

Biking, Rafting & Kayaking

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While Nepal may be synonymous with trekking, its world-class rapids and exhilarating mountain descents are made for white-water rafting and mountain biking. The bike trails suggested here are best suited to more experienced riders with a good level of fitness. And while most can be done on your own, you'll often need to rely on locals for directions, so hiring a guide or signing up for an organised tour will make life considerably easier. Meanwhile the rafting and kayaking routes are suitable for beginners and pros alike, and your choice is dependent on how much of a buzz you can handle.

See also the Bike Tracks & White Water chapter for general information on both activities and a recommended list of operators.

MOUNTAIN-BIKE ROUTES

The Scar Road from Kathmandu

Distance 65km

Duration Seven hours, or two days overnight in Kakani

Start/Finish Kathmandu

Summary Fine views and a challenging descent through a national park, after a tough initial climb of around 700m.

At times this can be a fairly demanding route, and is suited to more experienced riders; a guide is recommended.

Leaving Kathmandu (elevation 1337m), head towards Balaju on the Ring Rd 2km north of Thamel, and follow the sealed Trisuli Bazaar road towards Kakani, 23km away at an altitude of 2073m. You start to climb out of the valley as the road twists and turns past Nagarjun Hill (p124), which provides the road with a leafy canopy. Once you're through the initial pass and out of the valley, the road continues north-west and offers a view of endless terraced fields to your

left. (If you don't fancy the climb, you can avoid cycling on the road by putting your bike on the roof of the early-morning bus to Dhunche and getting off here.) On reaching the summit of the ridge, take a turn right (at a clearly marked T-junction), instead of continuing down to Trisuli Bazaar. (If you go too far, you reach a checkpoint just 100m beyond.) At this point magnificent views of the Ganesh Himal (himal means a range with permanent snow) provide the inspiration required to complete the remaining 4km of steep and deteriorating blacktop to the crown of the hill at **Kakani** (p181) for a well-deserved rest. It's an excellent idea to overnight here at the Tara Gaon (p181) or other such guesthouse and savour the dawn views over the Himalaya.

After admiring the view, descend for just 30m beyond the gate and take the first left onto a 4WD track. This track will take you through the popular picnic grounds frequented on Saturday by Kathmandu locals. Continue in an easterly direction towards Shivapuri. The track narrows after a few kilometres near a metal gate on your left. Through the gate, you are faced with some rough stone steps and then a 10-minute push/carry up and over the hilltop to an army checkpoint. Here it's necessary for foreigners to pay a Rs 250 entry fee to the Shivapuri National Park, plus a US\$5 fee for their bike. Exit the army camp, turning right where the Scar Rd is clearly visible in front of you. You are now positioned at the day's highest point – approximately 2200m.

Taking the right-hand track you start to descend dramatically along an extremely steep, rutted single trail with several water crossings. The trail is literally cut into the side of the hill, with sharp drops on the right that challenge a rider's skill and nerve. As you hurtle along, take time to admire the view of the sprawling Kathmandu Valley below – it's one of the best. In recent years the trail has become quite overgrown so you may have to carry your bike for several stretches and seek out the correct path. A guide would be useful for this section.

The trail widens, after one long gnarly climb before the saddle, then it's relatively flat through the protected Shivapuri watershed area. This beautiful mountain-biking section lasts for nearly 25km before the trail descends into the valley down a 7km spiral on a gravel road. This joins a sealed road, to the relief of jarred wrists, at **Bud-**

hanilkantha (p124), where you can buy refreshments. Take a moment to see the Sleeping Vishnu just up on your left at the main intersection. From here the sealed road descends gently for the remaining 15km back into the bustle of Kathmandu.

Kathmandu to Pokhara

Distance 263km

Duration Five days

Start Kathmandu

Finish Pokhara

Summary Fine views and challenging trails that take you off the beaten track and through historic Newari towns.

It's possible to ride from Kathmandu to Pokhara in 12 to 14 hours along the busy Prithvi Hwy, but unless you're in a hurry the back roads are much better suited to mountain biking. This route will take you along some fairly rural trails that see few foreigners, so a guide or an organised tour is a good idea. Otherwise you'll need to rely on villagers to point you in the right direction.

Day one sees you leaving Thamel in a northerly direction along the busy tarmac road, taking a left at the Kantipath exit. Continue along this road for 3km, past the American embassy and cross the Ring Rd at Maharajganj. From here it's a steady 6km uphill to **Budhanilkantha**, taking a break to see the Sleeping Vishnu. Continuing on, you leave the tarmac behind in a cloud of dust. The trail begins with a 3.5km climb to the army checkpoint where you pay the entry fee to **Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park**. Follow the rocky trail through the forest for 4km until you reach a clearing. Ignore the first small road on your right that has a sign pointing to Shivapuri Resort, and instead take the next right after it, leading you downhill for 18km. Ignore the crossroads and head straight. If unsure, ask locals the way to Bidur, or better yet, get a guide.

After the descent you head along a mostly flat road with the Likhu Khola on your right. After 8km you'll cross the river and then go on to a paved road where the river will be on your left for about 5km before meeting the Trisuli River. Cross the bridge on your right and take a left through the village, riding through town before taking a left at the small paved road. On reaching the main road, head right and ride 3km to