unicornis*) is the largest of the species of Asian rhinoceri. Habitat destruction and heavy poaching for the animals' horn, believed by the Chinese to be of great medicinal value, have led to a continued decline in numbers in recent decades. Less than 1500 are left in the Indian Subcontinent and that number represents the world population. Some 500 rhinos live in the Royal Chitwan National Park.

ABOVE RIGHT: Two species of monkey, the Langur and the Rhesus Macaque are prevalent throughout the park.

PUTTING SOMETHING BACK

Tiger Mountain places great emphasis on self-sufficiency at its lodges. Its own Tiger Mountain Organic Farms produce fresh ingredients for its award-winning Nepali and Western cuisine: wild-boar cross, poultry, seasonal vegetables and fruit, herbs, salads, honey. All bread, rolls, quiches, pastries, cookies and pies are freshly baked on the premises, and the lodges serve home-made marmalade and jams, chutneys, muesli, yoghurt, pasta, sausage, pâté, and fresh organic coffee and herbal teas. In line with its ethic of putting something positive back into the areas where its lodges are located, Tiger Mountain helps fund various charities, community development and environmental projects, including a free clinic, a school for underprivileged children (Tiger Tops Swissair Pre-School) and four other educational programmes, village irrigation, recycling, flood relief, agricultural and vocational training, women's literacy and empowerment and anti-poaching and wildlife monitoring programmes.

The view from Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge is possibly one of the most magnificent to be found in Asia.

jungles of the Terai, Pokhara is the gateway to the Himalaya. The most popular destination in Nepal after Kathmandu, Pokhara's lakeside ambience and proximity to some of the most famous treks - including the magnificent Annapurna range - was a favourite with Hippies in the 70s (although quite how much trekking the Hippies did is open to debate!) and retains something of the laid back hedonism of the time. The valley boasts three large lakes; Rupa Tal, Begnas Tal and Phewa Tal. Perched on a hilltop ridge that rises 1000 feet above the Pokhara valley, Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge enjoys spectacular views of Machhapuchhare, Dhaulagiri, Manaslu and Annapurna. The lodge's pool even boasts a reflection of Machhapuchhare on its glistening surface! A place to stay simply to experience one of the world's most spectacular views, to soak up the hedonism of a valley that echoes of times past, or as a start and finish point from the Himalaya, the lodge boasts many reasons to visit and few to leave!

Most arrive by air or road, but the most thrilling and unforgettable way to reach Tiger Mountain Karnali Lodge is to raft down the mighty Karnali River, the longest and largest river in Nepal. The Karnali offers some of the prettiest canyons and most dramatic jungle scenery in a country filled with landscapes that beg superlatives. Those, including the very experienced, who make the Karnali trip rave about it. But, be warned, the Karnali is a serious commitment combining huge rapids with an extremely remote location. The trip takes about seven days ending in the Royal Bardia National Park, at the edge of which Karnali Lodge offers a deep wilderness experience.

“This is Tharu land at its best and the colourful life of the indigenous people surrounds and reverberates throughout the lodge.”

This is Tharu land at its best and the colourful life of the indigenous people surrounds and reverberates throughout the lodge. The surrounding jungle is home to chital deer, blackbuck, wild elephant, boar, sloth bear, birds of many feathers and, yes you guessed it, the Royal Bengal tiger.

The standard of luxury and comfort provided in the lodges is superb but doesn't keep Tiger Mountain guests in their beds for long! The chances of spotting a tiger are best at dawn and there is no better way to do so than from the back of an elephant.

If you get lucky and spot a tiger first time out you'll want to get up the next day to see one again. And if you don't see one on the first safari... well there's always the next... and the next... and the next...

Whether you choose Tiger Tops, Tharu or Karnali, or have the luxury of time to experience all three, what is certain is that conversation around the fireplaces in the traditional *gol ghar*

dining halls or the well-stocked bars will revolve around wildlife. Tiger Mountain staff includes conservation experts, scientists and some of the best trained and most experienced safari guides in the world. The logistical brilliance that the company demonstrates in providing luxury and efficiency in what can only be described as extremely remote locations is nothing short of miraculous and magical. But then everything about the experiences offered is magical. As an elephant polo player put it when he dismounted from his massive pachyderm having ridden through the Terai jungle at sunset, "It doesn't get better!" Take my word for it, he's right... it doesn't!

HIGHER AND HIGHER

Annapurna

The Annapurna Sanctuary is a high glacial basin to the north of Pokhara at the very heart of some of Nepal's highest and most famous mountains. This magnificent amphitheatre is called a sanctuary not because of laws that protect wildlife within its boundaries, but because of its natural beauty and the divine presence of the goddesses Annapurna and Gangapurna, both important figures in Hindu myth and folklore.

Since it opened to foreign trekkers in 1977, the trek around the Annapurna 'circuit' has become the most popular in Nepal thanks to the wide diversity of peoples and spectacular scenery the route provides.

Because it's there...

Everest - named after Sir George Everest, the British Surveyor General of India at the time when the mountain was first identified as 'Point XV' on the border with Nepal and Tibet. To the Sherpas and Tibetans however she is 'Chomolungma' - Mother Goddess of the Earth, the Nepalese also have their own name, 'Sagarmatha'. Call it Everest, Chomolungma or Sagarmatha, there is no dispute that the mountain is the highest in the world. Every year climbers from nations all around the world rendezvous at the Everest Base Camp just beneath the infamous Khumbu Ice Fall to plot a route up the mountain and dream to reach the 'top of the world'. The trek to the simple peak just beside Base Camp, the point known as 'Kala Pattar', follows in the footsteps of these mountaineers up the Khumbu valley, home to the most famous people in the Himalayas, the Sherpas. Traditionally traders, they have been associated with Everest ever since the first attempts on the North (Tibetan) side of the mountain in the 1920's. Mountain Travel Nepal offers you the opportunity to trek in the highest region of the world with its trips specially designed to give you a chance to traverse in the shadows of the highest mountain in the world.

When to go

When and how you go trekking depends greatly on the time of year. Generally speaking, the best months to trek are October-November (post-monsoon) and April-May (pre-monsoon). It is possible to trek throughout the year but trekkers must be aware that bad/freak weather can strike in any season.

