

Minimum impact code for travel to Upper Mustang

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This minimum code is issued to tourists prior to their visit to Upper Mustang in a bid to raise awareness of the conservation of the environmental and cultural integrity of the region:

"As visitors and friends, you are asked to help conserve the sanctity and beauty of the Upper Mustang region for the generations to come. Here are a few tips on ways to "step gently" in this fragile area.

Travel ecologically

- In Jomsom and Upper Mustang, it is possible to rent horses and ponies, which are traditionally used for transportation and as pack animals. In fact, the people of Upper Mustang are not fully habituated to accommodating porters. To maintain tradition, and to minimise the environmental burden created by porters, it is recommended that ponies be used instead.

Save fuel

- Fuel is a scarce commodity in Upper Mustang. Many travel for over a day to collect firewood, thorny Taklang bushes and then spend another day returning. Others spend hours collecting goat and sheep pellets. In order not to further aggravate the problem of fuel gathering, it is forbidden for groups to buy firewood from the communities in Upper Mustang. All groups to Upper Mustang must demonstrate that they are self-sufficient in fuel before departing Jomsom. (Note that kerosene may not be readily available in Jomsom until the establishment of a fuel depot).
- During the trek, make sure your staff uses kerosene or gas for cooking. Do not make open fires. Limit hot showers. Bring adequate clothing for yourself, and ensure that your trekking staff is also warmly clothed.

Do not pollute

- In order to minimise pollution, burn all paper products, including toilet paper, cigarette butts, non-plastic and non-foil wrappers. Carry out all non-burnable rubbish like bottles, plastics, cans, and batteries. These may be disposed of in Jomsom Vegetables and food scraps should be properly buried or fed to stock animals.
- Use available toilet facilities, and make sure that your trekking agency carries along a toilet tent. Supervise your trekking staff to make sure that they cover toilet pits on the trail, make sure that you are at least 50 meters away from any water source when relieving yourself. When bathing, use only biodegradable soaps, and wash away from streams, as they are the only source of drinking water.

Protect wildlife

- Due to the limited carrying capacity of the desert environment, wildlife densities in Upper Mustang are very low. Nevertheless, in addition to the many species naturally found on the Tibetan Plateau, Upper Mustang is host to rare species such as Argali sheep, wild ass (kyang) and snow leopard.
- It is illegal to interfere with wildlife or their habitat in any manner, or to purchase any item made of rare or endangered animal parts. Please respect the fragile ecology of the area by avoiding walking on vegetation or collecting plants and flowers.

Respect the culture

- Upper Mustang is replete with religious sites such as gompas (monasteries), chortens (structures for worship) abandoned caves and reliquaries of ruined monasteries. These sites are a remarkable showcase for a culture that is ancient, yet alive.
- In order to assure the security of monuments and structures, it is essential that most of these areas, and especially the abandoned caves, be off-limits to trekkers and their staff.
- Local residents may wish gompas to be off-limits to tourist, or accessible for a small fee or donation. As the local people are the custodians of their culture, trekkers are asked to abide by their wishes.
- Please do not remove any religious artifacts from the area.
- Respect local customs in your dress and behaviour. Women should not wear shorts or revealing shirts. Men should always wear shirts. Avoid outward displays of affection. Nudity is highly prohibited.
- Ask permission to take photographs and respect people's right to privacy.
- Do not give anything to beggars unless they are legitimate religious mendicants.
- Encourage young Nepalis to be proud of their culture.

- Above all remember that your vacation has a great impact on the natural environment and on the people who live off its resources. By assisting in these small ways, you will help the land and people of Nepal.

"Nepal is here to change you, not for you to change Nepal."

Notes to reader

This paper is a part of a thesis on Tourism Development and Environmental Management in Nepal: A study of Sagarmatha National Park and the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, with special reference to Upper Mustang. Thesis submitted to the The International Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Management, Bournemouth University for master's degree.