



Kathmandu

HIGHLIGHTS

- o Soak up the amazing monuments of **Durbar Square** (opposite), an artistic and architectural tradition that rivals the great cities of Europe
- o Pig out on a yak steak, chicken tikka masala or cheeseburger at one of Kathmandu's dozens of **restaurants** (p81), a culinary heaven after weeks of trekkers' dal bhat!
- o Stock up on bargain-priced local trekking gear in Thamel's excellent **outdoor gear shops** (p82 and p409), then fill your pack with pashminas, carpets, books and CDs for the folks back home
- o Take a day trip out to the nearby Unesco World Heritage sites of **Swayambhunath**, **Pashupatinath**, **Bodhnath** or **Patan** (opposite)

telephone code 01

population 1 million

elevation 1337m

The capital of Nepal is an exhilarating, fascinating and maddening city of colour and chaos. Nestled in a large valley that – according to legend – was once a huge lake, Kathmandu offers an unparalleled variety of restaurants, hotels, trek gear and map shops as well as a heady array of exquisite medieval monuments, temples and statues.

Even if you are itching to get into the hills, you'll probably need to spend a day or so in Kathmandu organising transport, supplies or permits. There's much to see here, so set aside a few days after your trek for exploring the bazaars and temples of Kathmandu, as well as the nearby cities of Patan and Bhaktapur. After a couple of weeks in the hills you'll appreciate the big city's cappuccinos and chocolate cake all the more.



INFORMATION

Medical Services

CIWEC Clinic (Map p78; ☎ 4424111; www.ciwec-clinic.com; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri) Just across from the British embassy, to the northeast of Thamel and used by many foreign residents. A doctor is on call around the clock. Credit cards are accepted and staff are used to dealing with insurance claims.

KB Drug Store (Map p80; ☎ 4251567; Chhetrapati Chowk; ☎ 8am-9pm) This pharmacy offers knowledgeable advice in English and all the cheap antibiotics you need for a medical kit.

Nepal International Clinic (Map p78; ☎ 4434642; www.nepalinternationalclinic.com; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm) Just south of the new Royal Palace, east of Thamel. It has an excellent reputation and is slightly cheaper than the CIWEC Clinic. Credit cards accepted.

Money

Himalayan Bank (Map p80; ☎ 4250208; www.himalayanbank.com; Sanchaya Kosh Bhawan centre, Tridevi Marg; ☎ 8am-8pm Sun-Fri) Convenient for travellers staying in Thamel. You can change cash and travellers cheques, get cash advances on a Visa card and use its ATM, in front of the Tridevi (Three Goddesses) Temple.

Standard Chartered Bank (Map p80) Has useful ATMs opposite the Third Eye Restaurant and in the compound of the Kathmandu Guest House.

Tourism Information

Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA; Map p80; ☎ 4445505; www.himalayanrescue.org; Thamel; ☎ 10am-1pm, 2-5pm Sun-Fri) Come here at 3pm on weekdays for a free lecture on altitude sickness, plus weather updates and embassy registration forms. There's also a branch in Lazimpat (Map p78; ☎ 4440292).

Kathmandu Environmental Education Project (KEEP; Map p80; ☎ 4216775; www.keeppnepal.org; Jyatha, Thamel; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun-Fri) A good place for trekking reports, anti-leech oil (Rs 90) and water-purification tablets (Rs 500). It's also a good place to find a trek partner.

Tourist Service Centre (Map p78; ☎ 4256909 ext 223, 24hr tourism hotline 4225709; www.welcomenepal.com; Bhrikuti Mandap; ☎ 10am-1pm, 2-5pm Sun-Fri) General tourism info and the place to get your TIMS card and ACAP permit (see p369). It's a 20-minute walk from Thamel.

Travel Agencies

President Travel & Tours (Map p78; ☎ 4220245; www.president-travels.com; Durbar Marg) Professional agency favoured by expats and good at getting seats on heavily booked flights.

Wayfarers (Map p80; ☎ 4266010; www.wayfarers.com.np; Thamel; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun) For straight-talking travel info and air ticketing.

Visas & Permits

Visas can be extended at the **Central Immigration Office** (Map p78; ☎ 4223590; www.immi.gov.np; Maitighar; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Sun-Thu, 10am-3pm Fri, 11am-1pm Sat) in southeastern Kathmandu. See p373 for information on visa extensions. Your trekking agency will get your restricted-area trekking permit here.

The **Annapurna Conservation Area Project office** (ACAP; Map p78; ☎ 4222406; www.ntnc.org.np; Bhrikuti Mandap; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Fri, to 2pm Sat), at the Tourist Service Centre building (left), is the place to get an ACAP permit for trekking in the Annapurna region (see p370).

Buy national park entry permits at the next-door **Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation** (Map p78; www.dnpwc.gov.np; ☎ 9am-2pm Sun-Fri); see p370 for details.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Traffic on the streets of Kathmandu is an anarchic, at times near-apocalyptic, riot of pollution-belching two-, three- and four-wheel vehicles squeezing their way through impossibly narrow streets. Doomsayers compare Kathmandu's air pollution to that of Mexico City, although one Mexican trek leader assures us that it's nowhere near that bad. Traffic and touts can make a stroll through Thamel a deeply stressful experience.

Strikes are much less frequent these days but do still occur. During transport strikes the government normally runs special tourist buses between Thamel and the airport. Electricity cuts are frequent but scheduled.

SIGHTS

There's lots to see in Kathmandu. If you have a couple of days make sure you check out the spectacular medieval architecture of **Durbar Square** (Map p78; admission Rs 200) and follow this up with a stroll through the endlessly fascinating streets of the old town. Make some time also for the superbly restored and serene **Garden of Dreams** (Map p80; www.asianart.com/gardenofdreams; adult/child Rs 160/40; ☎ 9am-10pm), just to the east of Thamel.

The quite different stupas of both **Swayambhunath** (Map pp76-7; admission Rs 50) to the west of town and **Bodhnath** (off Map pp76-7; admission Rs 50) in the east are a short taxi ride from the centre and are both well worth the visit. Bodhnath is particularly interesting