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Fast facts

Kathmandu

The most interesting part of Kathmandu is the crowded backstreets of the rectangular-shaped old town. This is bordered to the north by the main tourist and backpacker district of Thamel (pronounced Thamel) and to the east by the sprawling modern new town. Thamel is bursting with hundreds of hotels, restaurants, internet cafes, travel agencies and shops that can be rivalled only by Bangkok's Khao San Rd. In the centre of the old town is the historic Durbar Sq and Hanuman Dhoka (old Royal Palace). Freak St, the focus of Kathmandu's overland scene during the hippie era, runs south from here. Thamel is 15 or 20 minutes' walk north from Durbar Sq. Running east from Durbar Sq is New Rd, constructed after the great earthquake of 1934, and one of the main shopping streets

in town. At the eastern end are the offices of Royal Nepal Airlines (RNAC). South of the junction of New Rd and Kantipath is the main post office and Sundhara district, easily located by the minaret-like Bhimsen Tower. The street known as Kantipath forms the boundary between the older and newer parts of the city. On the east side of Kantipath is a large, open parade ground known as Tundikhel, and on the eastern edge of this is the City (Ratna Park) bus station, for buses around the Kathmandu Valley. North of the Tundikhel is Durbar Marg, a wide street flanked by airline offices, restaurants and expensive hotels, and at its northern end is the New Royal Palace. Further north are the embassy and NGO districts of Lazimpat and Maharajganj. To the south of town is Patan, an historically

distinct city, which has now partially merged with Kathmandu's southern sprawl. Both Kathmandu and Patan are encircled by the Ring Rd. On this road in the north of the city is the main Kathmandu bus station and on the eastern edge is Tribhuvan Airport.

SIGHTS

Siddhartha Art Gallery

The best in the city, with a wide range of top-notch exhibitions.

Babar Mahal Revisited
Maitigha
tel: 4218048

Bhimsen Tower (Dharahara)

Towering like a lighthouse over the old town, this white, minaret-like tower is a useful landmark near the main post office. The views from 61.88m up - 213 steps above the city - are the best you can get. There is a small Shiva shrine right at the very top.

Sundhara
S of Durbar Sq
tel: 421 5616

Hanuman Dhoka

The inner palace complex of the Hanuman Dhoka was originally founded during the Licchavi period, but as it stands today most of it was constructed by King Pratap Malla in the 17th century. The royal palace was renovated many times in later years. The oldest parts are the smaller Sundari Chowk and Mohan Chowk at the northern part of the palace (both closed).

Old Town
near Durbar Square

Durbar Square

Kathmandu's Durbar Sq was where the city's kings were once crowned and legitimised, and from where they ruled (*durbar* means 'palace'). As such, the square remains the traditional heart of the old town and

Kathmandu's most spectacular legacy of traditional architecture, even though the king no longer lives in the Hanuman Dhoka - the palace was moved north to Narayanhiti about a century ago.

Old Town



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Kumari Bahal

At the junction of Durbar and Basantapur Sqs is a red brick, three-storey building with some incredible intricately carved windows. This is the Kumari Bahal, home to the Kumari, the young girl who is selected to be the town's living goddess until she reaches puberty and reverts to being a normal mortal. The building, in the style of the courtyarded Buddhist *vihara* (monastic abodes) of the valley, was built in 1757 by Jaya Prakash Malla.

Junction Durbar & Basantapur Sqs
Basantapur

DINING

Royal Hana Garden

This place is a bit of a find - there are two outdoor hot-spring baths where you can luxuriate for as long as you like before heading inside for a very reasonably priced Japanese meal. It's perfect for small groups and it's worth ringing ahead to book a soak. The restaurant is in Lazimpat, just north of the Hotel Ambassador.

Lazimpat
tel: 4416200



Kathmandu

Koto Restaurant

Some say Koto prepares the best Japanese food in town. If not the best, then it's close, with a wide range of dishes from cold soba noodles to sukiyaki and even fresh mackerel, plus several set menus. It's up a dingy little stairwell but the décor is cosy and intimate.

There's a less expensive branch in Thamel.

Durbar Marg

tel: 4226025

Seoul Arirang

This excellent Korean place has a pleasant rooftop area and serves dishes barbecued at your table, as well as Korean classics such as *bulgogi* (beef and ginger) and *bibimbap* (rice with beef, vegetables and hot sauce). The owner is Korean but the chefs are Nepali. The picture menu guarantees no nasty surprises.

Lal Durbar

tel: 4232105



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1905

You can dine with ambassadors and government ministers in Thomas Kilroy's latest venture, set in a lovely old house. The tables on a bridge over a wonderful lily pond adds a definite colonial Burmese feel, so it's fitting that there are several southeast Asian dishes on offer. You'll need some time to wade through the seven different menus, including one just for teas!

Thamel

Kantipath

tel: 4225272

Krishnarpan Restaurant

One of the best places for Nepali food is the Krishnarpan Restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel, east of the centre near the Ring Rd. The atmosphere is superb and the food gets consistent praise from diners. Bookings are advisable. If you are coming on Friday, arrive in time for the 18:00 dance show in the hotel courtyard.

Pashupatinath

E of the centre near the Ring Rd

tel: 4470770

ENTERTAINMENT

Kalamandapa Institute of Classical Nepalese Performing Arts

Nepali dances (and occasional theatre) are performed here at the Hotel Vajra most Tuesdays at 19:00. Phone ahead to check schedules. There are sometimes Newari music concerts on Fridays or Sunday evenings.

in Hotel Vajra

Bijeshwari

tel: 4271545

Jai Nepal Cinema

On the south side of the new Royal Palace this cinema shows some foreign films and is the best in town.

Lal Durbar

tel: 4442220



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Latin Quarter

This place has hot and sweaty salsa dance nights on Friday and Wednesday and you can even arrange salsa dance tuition here. It's owned by a famous Nepali singer/actor and is in the Babar Mahal Revisited complex.

In the Babar Mahal Revisited complex

Maitighar

HOTELS

Shanker Hotel

There's nowhere in Kathmandu quite like this former Rana palace - the kind of place where you expect at any moment to bump into some whiskered old Rana prince shuffling around the creaking wooden corridors. If you value dilapidated charm over mod cons, this could be the place for you.

Lazimpat

The hotel is off the main Lazimpat road, just north of the New Royal Palace. It's a 20-minute walk to Thamel.

off main Lazimpat Rd

tel: 4410151

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu

No expense has been spared on this huge modern day palace, from the epic Malla-style architecture to the stunning collection of intimate *chaityas* (mini-stupas) in the lobby. It's actually just outside Kathmandu, on the road to Bodhnath.

Head E out of Kathmandu, from near Chabahil stupa, along the road to Bodhnath. Continue past the junction at Chuchepati and the entrance to the hotel grounds is on the left, 1.5km before Bodhnath.

Taragaon

20min from central Kathmandu, on the road to

Bodhnath Stupa

tel: 4491234

Yak & Yeti Hotel

Yak & Yeti Hotel is probably the best-known hotel in Nepal, due to its connections with the legendary Boris Lissanevitch. Boris was its original owner and the father of Nepal's tourism industry. Everyone from dusty long-distance cyclists to UNDP workers and the tiara set stay here.

Halfway up Durbar Marg take the alley running E for 250m

Durbar Marg

tel: 4248999

Malla Hotel

The Malla Hotel is a top-end place right on the edge of Thamel, so you can have your cake and then go and eat in Thamel, a five-minute walk away. Who says rich people don't buy cheap CDs? Rooms are modern and comfortable, which is either reassuringly familiar or anaemically bland according to your taste. There's air-con/heating, cable TV, minibar and a choice of either pool or garden views.

Thamel

Walk to the northeastern edge of Thamel via Bhagwan Bahal district, Lekhnath Marg

tel: 4418385



Kathmandu

Radisson Hotel

North of the city in the Lazimpat Embassy Area, the Radisson is modern, well maintained and pleasantly decorated, with excellent facilities, including a 6th-floor pool with great views and a good gym operated by Clark Hatch. Rooms come with nice touches such as coffeemakers and data ports for laptop computers.

Lazimpat

Lazimpat Embassy Area

tel: 4423888

Hotel de l'Annapurna

Just off Durbar Marg, this is one of Kathmandu's longest-established hotels and is starting to show its age. Its central location on Durbar Marg is convenient, and apart from the usual five-star facilities, it has a casino and the largest hotel swimming pool in Kathmandu. If business is lax you should get a plush deluxe room for the price of a standard room. Look for the copy of the old town's Annapurna Temple in the foyer.

Durbar Marg

Jamal

tel: 4221711

FAST FACTS

Population

740000

Language

Nepali

Currency

Nepalese Rupee

NPR

Money and costs

It is worth checking bank exchange rates and commission - both vary. There are also dozens of licensed moneychangers in Thamel. Their hours are longer than those of the banks.

When to go

October-November, the start of the dry season, is probably the best time of year to visit Kathmandu: the weather is balmy, the air is clean, visibility is perfect and the countryside is green.

Electricity

230V

Phone

country dialling code: 977

Local Dragonair contact information

Reservation numbers: 977 (1) 4248944

Check-in counters: Tribhuvan International Airport,

International Departure Hall Check-in Counters

