

Around the Kathmandu Valley



Once upon a time, the valley surrounding Kathmandu was a vast lake, trapped by the uprising of the Himalaya. According to legend, the yogi Manjushree saw a sacred lotus rising from the waters and opened a channel with his sword to drain the waters. So the Kathmandu Valley was born. Today, this natural basin is a patchwork of terraced fields and sacred temple towns that showcase the glory of the architects and artisans of Nepal. If Kathmandu is the head of Nepal, the valley could be its heart.

Few visitors leave Nepal without seeing at least the Unesco World Heritage-listed towns of Patan and Bhaktapur, which once jostled for power with Kathmandu. However, the whole valley is a living museum of Nepali culture. It is hard to go more than a few hundred metres without stumbling upon a medieval village or centuries-old temple.

There's so much to see here – just set out from Kathmandu and explore. Buses are frequent and inexpensive and all of the attractions in this chapter can be explored by rented mountain bike or motorcycle, or even on foot, utilising a series of shortcuts that can shave hours off the journey by road.

As well as Patan and Bhaktapur, be sure to make time for Pashupatinath, the sacred funeral compound beside the Bagmati River, and Bodhnath, the gigantic stupa that acts as a spiritual lodestone for Nepal's Tibetan Buddhists. Between these famous sights are smaller Newari towns and villages that lie well off the mainstream tourist circuit. In fact, you'll see fewer tourists just 10km outside Kathmandu than you will if you trek for days through the Himalaya!

HIGHLIGHTS

- Have your mind blown by the glorious Newari architecture of Patan's **Durbar Square** (p181)
- Get lost in the fascinating backstreets of **Bhaktapur** (p194), Nepal's best-preserved medieval town
- Join the pilgrims on the *parikrama* (clockwise circuit) around the enormous **Bodhnath Stupa** (p174)
- Have a mini-adventure in the little-visited towns of the Southern Valley – **Kirtipur** (p215), **Bungmati** (p219) and **Chobar** (p216)
- Wake up to bedside views of the Himalaya from your hotel in **Nagarkot** (p222), **Dhulikhel** (p226) or **Kakani** (p233)
- Escape the crowds and find the real spirit of Nepal in the temple town of **Panauti** (p229)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 03

■ POPULATION: 4.7 MILLION

■ AREA: 227,420 SQ KM

