



# Kathmandu

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## Best Places to Eat

- » Or2K (p91)
- » Third Eye (p91)
- » K-Too Steakhouse (p91)
- » Delices de France (p91)
- » Kaiser Cafe (p95)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Ganesh Himal (p88)
- » Dwarika's (p90)
- » Kantipur Temple House (p87)
- » International Guest House (p86)
- » Hotel Tibet (p89)

## Why Go?

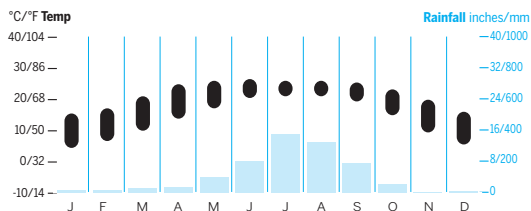
For many, stepping off a plane into Kathmandu is a pupil-dilating experience, a riot of sights, sounds and smells that can quickly lead to sensory overload. Whether you're barreling through the traffic-jammed alleyways of the old town in a rickshaw, marvelling at the medieval temples of Durbar Sq or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

To really glimpse the soul of the city, take a walk through the backstreets, and the capital's timeless cultural and artistic heritage reveals itself in hidden temples overflowing with marigolds, courtyards full of drying chillies and rice, and tiny hobbit-sized workshops.

This endlessly fascinating, sometimes 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** Monsoon months bring hot days and frequent showers but also spectacular Indra Jatra.

## 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 Kasthamandap, which later 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 weak-

ened 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.

A massive earthquake in 1934 destroyed much of the city, creating a network of modern boulevards such as New Rd. Kathmandu escaped the worst of the Maoist uprising (1996–2005), 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.

## Sights

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

### DURBAR SQUARE

Kathmandu's **Durbar Square** (Map p64; for-eigner/SAARC Rs 300/100, no student tickets) was where the city's kings were once crowned and legitimised, and from where they ruled ('durbar' means palace). As such, the square

## KATHMANDU & AROUND IN...

### Two Days

Start off the day with our two-hour walking tour on p72. Grab lunch overlooking **Basantapur Sq** or in nearby **Freak St** and then spend the afternoon soaking up the architectural grandeur of **Durbar Sq**. Finish the day with a cold beer and dinner in the Thamel area.

Next day cycle out to **Swayambhunath** in the morning and spend the afternoon shopping in **Thamel**. For your final meal splurge at one of the blowout Newari restaurants such as **Bhojan Griha** or **Thamel House**.

### Four Days

If you have an extra couple of days, take a short taxi ride out to **Patan** (p126) for a full day exploring its Durbar Sq, Patan Museum (the best in the country) and another fascinating backstreet walking tour. Take your dinner in one of Jhamsikhel's excellent restaurants.

On day four take a taxi to **Pashupatinath** (p115) and then make the short walk out to **Bodhnath** (p118) to soak up some Tibetan culture as the pilgrims gather at dusk.

### One Week

With a week up your sleeve you can spend a day (and preferably a night) at **Bhaktapur** (p140). When stress levels build, fit in some quiet time at the delightful **Garden of Dreams**.

Seven days gives you the chance to gorge on Thai (Yin Yang), Indian (Third Eye), Korean (Hankook Sarang), buff steak (K-Too), felafel (Or2k) and maybe even some Nepali food! Don't get us started on lunch...