



## Where is the Top of the World?

**2021 Leader's Guide** written by Faye Spencer, KAFCE State Vice-President

**GOALS:** Participants will have an increased awareness of the uniqueness and diversity of Nepal.

**Community Activities:** Promote Nepalese cultural and cuisine by celebrating holidays. Invite guest who come from or has traveled in Nepal to meetings. Plan and prepare Nepalese foods or tea party.

**Leaders:** You may use this document as a starting point to your own discovery, you may enhance the lesson with further research, maps, pictures, books, fashion show, testing new recipes, which would be an additional educational benefit to your presentation.

**Namaste!** This greeting is very traditional on the Indian subcontinent. Either meeting strangers passing by on the street or family members greeting one another, children acknowledging their elders, people join their palms together and bow their heads in respect of one another. Translated it means "I bow to you" (*Nanah* or *Namas* means bow; *Te* means you).

Where is the Top of the World? The highest point of our planet is Mount Everest, 29,029 feet or 5.5 miles above sea level, located in the Himalayan mountain range, and officially named the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal (ne'pal). Kansas's highest point is 4,039 feet (Mount Sunflower) in Wallace County. The mountain is estimated to be about 60 million years old but it was not until 1953 that Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay were the first recorded climbers to reach the summit. Of the 4,000+ people who since 1953 reached the summit, I am not one of them. But during a 2019 family trip to Nepal, we had a guided tour flying over and around Mount Everest and Himalayan Mountains.

When looking for Nepal on a map, it is in South Asia, trapezoidal in shape and landlocked between two powerful neighbors, China on the northern border and India to the south, east and west.

Nepal's 56,827 square mile area is number 93 in the world (Kansas has 82,277 square miles area), but not all the country is inhabitable. Humans, livestock and vegetation can't survive at the high altitudes. The most northern third of the country are mountainous. The thirty million people (49<sup>th</sup> largest country by population; Kansas population is 3 million) live in the nearly flat river plain, and the hilly central regions.

The ideal time to visit Nepal, as told by Brian's Nepalese relatives, would be autumn. But the time available for our family, three daughters, two sons-in law, Brian and myself, was early June, the beginning of summer monsoon. Thank goodness the rains did not come. The monsoon (June-September) produces 80% of all the rain. The weather was hot and humid. The travel agency did arrange for air conditioned transportation and lodging.

Our travel guide spoke very good English. Most tourist related businesses in the Kathmandu Valley speak English but the official language is Nepali. There are 126 listed spoken languages. But the driver had a limited command of English but that did not matter as much as his ability to negotiate bumper to bumper fast city traffic where there are pedestrians, mopeds, bicyclist, and cows; or narrow hairpin curves on the, sometimes unpaved, potholed, mountain roads. Whether or not there were road markings indicating lanes or no passing zones, passing other vehicles is an art-lots of car horns blaring, words and prayers. All of this and they drive on the left side.



Other important and interesting facts: the capital is Kathmandu, nicknamed the “City of Temples” (we saw 3-5); the national flag is the only one in the world that is not a rectangle; and prior to movement for democracy in 2006 and removal of the king in 2008, the country was officially a Hindu kingdom, established in 1769. The new 2007 constitution gives limited religious freedom for Christians, but prohibits conversion to other religions. Breakdown of religions and percentage of the 30 million population are: Hindu 81%, Buddhist 9%, Muslim 4% Christian 1.4%. Nationalisms: Flower-Rhododendron; Animal-Cow (to Hindus, a cow is sacred); Sport-Volleyball; Color-Crimson.

Our family had a very quick (13 day) but enlightening tour of Nepal. The goals were to learn and see the country that Brian was born in and meet his remaining family. Brian was the fifth child of ten children, (5 brothers and 4 sisters, 1 sister has died). One long road trip was to Surunga, Jhapa District in the very south eastern section of the county. In one day, we were greeted by Brian’s 3 brothers and 2 sisters along with their spouses, children, grandchildren and others that lived as part of their extended family community. The younger generation did speak some English. All I could do was smile, give a warm greeting of “Nameste” and enjoy their home cooked family meals. The rest of Brian’s siblings, 2 brothers and 1 sister are living in Kathmandu who we did visit between all the sightseeing.

**Other places we traveled to or toured:**

**Pokhara** (po (v) kʰəɾɑː) is the second largest city and tourism capital of Nepal. Located 120 miles from Katmandu, The city is home to the elite Gurkha soldiers, Barahi Temple (is on an island in middle of Phewa Lake), and World Peace Pagoda.

**Lumbini** (lum-bi-ni). Birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama in 563 BC, founder of Buddhism. Toured a complex of Buddhist temples which have been funded by Buddhist from various countries.

**Royal Chitwan National Park:** viewed the park on an elephant safari, saw the elephant breeding and training center. Established in in 1973, and is 360 sq. miles

**Kathmandu Valley: Patan Durbar Square**-some of the temples were built in the 12<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is the center of both Hinduism and Buddhism, had 136 courtyards and 55 major temples. **Bhaktapur Durbar Square** is the royal palace of the old Kingdom. The Palace of Fifty-five Windows was built during the reign of a king who ruled from 1696 to 1722 AD and was not completed until 1754 AD. **Changu Narayan Temple.** This shrine is dedicated to Lord Vishnu and held in special reverence by the Hindu people. This temple is considered to be the oldest temple in the history of Nepal, built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century but after a fire, it was rebuilt in the 1700’s. **Boudhanath Stupa** it is one of the largest stupas in the world. Each of the sites we toured are on the UNESCO list (A World Heritage Site is a landmark or area selected by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for having cultural, historical, or scientific significance, which is legally protected by international treaties.) In April to May, 2015, many such sites and places were heavily damaged during 2 major (7.8 and 7.3) earthquakes and 304 aftershocks. It will be a slow process to rebuild.

Reviewed by Brian Spencer, who was born in Nepal and Juanita Masko, retired teacher and KAFCE State Secretary

Recourses:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepal>; <https://www.welcomenepal.com/plan-your-trip/history.html>