



Kathmandu

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Hotel Ganesh Himal (p97)
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Why Go?

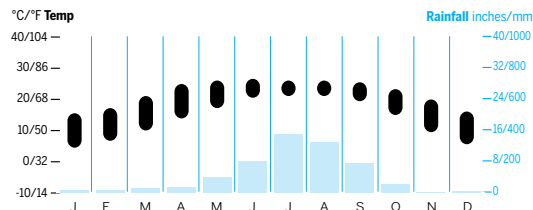
For many, stepping off a plane into Kathmandu is a pupil-dilating experience, a riot of sights, sounds and smells that can quickly lead to sensory overload. Whether you're barreling through the traffic-jammed alleyways of the old town in a rickshaw, marvelling at the medieval temples or dodging trekking touts in the backpacker district of Thamel, Kathmandu can be an intoxicating, amazing and exhausting place.

The 2015 earthquake brought devastation to parts of the city – including Kathmandu's Unesco-listed Durbar Square – but many areas emerged unscathed, and the soul of the city endures. Stroll through the backstreets and Kathmandu's timeless cultural and artistic heritage will reveal itself in hidden temples overflowing with marigolds, courtyards full of drying chillies and rice, and tiny hobbit-sized workshops.

This fascinating, infuriating city has enough sights to keep you busy for a week, but be sure to leave its backpacker comforts and explore the 'real Nepal' before your time runs out.

When to Go

Kathmandu



Oct–Dec Fine mountain views and warm days until December, with high-season crowds.

Mar–May March brings the Seto Machhendranath festival. Days can be hot in May.

Jun–Sep Hot days and frequent monsoon showers, but also the spectacular Indra Jatra festival.

History

The history of Kathmandu is really a history of the Newars, the main inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. While the documented history of the valley goes back to the Kiratis, around the 7th century BC, the foundation of Kathmandu itself dates from the 12th century AD, during the time of the Malla dynasty.

The original settlements of Yambu and Yangala, at the confluence of the Bagmati and Vishnumati Rivers in what is now the southern half of the old town, grew up around the trade route to Tibet. Traders and pilgrims stayed at rest houses such as the now destroyed Kasthamandap, which lent its name to the city.

Originally known as Kantipur, the city flourished during the Malla era, and the bulk of its superb temples, buildings and other monuments date from this time. Initially, Kathmandu was an independent city within the valley, but in the 14th century the valley was united under the rule of the Malla king of Bhaktapur. The 15th century saw division once more, this time into three independent kingdoms: Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur. Rivalry between the three city-states led to a series of wars that left each state weakened and vulnerable to the 1768 invasion of the valley by Prithvi Narayan Shah.

The ensuing Shah dynasty unified Nepal and made the expanded city of Kathmandu its new capital – a position the city has held ever since. In 1934, a massive earthquake reshaped parts of Kathmandu, and the reconstruction created a network of modern boulevards such as New Rd. Kathmandu escaped the worst of the Maoist uprising in the 1990s, though the city was frequently crippled by demonstrations and strikes. Tens of thousands of Nepalis flooded into the rapidly expanding city to escape the political violence, and the city infrastructure is still struggling to cope even a decade after the end of the conflict.

On 25 April 2015, history repeated itself as another massive earthquake shook the Kathmandu Valley. Thousands were killed and many of Kathmandu's most famous monuments were reduced to rubble. Although life was slowly returning to normal in the Nepali capital in the months following the disaster, many people were homeless and many buildings and monuments required urgent repairs. The repercussions

EARTHQUAKE DAMAGE IN KATHMANDU

Sitting on a bed of vulnerable clay, Kathmandu bore the full force of the earthquake on 25 April 2015, but not all parts of the city were affected equally. Thamel, the most popular district for accommodation, eating and nightlife, saw relatively little damage, and Bodhnath and Pashupatinath also escaped with only minor damage.

The most serious damage was reported in districts with many old buildings, including Kathmandu's famous Durbar Square, but even here, damage was uneven – temples at the south end of the square toppled while those to the north were almost untouched by the disaster. Other badly affected areas include Gongabu, near the main Kathmandu bus station, and Kalanki, at the start of the road to Pokhara.

of the earthquake are likely to be felt for generations.

👁️ Sights

Most of the interesting things to see in Kathmandu are clustered in the old part of town, focused on the majestic Durbar Sq and its surrounding backstreets.

👁️ Durbar Square

Kathmandu's **Durbar Square** (Map p73; foreigner/SAARC Rs 750/150, no student tickets) was where the city's kings were once crowned and legitimised, and from where they ruled ('durbar' means palace). Tragically, parts of the square were devastated by the 2015 earthquake. As the first tremor hit, palaces crumbled and temples tumbled from their plinths, reducing parts of this Unesco World Heritage Site to a mound of splintered timber and brick dust. Seeing the roll-call of destroyed monuments, it would be easy to imagine that there was nothing left, but much still endures amid the destruction. The area north of Hanuman Dhoka, with its fascinating jumble of statues, shrines and temples, was almost untouched, and even in the worst affected area, key monuments such as the palace of the Kumari – Nepal's living goddess – stand in defiance of the disaster.