

Kathmandu



For many people, stepping off a plane into Kathmandu is an exhilarating shock – the sights, sounds and smells can quickly lead to sensory overload. Whether it be buzzing around the crazy polluted traffic in a taxi, trundling down the narrow winding streets of the old town in a rickshaw, marvelling at Durbar Sq or dodging the tiger balm sellers and trekking touts in Thamel, Kathmandu can be an intoxicating, amazing and exhausting place.

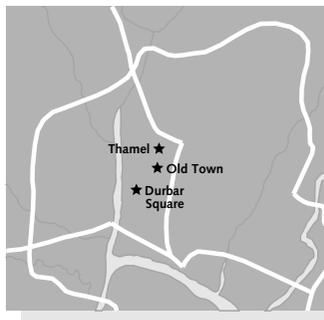
As the largest (and pretty much the only) city in the country, Kathmandu also feels like another developing-world city rushing into a modern era of concrete and traffic pollution. Take a walk in the backstreets, however, and the capital's amazing cultural and artistic heritage reveals itself in hidden temples overflowing with marigolds, courtyards full of drying chillis and rice, and tiny hobbit-sized workshops largely unchanged since the Middle Ages.

Kathmandu has been a travellers mecca since the 1960s but these days you're less likely to see a tie-dyed hippy in search of enlightenment than a well-heeled Gore-Tex-clad tourist in search of a good espresso. With tourist numbers down and political tensions up, the last few years have been uncertain, yet residents have retained a good-humoured self-respect.

Kathmandu is well worth a week of your time, but it's too easy to spend too much time stuck in touristy Thamel. Enjoy the Internet cafés, the Western music and the lemon cheese-cake, but make sure you also get out into the 'real Nepal', before your time runs out.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Stroll around Kathmandu's medieval-like **old town** (p131) and soak up its atmosphere
- Appreciate the amazing architectural monuments of **Durbar Square** (p114), an artistic and architectural tradition that rivals anything you'll find in the great cities of Europe
- Dine in one of the city's superb **Newari restaurants** (p147), with the accompaniment of traditional dances
- **Shop** (p153) till you drop in Thamel for cut-price CDs, books, backpacks, carpets and handicrafts
- Chill out in one of Thamel's rooftop garden **restaurants** (p145), with a good book and a slice of chocolate cake
- Take day trips out to the nearby Unesco World Heritage Sites of **Swayambhunath** (p162), **Pashupatinath** (p166), **Bodhnath** (p169) and **Patan** (p184)



■ AREA CODE: 01

■ POPULATION: 740,000

■ ELEVATION: 1337M

KATHMANDU IN...

Two Days

Start off with the two-hour **walking tour** (p129) south from Thamel to Durbar Sq. Grab lunch overlooking Basantapur Sq or in nearby **Freak St** (p149) and then spend the afternoon taking in the grandeur of **Durbar Square** (p114). Finish the day with a cold beer and dinner in Thamel.

Next day walk out to **Swayambhunath** (p162) in the morning and spend the afternoon **shopping** (p153) in Thamel. For your final meal splurge at one of the blowout Newari restaurants like **Bhojan Griha** or **Nepali Chulo** (see p147).

Four Days

If you have an extra couple of days, take a short taxi ride out to **Patan** (p184) for a full day exploring its **Durbar Square**, **Patan Museum** (the best in the country) and more fascinating backstreets.

After an early lunch on day four, take a taxi to **Pashupatinath** (p166) and then make the short walk out to **Bodhnath** (p169) to soak up some Tibetan culture as the sun sets.

If you are in town on Friday, splurge on the Friday barbeque at **Dwarika's** (p150).

One Week

With a week up your sleeve you can spend a day at **Bhaktapur** (p196). At the beginning of the week sign up for a two-day **rafting** (p89) or **canyoning** (p78) trip up at **Borderlands** or **The Last Resort**. When stress levels build, fit in some quiet time at the delightful **Garden of Dreams** (p126).

Seven days gives you the chance to gorge on Thai (Krua Thai), Indian (Third Eye), Japanese (Koto), South Indian *dosas* (Dudh Sagar), yak steak (Everest Steak House), felafel (Nargila's) and maybe even some Nepali food! Don't get me started on lunch...

HISTORY

The history of Kathmandu is really a history of the Newar people, 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, in what is the southern half of the old town, grew up around the trade route to Tibet and in early pilgrim resthouses such as the Kasthaman-dap, 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 the three independent kingdoms of 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.

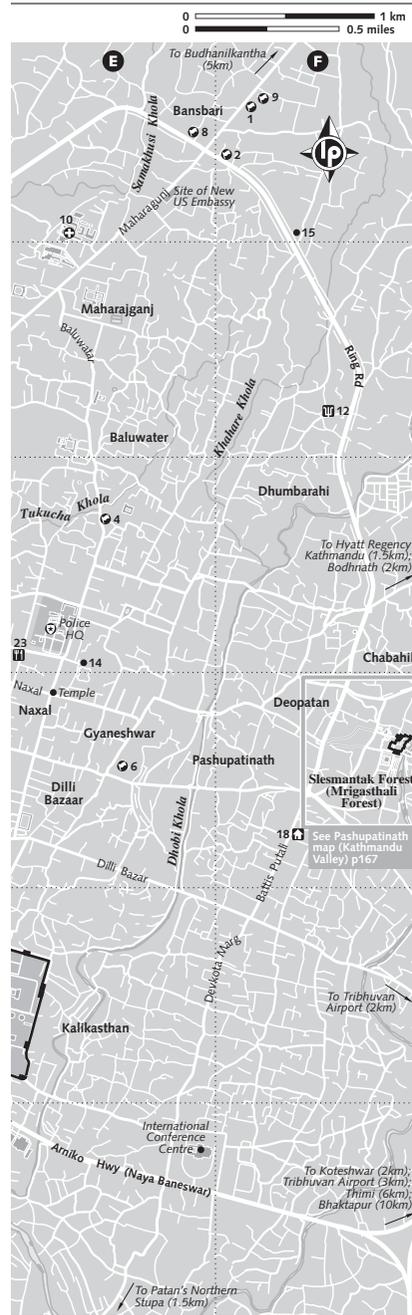
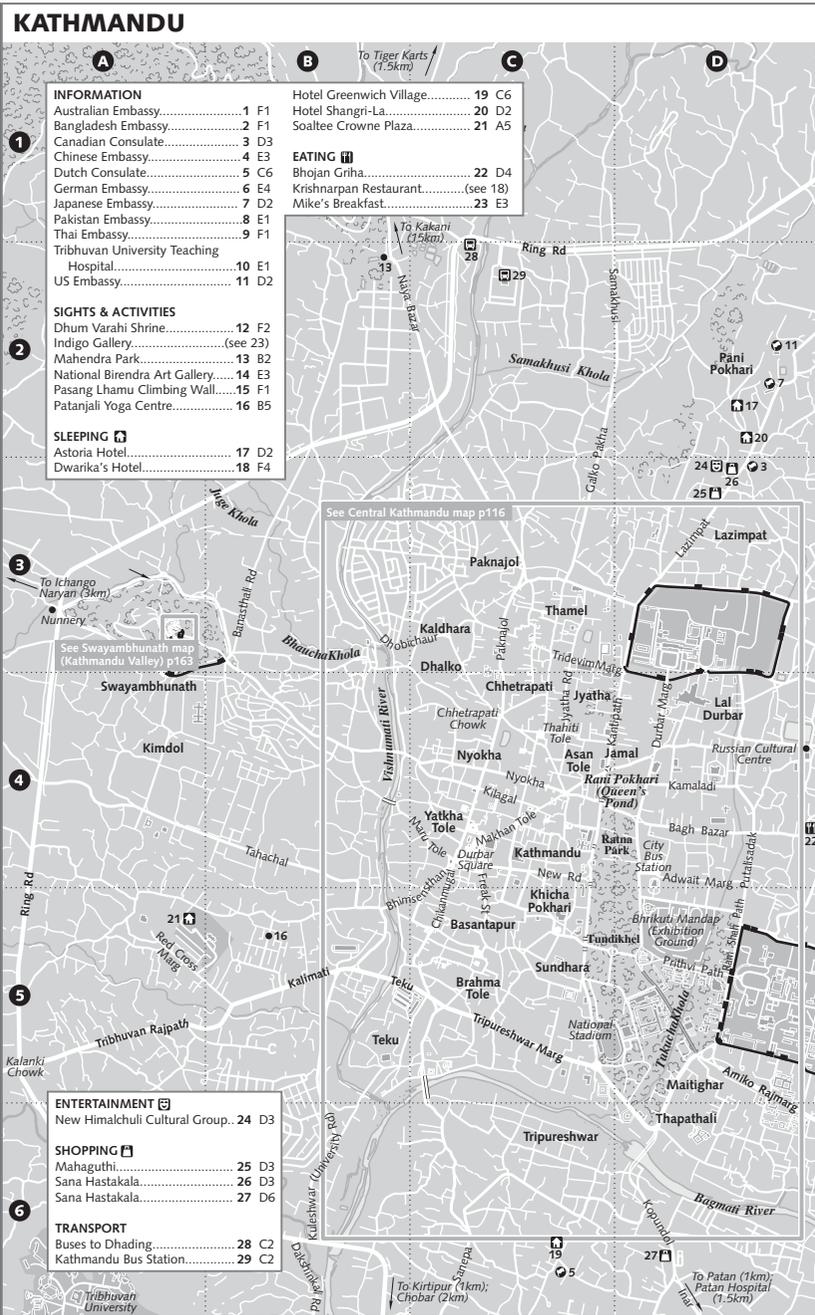
The ensuing Shah dynasty unified Nepal and made the expanded city of Kathmandu its new capital – a position the city has held ever since.

ORIENTATION

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 Tha-MEL) and to the east by the sprawling modern new town. Thamel is bursting with hundreds of hotels, restaurants, Internet cafés, 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 (see p184), 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.

Addresses

In old Kathmandu, streets are only named after their district, or *tole*. The names of these districts, squares, and other landmarks (perhaps a monastery or temple) form the closest thing to an address. For example, the address of everyone living within a 100m radius of Thahiti Tole is Thahiti Tole. 'Thamel' is now used to describe a sprawling area with at least a dozen roads and several hundred hotels and restaurants.

Outside the old town, the government made an arbitrary decision to name the main streets but most people (especially taxi drivers, who are often from outside the capital) have never heard of these newly created names.

Given this anarchic approach it is amazing that any mail gets delivered – it does, but slowly. Most businesses have post office boxes. If you're trying to find a particular house, shop or business, make sure you get detailed directions.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Kathmandu has excellent bookshops with a great selection of Himalayan titles,

including books that are not usually available outside the country. Prices for new books are generally 30% cheaper than their home-market prices, and there are plenty of second-hand books for sale and trade. Most dealers will buy back books for 50% of what you paid.

Barnes & Noble Bookhouse (Map p136; Thamel)

Bookworld (Map p136; Tridevi Marg)

Mandala Bookpoint (Map p136; Kantipath) Excellent selection, with a good range in French and German.

Nepal Book Depot (Map p136; Thamel) Some of the best prices.

New Tibet Book Store (Map p136; ☎ 4415788; Tridevi Marg) The best collection of Tibet-related titles but few discounts.

Pilgrims Book House (Map p136; ☎ 4424942; www.pilgrimsbooks.com) A couple of doors north of the Kathmandu Guest House; the best in town and particularly strong on antiquarian travelogues, though it's pricier than the competition. There are a couple of smaller branches around town.

United Books (Map p136; Thamel) Well-chosen selection and sensible prices, run by Danish Lars.

Walden Book House (Map p136; Chhetrapati)

Cultural Centres

Alliance Française (Map p116; ☎ 4241163; www.alliancefrancaise.org.np; Ganeshman Singh Path, Tripureshwar) French publications and French film screenings once a month, in southern Kathmandu.

British Council (Map p116; ☎ 4410798; www.britishcouncil.org/nepal; Lainchaur; ☎ 8.30am-5.45pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) You'll have to become a member (Rs 800 per year, one photo and ID required) to use this library, but nostalgic Brits can get a cheap cup of tea at the attached Tibetan café and leaf through British newspapers.

Emergency

Ambulance service (☎ 4521048) Provided by Patan Hospital.

Fire Brigade (☎ 101, 4221177)

Police (Map p115; ☎ 100, 4223011; Durbar Sq)

Red Cross Ambulance (☎ 4228094)

Tourist Police Bhrikuti Mandap (☎ 4247041); Thamel (☎ 4700750) There's a tourist booth in Durbar Sq (see map p115).

Immigration Office/Visa Extensions

Central Immigration Office (Map p116; ☎ 4223590, 42236817; www.immi.gov.np; Bhrikuti Mandap; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & public holidays) next to the central Tourism Directorate, home of the Tourist Service Centre, this offers relatively painless visa extensions of 30 days.

Get a form, join the queue, supply one photo and then join a separate queue to pay the US\$30 fee (in rupees). If you apply before 2pm you should get your passport back the same day at 3.30pm. See p375 for more on visa extensions.

Internet Access

Email is widely available in Thamel and elsewhere in Kathmandu. The best cybercafés have scanners and printers (Rs 10 per page) plus power backup. Connection speeds are generally fast and the rates are cheap, from Rs 15 per hour in a backstreet dive to Rs 40 at the more obvious locations such as Cybernet Cafe in central Thamel. For less than an hour's use you'll end up with a higher per-minute rate.

If you have your own laptop you can get free wireless Internet access during the day at the New Orleans Café (see p148).

Laundry

Several laundries across Thamel will machine wash laundry for Rs 50 per kilo. Get it back the next day or pay double for a three-hour service. Amazingly, it all comes back smelling sweeter than you thought possible, even after a three-week trek.

Left Luggage

Any hotel will hold your luggage free of charge.

Libraries

Kaiser Library (Map p136; ☎ 4411318; Ministry of Education & Sports compound, cnr Kantipath & Tridevi Marg; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun-Thu, 10am-3pm Fri) Also known as the Kesar Library, this place is definitely worth a visit.

The main reading room has antique globes, a stuffed tiger and suits of armour that you expect to spring to life at any moment. The library has a remarkable collection of antique travel books, with Nepal titles on the upper floor.

Media

Travellers' Nepal and *Nepal Traveller* are good-quality, free monthly magazines that cover a broad range of topics and have a section of practical information.

Thamel Time Out is the kind of flagrant copyright violation that is par for the course in Thamel but it has a map and some useful information.

You can find these magazines sporadically at most hotels and restaurants.

Medical Services

Bir Hospital (Map p116; ☎ 4221119) Government hospital where terminally ill Nepalis come to die; not recommended.

CIWEC Clinic (Map p116; ☎ 4424111; www.ciwec-clinic.com; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri) Just across from the British Embassy, to the northeast of Thamel and used by many foreign residents. It has operated since 1982 and has developed an international reputation for research into travellers' medical problems. The clinic is staffed mostly by foreigners and a doctor is on call around the clock. A consultation costs around US\$45. Credit cards are accepted and they are used to dealing with insurance claims.

CIWEC Dental Clinic (Map p116; ☎ 4440100; ciwec.dental@subisu.net.np) US dentist on the top floor of CIWEC Clinic (see above). A consultation costs around US\$35.

Nepal International Clinic (Map p116; ☎ 4434642, 4435357; www.nepalinternationalclinic.com; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm) Just south of the new Royal Palace, east of Thamel. It has an excellent reputation and is slightly cheaper than the CIWEC clinic. A consultation costs about US\$40 (US\$50 at weekends). Credit cards accepted.

NORVIC Hospital (Map p116; ☎ 4258554; www.norvic.hospital; Thapathali) Private Nepali hospital with a good reputation for cardiology.

Patan Hospital (Map p184; ☎ 5522266) Probably the best hospital in the Kathmandu Valley, in the Lagankhel district of Patan. Partly staffed by Western missionaries.

Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (Map pp110-11; ☎ 4412808, 4412363; Maharagunji) Reasonably well equipped (and carrying a ventilator), northeast of the centre.

Money

It is worth checking banks' exchange rates and commission – both vary. There are also dozens of licensed moneychangers in Thamel. Their hours are longer than those of the banks (until 8pm, later if things are busy), and rates are pretty consistent, though slightly lower than the banks. See p368 for information on exchange rates, commissions and transfers.

Himalaya Bank (Map p136; ☎ 4250208; Tridevi Marg; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Sun-Fri) The most convenient bank for travellers staying in Thamel is this small branch, opposite the Three Goddesses (Tridevi) Temples. You can change cash (no commission) and travellers cheques (commission of 0.75%, minimum Rs 150), get cash advances on a Visa card and access their ATM here.

Nepal Bank Ltd (Map p116; ☎ 4221185; ☎ 7am-7pm) The main branch on Dharna Path near New Rd is handy if you're staying in Freak St; has long opening hours.

Sita World Travel (Map p136; ☎ 4248556; wu@sitanepal.com; www.sitanepal.com; ☎ 9am-6pm

Sun-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat; Tridevi Marg) One of hundreds of local agents for Western Union money transfers and the closest to Thamel.

Standard Chartered Bank (Map p136; ☎ 4228474; Kantipath; ☎ 9.45am-7pm Sun-Thu, 9.45am-4.30pm Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat & holidays) Has an ATM for credit-card withdrawals. It has a 1.5% charge (minimum Rs 200) for changing travellers cheques and Rs 200 per transaction for cash. There's no charge for a rupee cash advance on a credit card but you pay 2% to get the cash in US dollars. There are two more Standard Chartered ATMs in Thamel – opposite the Third Eye Restaurant and in the compound of the Kathmandu Guest House – and others on New Rd, Durbar Marg and a couple of other locations around Kathmandu.

Yeti Travels (Map p116; ☎ 4221234; yeti@vishnu.ccl.com.np; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) American Express (AmEx) agent, which has its office just off the southern end of Durbar Marg. It provides AmEx cash advances, purchase and encashment of travellers cheques, and client mail services.

Post

Most bookshops in Thamel, including Pilgrims Book House (opposite), sell stamps and deliver postcards to the post office, which is much easier than making a special trip to the post office yourself. Pilgrims charges a 10% commission for this service.

Everest Postal Care (Map p136; ☎ 4417913; Tridevi Marg; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Sun-Fri) Convenient private post office near Thamel, which posts letters and parcels at the same rates as the post office.

General post office (Map p116; Sundhara; ☎ 7am-6pm Sun-Thu, 7am-3pm Fri) Close to the Bhimsen Tower. Stalls in the courtyard sell air mail and padded envelopes. Poste restante is here. Get stamps at counter 10. You can post packages up to 2kg at counter 18; beyond that you need to go to the foreign post office.

Foreign post office (Map p116; Sundhara; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun-Fri) Parcels can be sent from here, in a separate building just north of the main post office. Parcels have to be examined and sealed by a customs officer and then packed in an approved manner. Start the process before 2pm.

Sending parcels from the foreign post office is something of a procedure, so if you're short of time you're best off using a cargo agency like **Diki Continental Exports** (Map p136; ☎ 4256919; JP School Rd, Thamel; www.dikiexports.com).

Courier agencies include:
DHL Kamaladi (Map p116; ☎ 4496248); Thamel (Map p136; ☎ 2012221; ☎ 11am-7pm Sun-Fri)
FedEx (Map p136; ☎ 4269248; www.fedex.com.np; Kantipath; ☎ 9am-6pm Sun-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

Telephone

You can make international telephone calls and send faxes from any of the dozens of 'communication centres' in Thamel and elsewhere throughout the city.

Many of the communication centres offer Internet phone calls. The cheapest places charge around Rs 20 per minute, with some places as low as Rs 10 per minute to the US. See p373 for more information.

Tourist Information

There are a number of good notice boards in Thamel that are worth checking for information on apartments, travel and trekking partners, courses and cultural events. The Kathmandu Guest House has a good notice board, as do the Pumpnickel Bakery and Fire & Ice Restaurant.

For Kathmandu-based offices that offer trekking-related information see p331.

Kathmandu Environmental Education Project

(KEEP; Map p136; ☎ 4216775; www.keeppnepal.org; ☞ 10am-5pm Sun-Fri) A good place for trekking reports, occasional lectures, a small collection of reference books, a café and a mineral-water refill service (Rs 10 per litre). They also sell biodegradable travel products such as anti-leech oil (Rs 80) and fair trade beeswax lip balm, as well as water purification tablets (Rs 500). Leave your shoes outside.

Tourist office (☎ 4470537) In the international terminal at the airport; usually dishes out a handy free map to arriving passengers who ask for it.

Tourist Service Centre (Map p116; ☎ 4256909, 24hr tourism hotline ☎ 4225709; Bhrikuti Mandap; ☞ 9am-1pm, 2-5pm Sun-Fri) On the eastern side of the Tundikhel parade ground, the center has a few brochures and maps but the location of the office is inconvenient.

Travel Agencies

Kathmandu has a great number of travel agencies, particularly along Durbar Marg, Kantipath and in Thamel. See p327 for details of local trekking agencies.

Wayfarers (Map p136; ☎ 4266010; www.wayfarers.com.np; Thamel; ☞ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) For straight-talking travel and ticketing (particularly international air tickets) this is the place. The staff also book domestic Indian air and train tickets and offer Kathmandu Valley walking trips (see p162).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Kathmandu is frequently the focus of political demonstrations, strikes and even occasional curfews. These generally just affect transport but they can turn violent so are

best avoided. *Bandhs* (strikes) paralyse the city every now and then, closing shops and shutting down transport. See p360.

The main annoyances in Thamel are the crazy motorcyclists and the limpet-like hash/tiger balm/chess set sellers.

For details of Thamel's gem scams see p360.

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 p115; admission foreigner/SAARC/Nepali Rs 200/25/free, 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 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.

It's easy to spend hours wandering around the square and watching the world go by from the terraced platforms of the towering Maju Deval; it's a wonderful way to get a feel for the city. Although most of the square dates from the 17th and 18th centuries (and many of the original buildings are much older), a great deal of damage was caused by the great earthquake of 1934 and many were rebuilt, not always in their original form. The entire square was designated a Unesco World Heritage Monument in 1979.

The Durbar Sq area is actually made up of three loosely linked squares. To the south is the open Basantapur Sq area, off which runs Freak St. The main Durbar Sq area, with its popular watch-the-world-go-by temples, is to the west. Running northeast is a second part of Durbar Sq, which contains the entrance to the Hanuman Dhoka and an assortment of temples. From this open area Makhana Tole, at one time the main road in Kathmandu and still the most interesting street to walk down, continues northeast.

A good place to start an exploration of the square is with what may well be the oldest building in the valley, the unprepossessing Kasthamandap.

INFORMATION

The entry ticket to Durbar Sq is valid only for the date stamped. If you want a longer duration you can go to the **site office** (Map p115; ☎ 4268969; ☞ 7am-7pm), on the south side of Basantapur Sq, to get a free visitor pass, which allows you access for as long as your visa is valid. You will need your passport and one photo and the process takes about two minutes. You generally need to show your ticket even if you are just transiting the square to New Rd or Freak St.

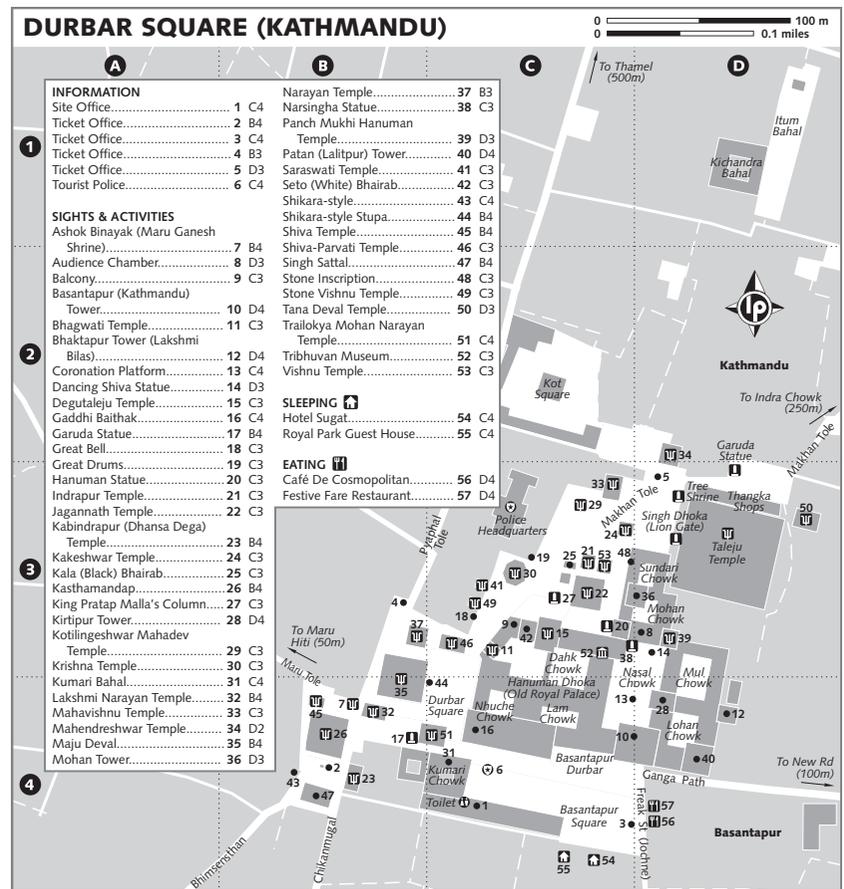
There is a toilet near the site office.

KASTHAMANDAP

Kathmandu owes its name to the **Kasthamandap** (Pavilion of Wood; Map p115). Although

its history is uncertain, local tradition says the three-roofed building was constructed around the 12th century from the wood of a single sal tree. It first served as a community centre where visitors gathered before major ceremonies (a *mandap* is a 16-pillared pilgrim shelter), but later it was converted to a temple dedicated to Goraknath, a 13th-century ascetic who was subsequently linked to the royal family. The last disciples were kicked out in the 1960s.

A central wooden enclosure houses the image of the god, which is noteworthy since Goraknath is mostly represented only by his footprints. In the corners of the building are four images of Ganesh. Hindu epics are illustrated around the corner platforms.



MARU TOLE

This *tole* leads you away from Durbar Sq down to the Vishnumati River, where a foot-bridge continues the pathway to Swayambhunath (see p165). This was a busy street in the hippy era, but the famous pastry shops that gave it the nickname 'Pie Alley' have long gone. Just 30m from Durbar Sq down Maru Tole is Maru Hiti, one of the finest sunken water conduits in the city.

MAJU DEVAL

A pleasant half hour can easily be spent sitting on the steps of this Shiva temple. In fact the nine-stage ochre platform of the **Maju Deval** (Map p115) is probably the most popular meeting place in the city. From here you can watch the constant activity of fruit and vegetable hawkers, the comings and goings of taxis and rickshaws, and the flute and other souvenir sellers importuning tourists. The large, triple-roofed temple has erotic carvings on its roof struts and offers great views over the square and across the roofs of the city. Marigold sellers set up shop on the ground level.

The temple dates from 1690 and was built by the mother of Bhaktapur's King Bhupatindra Malla. The temple has a well-known Shiva lingam (phallic symbol) inside. At the bottom of the **temple** (Map p115) stairway

on the east side is a small temple to Kam Dev, a 'companion' of Shiva. It was built in the Indian *shikhara* style, with a tall corn-coblike spire.

TRAILOKYA MOHAN NARAYAN TEMPLE

The other temple standing in the open area of the square is the smaller five-roofed **Trailokya Mohan Narayan** (1680; Map p115). It is easily identified as a temple to Narayan/Vishnu by the fine Garuda kneeling before it. This huge Garuda figure was a later addition, erected by King Prithvibendra Malla's widow soon after his death. Look for the Vaishnavite images on the carved roof struts and the window screens with their decoratively carved medallions. Dances depicting the 10 incarnations of Vishnu are performed on the platform to the east of the temple during the Indra Jatra festival.

SHIVA-PARVATI TEMPLE

From the steps of the Maju Deval you can look across to the **Shiva-Parvati Temple** (Map p115), where the much-photographed images of Shiva and his consort look out from the upstairs window on the comings and goings below them. The temple was built in the late 1700s by Bahadur Shah, the son of Prithvi Narayan Shah. Although the temple is not very old by Kathmandu standards, it

EROTIC ART

The most interesting woodcarving on Nepali temples is on the roof struts, or *tunala*, and on many temples these carvings include erotic scenes. These scenes are rarely the central carving on the strut, they're usually the smaller carving at the bottom of the strut, like a footnote to the larger image. Nor are the carvings sensuous and finely sculptured like those at Khajuraho and Konark in India. In Nepal the figures are often smaller and cruder, even cartoonlike.

The themes have a Tantric element, a clear connection to the intermingling of Tibetan Buddhist and Hindu beliefs in Nepal, but their real purpose is unclear. Are they simply a celebration of an important part of the life cycle? Are they a more explicit reference to Shiva's and Parvati's creative roles than the enigmatic lingams and yonis scattered around so many temples? Or are they supposed to play some sort of protective role for the temple? It's popularly rumoured that the goddess of lightning is a shy virgin who wouldn't dream of striking a temple with such goings-on, although that's probably more a tourist-guide tale than anything else.

Whatever the reason for their existence, these Tantric elements can be found on temples throughout the valley. Some temples reveal just the odd sly image while others are covered in the stuff. The activities range from straightforward exhibitionism to scenes of couples engaged in impressively athletic acts of intercourse. More exotic carvings include medieval *ménages à trois*, scenes of oral or anal intercourse or couplings with demons or animals.

The temples with the more interesting erotic carvings include Kathmandu's Jagannath Temple, Basantapur Tower and Ram Chandra Temple; Patan's Jagannarayan Temple; and Bhaktapur's Erotic Elephants and Pashupatinath temples.

KUMARI DEVI

Not only does Nepal have countless gods, goddesses, deities, Bodhisattvas, Buddhas, avatars (incarnations of deities) and manifestations – which are worshipped and revered as statues, images, paintings and symbols – but it also has a real living goddess. The Kumari Devi is a young girl who lives in the building known as the Kumari Bahal, right beside Kathmandu's Durbar Square.

The practice of having a living goddess probably came about during the reign of Jaya Prakash Malla, the last of the Malla kings of Kathmandu, whose reign abruptly ended with the conquest of the valley by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1768. As usual in Nepal, where there is never one simple answer to any question, there are a number of legends about the Kumari.

One such legend relates that a paedophile Malla king had intercourse with a prepubescent girl. She died as a result of this and in penance he started the practice of venerating a young girl as a living goddess. Another tells of a Malla king who regularly played dice with the goddess Taleju, the protective deity of the valley. When he made an unseemly advance she threatened to withdraw her protection, but relented and promised to return in the form of a young girl. Yet another tells of a young girl who was possessed by the goddess Durga and banished from the kingdom. When the furious queen heard of this she ordered her husband to bring the young girl back and keep her as a real goddess.

Whatever the background, in reality there are a number of living goddesses around the Kathmandu Valley, although the Kumari Devi, or Royal Kumari, of Kathmandu is the most important. The Kumari is selected from a particular caste of Newari gold- and silversmiths. Customarily, she is somewhere between four years old and puberty and must meet 32 strict physical requirements ranging from the colour of her eyes and shape of her teeth to the sound of her voice. Her horoscope must also be appropriate, of course.

Once suitable candidates have been found they are gathered together in a darkened room where terrifying noises are made, while men dance by in horrific masks and 108 gruesome buffalo heads are on display. Naturally these goings-on are unlikely to frighten a real goddess, particularly one who is an incarnation of Durga, so the young girl who remains calm and collected throughout this ordeal is clearly the new Kumari. In a process similar to the selection of the Dalai Lama, the Kumari then chooses items of clothing and decoration worn by her predecessor as a final test.

Once chosen as the Kumari Devi, the young girl moves into the Kumari Bahal with her family and makes only a half-dozen ceremonial forays into the outside world each year. The most spectacular of these occasions is the September Indra Jatra festival, when she travels through the city on a huge temple chariot over a three-day period. During this festival the Kumari customarily blesses the king of Nepal.

The Kumari's reign ends with her first period, or any serious accidental loss of blood. Once this first sign of puberty is reached she reverts to the status of a normal mortal, and the search must start for a new Kumari. During her time as a goddess the Kumari is supported by the temple income and on retirement she is paid a handsome dowry. It is said that marrying an ex-Kumari is unlucky, but it's believed more likely that taking on a spoilt ex-goddess is likely to be too much hard work!

For an account of the life of a Kumari, check out *From Goddess to Mortal*, the story of Rashmilla Shakya, Kathmandu's Kumari between 1984 and 1991. It's available in Kathmandu bookstores.

stands on a two-stage platform, which may have been an open dancing stage hundreds of years earlier. A **Narayan (Vishnu) temple** (Map p115) stands to the west side.

KUMARI BAHAL

At the junction of Durbar and Basantapur Sqs is a red brick, three-storey building with some incredibly intricate carved windows. This is the **Kumari Bahal** (House of the Living

Goddess; Map p115), home to the Kumari, the girl who is selected to be the town's living goddess until she reaches puberty and reverts to being a normal mortal! (See above). The building, in the style of the Buddhist *viharas* (monastic abodes) of the valley, was built in 1757 by Jaya Prakash Malla.

Inside the building is the three-storey courtyard, or Kumari Chowk. It is enclosed by magnificently carved wooden balconies

and windows, making it quite possibly the most beautiful courtyard in Nepal. Photographing the goddess is forbidden, but you are quite free to photograph the courtyard when she is not present. The Kumari went on strike in 2005, refusing to appear at her window for tourists, after authorities denied her guardians' request for a 10% cut of the square's entry fees!

The courtyard contains a miniature stupa carrying the symbols of Saraswati, the goddess of learning. Non-Hindus are not allowed to go beyond the courtyard.

The big gate to the right of the Kumari Bahal conceals the huge chariot that transports the Kumari around the city during the annual Indra Jatra festival (see p134). Look for the huge wooden runners in front of the Kumari Bahal that are used to transport the chariot. The wood is considered sacred. You can see part of the chariot from the top of the nearby Trailokya Mohan Narayan Temple steps.

GADDHI BAI THAK

The eastern side of Durbar Sq is closed off by this white neoclassical **building** (Map p115). With its imported European style, it was built as part of the palace in 1908 during the Rana period and makes a strange contrast to the traditional Nepali architecture that dominates the square. It is said to have been modelled on London's National Gallery.

BHAGWATI TEMPLE

Next to the Gaddhi Baithak, this triple-storey, triple-roofed **temple** (Map p115) is easily missed since it surmounts the building below it, which currently has thangka shops along its front. The best view of the temple and its golden roofs is probably from the Maju Deval, across the square. The temple was built by Jagat Jaya Malla and originally had an image of Narayan. This image was stolen in 1766, so when Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered the valley two years later he simply substituted it with an image of the goddess Bhagwati. In April each year the image of the goddess is conveyed to the village of Nuwakot, 65km to the north, then returned a few days later.

GREAT BELL

On your left as you leave the main square along Makhani Tole is the **Great Bell** (Map p115), el-

evated atop a white building erected by Rana Bahadur Shah (son of Prithvi Narayan Shah) in 1797. The bell's ring drives off evil spirits, but it is only rung during puja (worship) at the **Degutaleju Temple** (Map p115).

Across from the great bell is a very ornate corner **balcony** (Map p115), decorated in gorgeous copper and ivory, from where members of the royal court could view the festival action taking place in Durbar Sq.

KRISHNA TEMPLE

The history of the octagonal **Krishna Temple** (Map p115) is well documented. It was built in 1648 by Pratap Malla, perhaps as a response to Siddhinarasingh's magnificent Krishna Temple in Patan. Inside there are images of Krishna and two goddesses, which, according to a Sanskrit inscription, are modelled on the king and his two wives. The temple also has a Newari inscription, but this neglects to mention the king's little act of vanity. The temple is a favourite of sadhus (itinerant holy men) who pose (and expect to be paid) for photos here.

GREAT DRUMS & KOT SQUARE

Just beyond the temple are the **Great Drums** (Map p115), to which a goat and a buffalo must be sacrificed twice a year. In front of these is the police headquarters building (currently sandbagged against possible Maoist attacks). Beyond here is the closed-off Kot Sq, where Jung Bahadur Rana perpetrated the famous 1846 massacre that led to a hundred years of Rana rule (see p33). *Kot* means 'armoury' or 'fort'. During the Dasain festival each year, blood again flows in Kot Sq as hundreds of buffaloes and goats are sacrificed. Young soldiers are supposed to lop off each head with a single blow.

KING PRATAP MALLA'S COLUMN

Across from the Krishna Temple is a host of smaller temples and other structures, all standing on a slightly raised platform in front of the Hanuman Dhoka and the towering Taleju Temple behind. The square stone pillar, known as the Pratap Dhvaja, is topped by a **statue** (Map p115) of the famous King Pratap Malla (1641–74), seated with folded hands and surrounded by his two wives and his five (including an infant) sons. He looks towards his private prayer room on the 3rd floor of the Degutaleju

Temple. The column was erected in 1670 by Pratap Malla and preceded the similar columns in Patan and Bhaktapur.

This area and its monuments are usually covered in hundreds if not thousands of pigeons, and you can buy packets of grain to feed them.

SETO (WHITE) BHAI RAB

Seto (White) Bhairab's horrible face is hidden away behind a grille opposite King Pratap Malla's column. The huge **mask** (Map p115) dates from 1794, during the reign of Rana Bahadur Shah, the third Shah dynasty king. Each September during the Indra Jatra festival the gates are opened to reveal the mask for a few days. At that time the face is covered in flowers and rice and at the start of the festivities beer is poured through the horrific mouth, as crowds of men fight to get a drink of the blessed brew (see p134). At other times of the year you can peek through the lattice to see the mask, which is used as the symbol of Royal Nepal Airlines.

JAGANNATH TEMPLE

This **temple** (Map p115), noted for the erotic carvings on its roof struts, is the oldest structure in this part of the square. Pratap Malla claimed to have constructed the temple during his reign, but it may actually date back to 1563, during the rule of Mahendra Malla. The temple has a three-tiered platform and two storeys. There are three doors on each side of the temple, but only the centre door opens.

DEGUTALEJU TEMPLE

This triple-roofed **temple** (Map p115) is actually part of the Hanuman Dhoka, surmounting the buildings below it, but is most easily seen from outside the palace walls. Degutaleju is another manifestation of the Malla's personal goddess Taleju. This temple was built by Shiva Singh Malla.

KALA (BLACK) BHAI RAB

Behind the Jagannath Temple is the figure of **Kala (Black) Bhairab** (Map p115). Bhairab is Shiva in his most fearsome aspect, and this huge stone image of the terrifying Kala Bhairab has six arms, wears a garland of skulls and tramples a corpse, which is symbolic of human ignorance. The figure is said to have been brought here by Pratap Malla,

having been found in a field to the north of the city. The image was originally cut from a single stone, but the upper left-hand corner has since been repaired. It is said that telling a lie while standing before Kala Bhairab will bring instant death and it was once used as a form of trial by ordeal.

INDRAPUR TEMPLE

Immediately to the east of the horrific Bhairab stands the mysterious **Indrapur Temple** (Map p115). This puzzling temple may be of great antiquity but has been renovated recently and little is known of its history. Even the god to which it is dedicated is controversial – the lingam inside indicates that it is a Shiva temple but the Garuda image half-buried on the southern side indicates that it is dedicated to Vishnu. To compound the puzzle, however, the temple's name clearly indicates it is dedicated to Indra! The temple's unadorned design and plain roof struts together with the lack of an identifying *torana* (pediment above the temple doors) offer no further clues.

KAKESHWAR TEMPLE

This **temple** (Map p115) was originally built in 1681 but, like so many other structures, was rebuilt after it was badly damaged in the 1934 earthquake. It may have been considerably altered at that time as the temple is a strange combination of styles. It starts with a Newari style floor, above which is an Indian *shikhara*-style upper storey, topped by a spire shaped like a *kalasa* (water vase), indicative of a female deity.

STONE INSCRIPTION

On the outside of the palace wall, opposite the **Vishnu Temple** (Map p115), is a long, low **stone inscription** (Map p115) to the goddess Kalika written in 15 languages, including one word of French. King Pratap Malla, renowned for his linguistic abilities, set up this inscription in 1664 and a Nepali legend tell that milk will flow from the spout in the middle if somebody is able to decipher all 15 languages!

KOTILINGESHWAR MAHADEV TEMPLE

This early Malla **temple** (Map p115) dates from the reign of Mahendra Malla in the 16th century. The three-stage plinth is topped by a temple in the *gumbhaj* style,

which basically means a square structure topped by a bell-shaped dome. The bull facing the temple on the west side indicates that it is a Shiva temple. Next door is the **Mahavishnu Temple** (Map p115), which was damaged in the 1934 earthquake.

MAHENDRESHWAR TEMPLE

At the extreme northern end of the square, this **temple** (Map p115) dates from 1561, during the reign of Mahendra Malla. The temple was restored in 1963 and is dedicated to Shiva. A small image of Shiva's bull Nandi fronts the temple and at the northeastern corner there is an image of Kam Dev. The temple has a wide, two-level plinth and a spire topped by a golden umbrella.

TALEJU TEMPLE

The square's most magnificent **temple** (Map p115) stands at its northeastern extremity but is not open to the public. Even for Hindu entry is restricted; they can only visit it briefly during the annual Dasain festival.

The Taleju Temple was built in 1564 by Mahendra Malla. Taleju Bhawani was originally a goddess from the south of India, but she became the titular deity, or royal goddess, of the Malla kings in the 14th century. Taleju temples were erected in her honour in Patan and Bhaktapur, as well as in Kathmandu.

The temple stands on a 12-stage plinth and reaches more than 35m high, dominating the Durbar Square area. The eighth stage of the plinth forms a wall around the temple, in front of which are 12 miniature temples. Four more miniature temples stand inside the wall, which has four beautifully carved wide gates. If entry to the temple were permitted it could be reached from within the Hanuman Dhoka or from the Singh Dhoka (Lion Gate) facing Durbar Sq.

TANA DEVAL TEMPLE & MAKHAN TOLE

Directly across from the Taleju Temple is a 10th-century kneeling **Garuda statue** (Map p115), facing a small Vishnu Temple.

To your right, in a walled courtyard just past the long row of stalls, is the **Tana Deval Temple**, with three carved doorways and multiple struts, the latter of which show the multi-armed Ashta Matrikas (Mother Goddesses). It's possible to enter the temple. Nearby shops sell brightly-coloured Tibetan thangkas.

Crowded and fascinating **Makhan Tole** (*makhan* is the Nepali word for butter, *tole* means street) starts from here and runs towards the busy marketplace of Indra Chowk (see p125). Makhan Tole was at one time the main street in Kathmandu and the start of the main caravan route to Tibet.

From here you can either head south to visit the Hanuman Dhoka or continue north-east up Makhan Tole back towards Thamel.

Hanuman Dhoka

The inner palace complex of the **Hanuman Dhoka** (Map p115; admission foreigner/SAARC Rs 250/25; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun Feb-Oct, 9.30am-3pm Tue-Sun Nov-Jan) 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). The complex originally housed 35 courtyards and spread as far as New Rd but the 1934 earthquake reduced the palace to today's 10 chowks (courtyards). Cameras are allowed only in the courtyards, not inside the buildings of the complex.

Hanuman's very brave assistance to the noble Rama during the exciting events of the Ramayana has led to the monkey god's appearance guarding many important entrances. Here, cloaked in red and sheltered by an umbrella, a **Hanuman statue** (Map p115) marks the *dhoka* (entrance) to the Hanuman Dhoka and has even given the palace its name. The statue dates from 1672 and the god's face has long disappeared under a coating of orange paste applied by generations of faithful visitors.

Standards bearing the double-triangle flag of Nepal flank the statue, while on each side of the palace gate are stone lions, one ridden by Shiva, the other by his wife Parvati. Above the gate a brightly painted niche is illustrated with a central figure of a ferocious Tantric version of Krishna. On the left side is the gentler Hindu Krishna in his traditional blue colour accompanied by two of his comely *gopi* (milkmaids). On the other side are King Pratap Malla and his queen.

NASAL CHOWK

From the entrance gate of the Hanuman Dhoka you immediately enter its most fa-

mous chowk. Although the courtyard was constructed in the Malla period, many of the buildings around the square are later Rana constructions. During that time Nasal Chowk was used for coronations, a practice that continues to this day on the **coronation platform** (Map p115) in the centre of the courtyard (the current King Gyanendra was crowned here in 2001). The nine-storey **Basantapur (Kathmandu) Tower** (Map p115) looms over the southern end of the courtyard.

The rectangular courtyard is aligned north-south and the entrance is at the northwestern corner. Just by the entrance there is a surprisingly small but beautifully carved doorway, which once led to the Malla kings' private quarters.

Beyond the door is the large **Narsingha Statue** (Map p115), Vishnu in his man-lion incarnation, in the act of disembowelling a demon. The stone image was erected by Pratap Malla in 1673 and the inscription on the pedestal explains that he placed it here for fear that he had offended Vishnu by dancing in a Narsingha costume. The Kabindrapur Temple in Durbar Sq was built for the same reason.

Next is the **Audience Chamber** (Map p115) of the Malla kings. The open veranda houses the Malla throne and contains portraits of the Shah kings. Images of the present king and queen dominate the eastern wall.

PANCH MUKHI HANUMAN TEMPLE

At the northeastern corner of the Nasal Chowk stands the **Panch Mukhi Hanuman** (Map p115) with its five circular roofs. Each of the valley towns has a five-storey temple, although it is the great Nyatapola Temple of Bhaktapur that is by far the best known. Hanuman is worshipped in the temple in Kathmandu, but only the priests of the temple may enter it.

DANCING SHIVA STATUE

In Nepali *nasal* means 'dancing one', and Nasal Chowk takes its name from this Shiva **statue** (Map p115) hidden in the whitewashed chamber on the eastern side of the square.

TRIBHUVAN MUSEUM

The part of the palace west of Nasal Chowk, overlooking the main Durbar Sq area, was constructed by the Ranas in the middle to late part of the 19th century. Ironically, it

is now home to a **museum** (Map p115) that celebrates King Tribhuvan (ruled 1911-55) and his successful revolt against their regime, along with memorials to Kings Mahendra (1955-72) and Birendra (1972-2001).

Exhibits with names such as 'the Royal Babyhood' include some fascinating recreations of the foppish king's bedroom and study, with genuine personal effects that give quite an eerie insight into his life. Some of the exhibits, like the king's favourite stuffed bird (looking a bit worse for wear these days!), his boxing gloves, the walking stick with a spring-loaded sword hidden inside and his dusty, drained aquarium, add some surreal moments. There are several magnificent thrones, plenty of hunting photos and the obligatory coin collection.

Halfway through the museum you descend before ascending the steep stairways of the nine-storey **Basantapur Tower**, which was extensively restored prior to King Birendra's coronation. There are superb views over the palace and the city from the top. The struts along the facade of the Basantapur Tower, particularly those facing out to Basantapur Sq, are decorated with erotic carvings.

It's hard not to rush through the second half of the museum, full of dull press clippings about the rather Peter Sellers-looking King Mahendra, before glossing over the massacre of King Birendra by his son in 2001 (see the boxed text, p38). The museum exits into Lohan Chowk.

LOHAN CHOWK

King Prithvi Narayan Shah was involved in the construction of the four red-coloured towers around the Lohan Chowk. The towers represent the four ancient cities of the valley, the towers include the Kathmandu or Basantapur Tower; the Kirtipur Tower; the Bhaktapur Tower or Lakshmi Bilas; and the Patan or Lalitpur Tower.

OTHER CHOWKS

The palace's other courtyards are currently closed to visitors, but you can get glimpses of them from the Tribhuvan Museum and they might reopen at a future date.

North of Lohan Chowk, **Mul Chowk** was completely dedicated to religious functions within the palace and is configured like a *vihara*, with a two-storey building surrounding the courtyard. Mul Chowk is dedicated

to Taleju Bhawani, the royal goddess of the Mallas, and sacrifices are made to her in the centre of the courtyard during the Dasain festival. A smaller Taleju temple stands in the southern wing of the square and the image of the goddess is moved here from the main temple during the Dasain festival.

North of Nasal Chowk is **Mohan Chowk**, the residential courtyard of the Malla kings. It dates from 1649 and at one time a Malla king had to be born here to be eligible to wear the crown. (The last Malla king, Jaya Prakash Malla, had great difficulties during his reign, even though he was the legitimate heir, because he was born elsewhere.) The golden waterspout, known as Sundhara, in the centre of the courtyard delivers water from Budhanilkantha in the north of the valley. The Malla kings would ritually bathe here each morning.

North of Durbar Square

Hidden in the bustling and fascinating backstreets north of Durbar Sq is a dense sprinkling of colourful temples, courtyards and shrines. The best way to get a feel for this district is on the walking tour 'From Thamel to Durbar Square' (see p129).

KATHESIMBHU STUPA

The most popular Tibetan pilgrimage site in the old town is this lovely **stupa** (Map p116), a small copy dating from around 1650 of the great Swayambhunath complex. Just as at Swayambhunath, there is a two-storey pagoda to Harti, the goddess of smallpox, right behind the main stupa. The entrance is flanked by metal lions atop red ochre concrete pillars, just a couple of minutes' walk south of Thamel.

Various statues and a few smaller *chaityas* (small stupas) stand around the temple, including a fine standing Avalokiteshvara statue enclosed in a glass case and protective metal cage in the northeast corner. Avalokiteshvara carries a lotus flower in his left hand, and the Dhyani Buddha Amitabha is seen in the centre of his crown.

ASAN TOLE

From dawn until late the junction of **Asan Tole** (Map p116) is jammed with buyers, sellers and passers-by, making it the busiest square in the city. Every day, produce is carried to this popular marketplace from all over the

valley so it is fitting that the three-storey **Annapurna Temple** (Map p116) is dedicated to the goddess of abundance, Annapurna is represented by a *purana* bowl full of grain. At most times, but especially Sundays, you'll see locals walk around the shrine, touch a coin to their heads, throw it into the temple and ring the bell above them.

Nearby the two-storey **Ganesh shrine** (Map p116) is coated in bathroom tiles. South is the Yita Chapal (Southern Pavilion) which was once used for festival dances (the dance platform out front is still visible). Cat Stevens wrote his hippie-era song *Kathmandu* in a smoky teahouse in Asan Tole.

On the western side of the square are spice shops. Near the centre of the square is a small **Narayan shrine** (Narayan is a form of Vishnu).

SETO MACHHENDRANATH TEMPLE (JAN BAHAL)

Southwest of Asan Tole, this **temple** (Map p116) attracts both Buddhists and Hindus – Buddhists consider Seto (White) Machhendranath to be a form of Avalokiteshvara, while to Hindus he is a rain-bringing incarnation of Shiva. The temple's age is not known but it was restored during the 17th century. The arched entrance to the temple is marked by a small Buddha figure on a high stone pillar in front of two metal lions.

In the courtyard there are lots of small shrines, *chaityas* and statues, including a mysteriously European-looking female figure surrounded by candles who faces the temple. It may well have been an import from Europe that has simply been accepted into the pantheon of gods. Facing the other way, just in front of the temple, are two graceful bronze figures of the Taras seated atop tall pillars. Buy some grain to feed the pigeons and boost your karma.

Inside the temple you can see the white-faced image of the god covered in flowers. The image is taken out during the Seto Machhendranath festival in March/April each year and paraded around the city in a chariot, see opposite. You can follow the interior path that circles the central building.

In the courtyard you may see men standing around holding what looks like a bizarre string instrument. This tool is used to separate and fluff up the downlike cotton padding that is sold in bulk nearby.

SETO MACHHENDRANATH FESTIVAL

Kathmandu's Seto (White) Machhendranath festival kicks off a month prior to the much larger and more important Rato (Red) Machhendranath festival in Patan (see p191). The festival starts with removing the image of Seto Machhendranath from the temple at Kel Tole and placing it on a towering and creaky wooden temple chariot known as a *rath*. For the next four evenings, the chariot proceeds slowly from one historic location to another, eventually arriving at Lagan in the south of Kathmandu's old town. There the image is taken down from the chariot and carried back to its starting point in a palanquin while the chariot is disassembled and put away until next year.

The string is plucked by a wooden double-headed implement that looks like a cross between a dumbbell and a rolling pin.

As you leave the temple, to the left you'll see the small, triple-roofed **Lunchun Lunbun Ajima**, a Tantric temple that's red-tiled around the lower level and has some erotic carvings at the base of the struts at the back.

INDRA CHOWK

The busy street of Makhana Tole spills into Indra Chowk, the courtyard named after the ancient Vedic deity, Indra. On the right of the square is the **Akash Bhairab Temple** (Map p116), or Bhairab of the Sky Temple. From the balcony four metal lions rear out over the street. The temple's entrance is at the right-hand side of the building, guarded by two more metal lions, but non-Hindus cannot enter. The silver image inside is visible through the open windows from out in the street, and during important festivals, particularly Indra Jatra (September), the image is displayed in the square. A large lingam (phallic symbol) is also erected in the centre of the square at that time.

In a small niche just to the left of the Akash Bhairab Temple is a very small but much-visited brass Ganesh shrine.

Indra Chowk is traditionally a centre for the sale of blankets and cloth, and there are often many merchants on the platforms of the **Mahadev Temple**. The next door **Shiva Temple** is a smaller and simplified version of Patan's Krishna Temple.

ITUM BAHAL

The long, rectangular courtyard of the **Itum Bahal** (Map p115) is the largest Buddhist *bahal* (courtyard) in the old town and remains a haven of tranquillity in the chaotic surroundings. A small, white-painted stupa stands in the centre of the courtyard. On the western side of the courtyard is the **Kichandra Bahal** (Map p115) or 'Keshchandra Paravarta Mahar Bihar', one of the oldest *bahals* in the city, dating from 1381. A *chaitya* in front of the entrance has been completely shattered by a bodhi tree, which has grown right up through its centre. In autumn and winter the square is decorated in ornate swirling patterns of drying grain.

Inside the Kichandra Bahal is a central pagoda-like sanctuary, and to the south is a small *chaitya* decorated with graceful standing Bodhisattvas. On the northern side of the courtyard are four brass plaques mounted on the upper-storey wall. The one on the extreme left shows a demon known as Guru Mapa taking a misbehaving child from a woman and stuffing it greedily into his mouth. Eventually the demon was bought off with the promise of an annual feast of buffalo meat, and the plaque to the right shows him sitting down and dipping into a pot of food. With such a clear message on juvenile misbehaviour it is fitting that the courtyard houses a primary school – right under the Guru Mapa plaques!

To this day, every year during the festival of Holi the inhabitants of Itum Bahal sacrifice a buffalo to Guru Mapa on the banks of the Vishnumati River, cook it in the afternoon in the courtyard and in the middle of the night carry it in huge cauldrons to a tree in the Tundikhel parade ground where the demon is said to live.

NARA DEVI TEMPLE

Halfway between Chhetrapati and Durbar Sq, the **Nara Devi Temple** (Map p116) is dedicated to Kali, Shiva's destructive consort. It's also known as the Seto Kali (White Kali) Temple.

Although the temple, with its three tiers, golden roof and red and white guardian lions, is quite old, some of the decorations are clearly more recent additions. It is said that Kali's powers protected the temple from the 1934 earthquake, which destroyed so many other temples in the

valley. A Malla king once stipulated that a dancing ceremony should be held for the goddess every 12 years, and dances are still performed on the small dance platform that is across the road from the temple.

THREE GODDESSES TEMPLES

Next to the modern Sanchaya Kosh Bhawan Shopping Centre in Thamel are the often ignored **Three Goddesses Temples** (Map p136). The street on which the temples are located is named Tridevi Marg – *tri* means ‘three’ and *devi* means ‘goddesses’. The goddesses are Dakshinkali, Manakamana and Jawalamai, and the roof struts have some creative erotic carvings.

GARDEN OF DREAMS

Just two minutes’ walk, but a million miles from Thamel is the beautifully restored Swapna Bagaicha, or **Garden of Dreams** (Map p136), one of the most serene and beautiful enclaves in Kathmandu.

Field marshal Kaiser Shamsar, whose palace the gardens complement, built the Garden of Dreams in the 1920s after a visit to several Edwardian estates in England, using funds won from his father in an epic Rs 100,000 game of cowrie shells. The gardens and its pavilions suffered neglect to the point of collapse before they were lovingly brought back to life over a six-year period by the same team that created the Patan Museum.

There are dozens of gorgeous details in the garden, including the original gate, a marble inscription from Omar Khayyam’s rubaiyat, the new fountains and ponds, and a quirky ‘hidden garden’ to the south. Of the original four acres and six pavilions (named after the six Nepali seasons), only 1.2 acres and three pavilions remain.

A café is due to open in the Basanta (Spring) Pavilion and you can expect the gardens to be a prime site for cultural events and exhibitions.

RANI POKHARI

This large fenced **tank** (Map p116) is said to have been built by King Pratap Malla in 1667 to console his queen over the death of their son (who was trampled by an elephant). The pool (*pokhari* means pool or small lake) was apparently used during the Malla era for trials by ordeal and later became a favourite suicide spot.

Perhaps because of the high suicide rate, the gate to the tank and its central Shiva Temple is unlocked only one day each year, during the festival of Tihar. The footbridge over the nearby chowk has the best views of Rani Pokhari. The chowk has rather optimistically been declared a no-horn zone!

Across Kantipath is a long imposing building originally known as the Durbar School, which was the first school in Nepal (1854). It has since been renamed the Bhanubhakta School, after the Nepali poet of that name.

East of Durbar Square

MAHAKALA TEMPLE

On the eastern side of Kantipath, just north of New Rd, the **Mahakala Temple** (Map p116) was very badly damaged in the 1934 earthquake and is now of little architectural merit. If you can see inside the darkened shrine you may be able to make out the 1.5m-high figure of Mahakala, the ‘Great Black One’, a particularly ferocious form of Shiva.

ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM

If you have some time to kill while waiting for your visa extension, pop into the next-door tourism service centre and its **Ethnographic Museum** (Map p116; admission Rs 25; ☎ 10am–4pm Tue–Sun; Bhrikuti Mandap), which has a vaguely interesting collection of puppets, costumes and traditional crafts. There are grand plans (but no money as yet) to build a huge new ethnographic museum complex south of Kirtipur in the southern Kathmandu Valley.

South of Durbar Square

JAISI DEVAL TEMPLE

The south of Kathmandu’s old city was the heart of the ancient city in the Licchavi period (4th to 9th centuries) and its major temple is the tall, triple-roofed **Jaisi Deval Temple** (Map p116), built just two years before Durbar Sq’s famous Maju Deval (which is one platform higher). It’s a Shiva temple, as indicated by the bull on the first few steps and the mildly erotic carvings on some of the temple struts. Right across the road from the temple is a stone lingam rising a good 2m from a yoni (female equivalent of a phallic symbol). This is definitely a god-sized phallic symbol and a prayer here is said to aid fertility.

In its procession around the town during the Indra Jatra festival (see p134), the Kumari Devi’s chariot pauses here. During its stop, dances are held on the small dance platform across the road from the temple.

Southwest of the temple, enter the courtyard of the **Ram Chandra Temple** (Map p116), named after Ram, incarnation of Vishnu and the hero of the Hindu epic the Ramayana. This small temple is notable for the tiny erotic scenes on its roof struts; it looks as if the carver set out to illustrate 16 different positions, starting with the missionary position, and just about made it before running out of ideas (there’s one particularly ambitious, back-bending position). The north side of the courtyard is used as a cow stable, highlighting the wonderful mix of the sacred and profane in Nepal!

The temple is best visited as part of the walking tour ‘South From Durbar Square’ (see p131).

BHIMSEN TOWER (DHARAHARA)

Towering like a lighthouse over the old town, this white, minaret-like **tower** (Map p116; ☎ 4215616; admission foreigner/SAARC/Nepali Rs 299/49/49, over 65 & under five years free, no student tickets; ☎ 8am–8pm), is a useful landmark near the 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.

The tower was originally built in 1826 by the Rana prime minister, Bhimsen Thapa, as part of the city’s first European-style palace. It was rebuilt after being severely damaged in the 1934 earthquake. The nearby Sundhara water tank lends its name to the district.

PACHALI BHAIRAB & THE SOUTHERN GHATS

The northern banks of the Bagmati River south of the old town are home to little visited temples and shrines, as well as the worst urban poverty in Kathmandu; rarely do such splendour and squalor sit so close.

Between Tripureshwar Marg and the Bagmati River at **Pachali Bhairab** (Map p116) a huge, ancient pipal tree forms a natural sanctuary for an image of Bhairab Pachali, surrounded by tridents (Pachali is a form of Shiva). To the side lies the brass body of Baital, one of Shiva’s manifestations. Worshipers gather here on Tuesday and Saturday. It is particularly busy here during the festival of Pachali Bhairab Jatra (see p366).

From the temple you could explore the temples and ghats that line the holy, polluted, Bagmati River. Head south of Pachali Bhairab to the ghats on the riverbank to find a collection of lovely statuary. To the west is the Newari-style pagoda of the **Lakshmi Mishwar Mahadev** (Map p116); to the east is the interesting **Tin Deval Temple** (Map p116), easily recognisable by its three *shikari*-style spires. From here you can continue west along footpaths to cremation ghats and a temple at the holy junction of the Bagmati and Vishnumati Rivers; or east past some of Kathmandu’s poorest and lowest caste communities to the triple-roofed **Tripureshwar Mahadev Temple** (Map p116). Further east is the Mughal-style **Kalmochan Temple** (Map p116) built in 1873.

Elsewhere

DHUM VARAHI SHRINE

In an unprepossessing schoolyard just inside Kathmandu’s Ring Rd to the northeast

KATHMANDU ART

If you have a particular interest in Nepali art the following galleries might be worth visiting. Check the websites to see what’s being exhibited.

Siddhartha Art Gallery (Map p116; ☎ 4218048; www.siddharthaartgallery.com; Babar Mahal Revisited; ☎ 11am–6pm) The best in the city, with a wide range of top-notch exhibitions.

Park Gallery (Map p116; ☎ 4419353; www.parkgallery.com.np; Lazimpat; ☎ 10am–6pm Sun–Fri) Smaller, with exhibits in its upper-floor space and prints and cards on the ground floor.

National Birendra Art Gallery (Map p116; ☎ 4411729; ☎ 9am–5pm Sun–Fri; admission Rs 75) The offbeat location in a crumbling old Rana palace is probably more interesting than the dusty collection of Nepali oils and watercolours.

Indigo Gallery (Map pp110–11; ☎ 4424303; Naxal; ☎ 7am–5pm) An upmarket gallery at Mike’s Breakfast (see p150), set in a lovely old Rana building, with excellent exhibits of modern thangkhas, photography and prints, most for sale at top-end prices.

of Kathmandu, a huge pipal tree encloses a small **shrine** (Map pp110–11) and a dramatic 5th-century sculpture of Vishnu as a wild boar with a human body, holding Prithvi, the earth goddess, on his left elbow.

The statue is one of the earliest depictions of an animal-human, created before iconographic rules were established, which perhaps contributes to the unusual sense of movement and vitality that the statue possesses. The statue shows Vishnu rescuing Prithvi from the clutches of a demon.

To get here head north along the Ring Rd from Pashupatinath and take a left about 200m north of the bridge over the Dhobi River. The statue lies 100m down the dirt track, in the grounds of the Shridhumrabarah Primary School.

ACTIVITIES

See p76 for the various rafting, canyoning, climbing and bungee-jumping trips that you can arrange from Kathmandu.

For golfing near the capital, see the Gokarna Forest Golf Resort on p213.

Pools & Fitness Centres

Generally, pools in the major hotels can be used by friends of hotel guests, or at some hotels by outsiders, for a charge. Yak & Yeti Hotel charges Rs 500 for a one-time use of its pools, plus Rs 500 for its health club.

The **Clark Hatch Fitness Center** (Map p116; ☎ 4411818) located at the Radisson charges Rs 780/910 weekdays/weekends for gym, pool and aerobics. **Club Oasis** (☎ 4491234; ☎ 7am–9.30pm) at the Hyatt Regency charges Rs 1000 for its gym, pool, sauna, steam and Jacuzzi, or Rs 534/350 adult/child for its pool (plus 13% tax).

The Park Village Hotel at Budhanilkantha, 15km north of Kathmandu (see p183), offers a nice half-day escape from busy Kathmandu. Access to its pool costs Rs 300, or choose a half-day spa package for Rs 2600.

A recommended health club for aerobic classes is **Banu's Total Fitness** (Map p116; ☎ 4434024; banu94@yahoo.com; Kamal Pokhari; ☎ 6am–9pm Sun–Fri, 7am–11am Sat), hidden down an alleyway southeast of the new Royal Palace. There are aerobic classes at 7am, 10.30am (women only) and 5.30pm and regular yoga lessons (Rs 1500 per month). A visit costs Rs 170 for nonmembers, or Rs 375 with cardio machines and sauna.

The **Self-Awakening Centre** (Map p116; ☎ 4256 618; Babar Mahal Revisited; ☎ closed Sat) offers classes in t'ai chi, yoga, transcendental meditation and anything else you can dream up. Yoga classes cost Rs 200 per hour, t'ai chi Rs 2800 per month.

Climbing

If you need to polish your climbing skills before heading to the mountains, try the **Pasang Lhamu Climbing Wall** (Map pp110–11; ☎ 4370 742; www.pasanglhamu.org; ☎ 10am–5.30pm) on the city's northeastern edge. A day's membership costs Rs 350 and equipment rental costs Rs 100. Week-long climbing courses and private tuition are available.

The wall is on the Ring Rd, near the Bangladesh embassy, and is part of the Pasang Lhamu Mountaineering Federation, named after the first Nepali woman to summit Everest, in 1993. A taxi here from central Kathmandu costs around Rs 150.

Karting

If negotiating Kathmandu's lunatic traffic isn't enough of a challenge for you, let off some steam at **Tiger Karts** (☎ 4361500; www.tigerkarts.com.np; ☎ 10am–sunset; karting Rs 500/800/1200 for 5/10/15-min), out in the middle of nowhere, 3km north of the bus park, down a dirt road in Manamajju.

WALKING TOURS

A stroll around Kathmandu's backstreets will lead the casual wanderer to many intriguing sights, especially in the crowded maze of streets and courtyards in the area north of Durbar Sq. There are temples, shrines and sculptures hidden away in the most unlikely of places. You can really appreciate Kathmandu's museumlike quality when you come across a 1000-year-old statue – something that would be a prized possession in many Western museums – being used as a plaything or a washing line.

Both of the walks will take you to a number of markets, temples, *toles*, *bahals* (courtyards), *bahil* (courtyard with accommodation) and chowks which remain the focus of traditional Nepali life.

The walks can be made as individual strolls or linked together into one longer walk. Walking Tour 1 gives you a taste of the crowded and fascinating shopping streets in the oldest part of Kathmandu

and takes you to some of the city's most important temples. Walking Tour 2 takes you to a lesser-known section of southern Kathmandu, without spectacular sites but where the everyday life of city dwellers goes on and tourists are fairly rare.

South from Thamel to Durbar Square

This walk is best made en route from Thamel to Durbar Sq, or vice versa. To get to Thahiti Tole, walk south from Thamel on the road from the main Thamel Chowk; the first square you come to is Thahiti.

Thahiti Tole wraps around a central **stupa** (1), whose stone inscription indicates it was constructed in the 15th century. Legends relate that it was built over a pond plated

with gold and that the stupa served to keep thieves at bay. Or perhaps the pond was full of dangerous snakes and the stupa kept the snakes in their place – the legends vary!

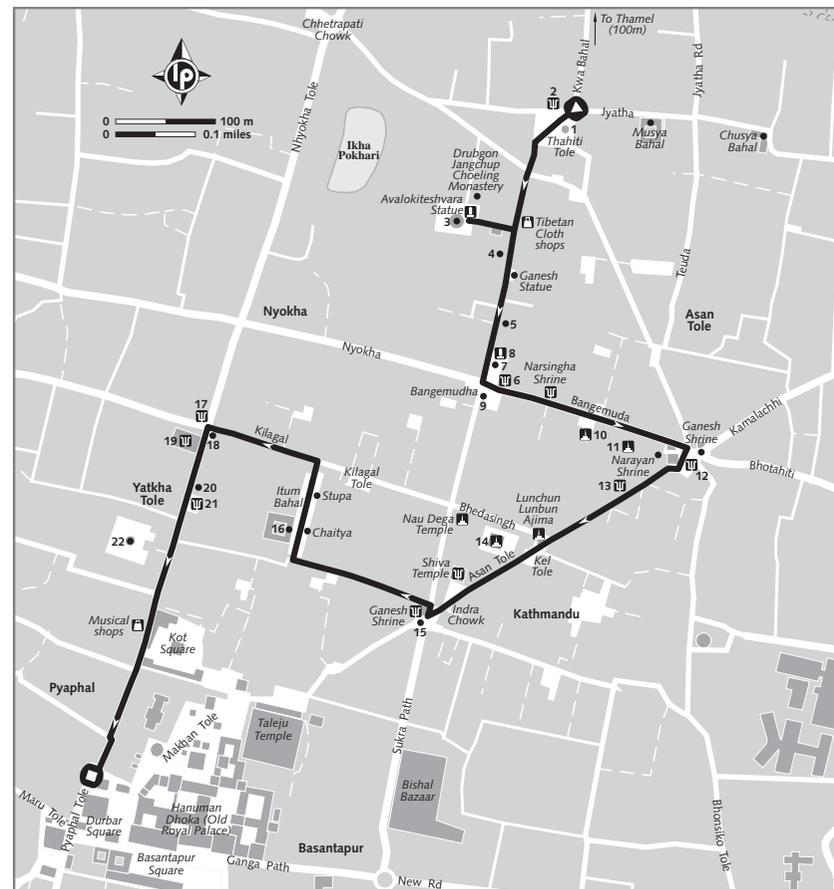
Nateshwar Temple (2), on the northern side of the square, is dedicated to a form of Shiva that doubles as the local Newari god of music; the metal plates that surround the doors show creatures busily playing a variety of musical instruments.

WALK FACTS

Duration 2–2½ hours

Start Thahiti Tole

Finish Durbar Square



Take the road heading south past shops selling prayer flags and Buddhist cloth to the impressive **Kathesimbhu Stupa (3)**, just southwest of Thahiti Tole (see p124). There are lots of *malla* (prayer beads) stalls in the square, as well as a little teahouse/restaurant on the corner if energies are flagging (already?!).

A little further on your right, a single broken stone lion (his partner has disappeared) guards a passageway to the small enclosed courtyard of the **Nag Bahal (4)**, signed as the 'Ratna Mandal Mahabihar', with painted murals above the shrine.

Further down on the left, past a Ganesh statue, is a small recessed area and a dark gridded doorway marking a small but intricate central **stone relief (5)** dating from the 9th century. It shows Shiva sitting with Parvati on Mt Kailash, her hand resting proprietarily on his knee in the pose known as Uma Maheshwar. Various deities and creatures, including Shiva's bull Nandi, stand around them. The door is marked by an almost unrecognisable orange-coloured Ganesh head. Incidentally, the impressive wooden balcony across the road is said to have had the first glass windows in Kathmandu (it looks like it's the same glass!).

Continue south past a string of dentists' shops (the reason will soon become clear), advertised by signs showing a grinning mouthful of teeth. When you hit a square you'll see a small, double-roofed **Sikha Narayan Temple (6)**, easily identified by the kneeling Garuda figure facing and the modern clock on the wall. The temple houses a beautiful 10th- or 11th-century four-armed Vishnu figure that sadly isn't generally on display. The square also has a fine image of the goddess Saraswati playing her lute at the **Saraswati Shrine (7)**, with a Shiva shrine to the left.

In the middle of the nondescript northern frontage, directly beneath the 'Raj Dental Clinic' sign, is a standing **Buddha statue (8)** framed by modern blue and white tile-work. The image is only about 60cm high but dates from the 5th or 6th century. It's a reminder of the casual treatment of what really is an incredible artistic treasure.

At the southern end of the area, just across the crossroads you will see a lump of **wood with coins (9)** into which thousands of coins have been nailed. The coins are offerings to the toothache god, which is represented by a tiny image in the ugly lump of wood. The

square at the junction is known as Bange-mudha, which means 'Twisted Wood'.

Head east to the triple-roofed **Ugratara Temple (10)**, by a small square known as Nhakantalla; a prayer at the shrine is said to work wonders for the eyes. Just further on your right you will pass the Krishna Music Emporium (maker and repairer of harmoniums), before spotting a gridded entrance that leads into **Haku Bahal (11)**. Look for the sign that advertises 'Opera Eye Wear'. This tiny *bahal* has a finely carved wooden window overlooking the courtyard.

You'll soon come to the bustling chowk of **Asan Tole** (see p124), old Kathmandu's busiest market junction and a fascinating area to explore. The diagonal southwest to northeast main road was for centuries the main commercial street in Kathmandu, and the start of the caravan route to Tibet. It was not replaced as Kathmandu's most important street until the construction of New Rd after the great earthquake of 1934. The main shrine here is the **Annapurna Temple (12)**.

The street continues southwest past the octagonal **Krishna Temple (13)**, jammed between brass shops. It looks decrepit, but the woodcarvings on this temple are very elaborate, depicting beaked monsters and a tiny Tibetan protector, holding a tiger on a chain like he's taking the dog for a walk. Look for the turn-of-the-century plaques depicting troops on the building to the left.

The next square is Kel Tole, where you'll find one of the most important and ornate temples in Kathmandu, the **Seto (White) Mahendranath Temple (14)**. See p124 for details.

The busy shopping street spills into **Indra Chowk**, marked by the stepped Mahadev Temple and **Akash Bhairav Temple (15)**. For more on these see p125. From the south of the square, wide Surkha Path leads to New Rd; the shops along this road sell consumer goods imported from Hong Kong and Singapore, and many of them end up in India.

Before you leave Indra Chowk, look for the market hidden in the alleyways to the east, crowded with stalls selling the glass bangles and beads that are so popular with married Nepali women.

Take the quiet alleyway west from Indra Chowk and after 200m or so look for a tiny entryway to the right, by a shrine and under the sign for 'Jenisha Beauty Parlour'. The entryway leads in to the long, rectangular

courtyard of **Itum Bahal**, one of the oldest and largest *bahals* in the city, with some lovely architecture and stupas. See p125 for more on this and the **Kichandra Bahal (16)**.

Exit the courtyard at the north and turn left (west). On your right at the next junction is the **Nara Devi Temple (17)** – see p125 for details. Just to the south of the **dance platform (18)** is a small shop occupied by one of Kathmandu's many marching bands, mainly used for weddings – look for gleaming tubas, red uniforms and tuneless trumpeting. Also across the road is a three-roofed **Narsingha Temple (19)** but it's almost impossible to find through a maze of small courtyards (you can see the roof from the dance platform).

At the Nara Devi corner, turn left (south) for 30m and you soon come to a nondescript photocopy shop on your left with an utterly magnificent **wooden window (20)** above it. It has been called *deshay madu* in Nepali, which means 'there is not another one like it'. Next to the building, in a small courtyard, is the recently restored triple-roofed **Bhulukha Dega Temple (21)**, dedicated to Shiva.

Further south, on the right is the entrance to the **Yatkha Bahal (22)**, a huge open courtyard with a central unremarkable stupa. Directly behind it is an old building, whose upper storey is supported by four superb carved-wood struts. Dating from the 14th century, they are carved in the form of *yakshas* (attendant deities or nymphs), one of them gracefully balancing a baby on her hip. The struts were recently restored by the Department of Architecture, Unesco and the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust.

Back on the road, head south again, past the music shops on the right, to Durbar Sq, your final destination for this walk.

South from Durbar Square

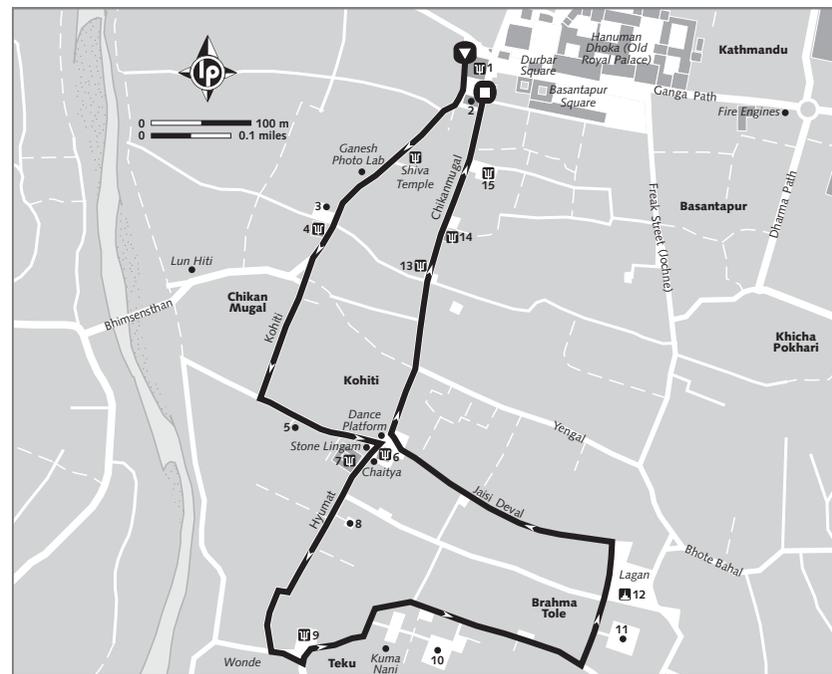
Starting from the Kasthamandap in Durbar Sq (see p114), a circular walk can be made to

WALK FACTS

Duration 45 minutes-1 hour

Start Durbar Square

Finish Durbar Square



the older parts in the south of the city. This area is not as packed with historical interest as the walks north of Durbar Sq, but the streets are less crowded and you are far less likely to run into other tourists.

Starting from the **Kasthamandap (1)** in the southwestern corner of Durbar Sq, the road out of the square forks almost immediately around the **Singh Sattal (2)**, built with wood left over from the Kasthamandap Temple. The squat building has small shop stalls around the ground floor and golden-winged lions guarding each corner of the upper floor and is a popular place for *bhajan* (devotional music) in the mornings and evenings. The building was originally called the Silengu Sattal (a *sattal* is a pilgrim hostel) until the addition of the *singh* (guardian lions).

Take the road running diagonally to the right of this building, past a Shiva Temple, and you eventually come to the large tank-like **hiti (3)**, or water tank, where people will usually be washing clothes.

Immediately beyond is the highly decorated **Bhimsen Temple (4)**, which is fronted by a brass lion ducking under the electric wires and has white-painted snow lions guarding the two front corners. Bhimsen is supposed to watch over traders and artisans so it's quite

appropriate that the ground floor of this well-kept temple should be devoted to shop stalls. An image of Bhimsen used to be carried to Lhasa in Tibet every 12 years to protect those vital trade routes, until the route was closed by Chinese control and the flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959. There are some lovely *chaityas* here. Tourists are not allowed in the temple.

Continue south beyond the Bhimsen Temple then turn sharp left (uphill) where the road ends, passing the ornate **Kohiti water tank (5)** en route. At the top of the hill you'll come out by the tall, triple-roofed, 17th-century **Jaisi Deval Temple (6)**, which stands on a seven-level base. Nearby is the **Ram Chandra Temple (7)**. For more on both of these see p126.

There is a series of *bahals* on the next stretch of the walk, but most are of little interest apart from the small and very much lived-in courtyard of **Tukan Bahal (8)**. The Swayambhunath-style 14th-century stupa in the centre is surprisingly impressive.

The road continues with a few bends, then turns sharply left (east) at Wonde junction, which is marked by several temples, including a taller **shikhara temple (9)**. If you take the downhill road leading south from this junction (and off the Walking Tour map) you emerge onto Tripureshwar Marg,

from where you can continue to the Pachali Bhairab Temple (see p127).

Our walk continues past Brahma Tole to the **Musum Bahal (10)**, with its phallic-shaped Licchavi-style *chaityas*, an enclosed well and surrounding interconnecting *bahals*. Turn sharp left (north) at the next main junction and, after 25m, look out for the large, spacious **Ta Bahal (11)** with its many *chaityas*, down an alley on the right.

The road opens into an open square featuring the white 5m-high **Machhendranath Temple (12)**, as well as the occasional neighbourhood cricket match. During the annual Seto Machhendranath festival, the image of the god is transported here from the Seto Machhendranath Temple in Kel Tole (see p124). The final stage of the procession is to pull the god's chariot three times around the temple, after which the image is taken back to its starting point on a palanquin while the chariot is dismantled here.

Turn left out of Lagan and walk back to the tall Jaisi Deval Temple, then turn right (northeast) back towards Durbar Sq.

At the next crossroads the slender three-storey **Hari Shankar Temple (13)** stands to the left of the road.

Continue north past a **Vishnu (Narayan) Temple (14)** to a second Vishnu temple, the **Adko Narayan Temple (15)**. Although it's not all that large, it is one of the four most important Vishnu temples in Kathmandu. Twin feathered Garudas front the temple, while lions guard each corner. An ornately carved *path* (pilgrim's shelter) is on the street corner.

Beyond the temple you pass the Singh Sattal building again and arrive back at the starting point. Alternatively, head east through the backstreets for a reviving chocolate cake and milk tea at Freak Street's Snowman Restaurant (see p149).

KATHMANDU FOR CHILDREN

Pilgrims Bookstore in Kathmandu has a fine collection of kids' books, including colouring books. Away from the tourist areas highchairs are virtually nonexistent and finding nonspicy food children will eat may be more of a problem.

Kids will probably enjoy the zoo in nearby Patan (see p192) and older kids will get a thrill from spotting the monkeys at Swayambhunath.

DAY TRIPS FROM KATHMANDU

The great thing about Kathmandu is that there are so many fantastic sights just a couple of kilometres outside the city. You can check out any of the following sites and still be back in Thamel for the start of happy hour.

- Bhaktapur – see p196
- Patan – see p184
- Bodhnath – see p169
- Ichangu Narayan – see p165
- Budhanilkantha – see p182

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Kathmandu has many festivals, of which the most outrageous is probably Indra Jatra (see p134) in September, closely followed by the Seto Machhendranath chariot festival (see p124) in March/April, Dasain in October, and the Pachali Bhairab Jatra, also in October. See p363 for details.

The annual **Jazzmandu Festival** (www.kathmandujazzfestival.com) is a week-long programme of local and international jazz acts that plays in venues across town in November. Tickets cost around Rs 900. See the website for details.

SLEEPING

Kathmandu has a great range of places to stay, from luxurious international-style hotels to cheap and cheerful lodges, and almost all offer competitive prices.

Most of Kathmandu's accommodation offers some form of discount these days (see the boxed text, p356). Normal high-season rates are given here, followed where relevant by the amount of discount being offered on this rate at the time of high-season research. If you email a reservation in advance you probably won't get the largest discount but you should get a free airport pickup.

It's difficult to recommend hotels, especially in the budget and middle brackets, as rooms in each hotel can vary widely. Many of these hotels have additions to additions, and while some rooms may be very gloomy and run-down, others (generally the upper floors) might be bright and pleasant. A friendly crowd of travellers can also make all the difference. In general, roadside rooms

QUIRKY KATHMANDU

Kathmandu has more than its fair share of quirk and, as with most places in the subcontinent, a 10-minute walk in any direction will throw up numerous curiosities.

The corridors of the **Natural History Museum** (see p164) are full of bizarre moth-eaten animals and jars that lie somewhere between a school science experiment and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The 20-ft python skin and nine-month old baby rhino in a jar are guaranteed to give you nightmares. The other exhibits are a bit slapdash, including the line of stuffed birds nailed carelessly to a bit of wood to indicate their distribution, or the big pile of elephant dung deposited randomly in the front corner. After all this fun the section on algae is a bit dull...

For items of personal quirkiness, the **Tribhuvan Museum** (see p123) offers up such gems as the king's parachuting uniform, the king's personal film projector and the king's personal walking stick with a spring-loaded sword inside – very '007'.

The National Museum (see p164) also houses more than its fair share of weirdness, including the mandible of a whale (?), a portrait of King Prithvi Narayan Shah giving everyone the finger, and a man poking a fox in the arse with a stick, the significance of which passed us by completely.

Compared to all this funkiness, Kathmandu's old town is pretty docile. Look for the antique **fire engines** (Map p116) hidden behind a grille just west of the junction of New Rd and Surkha Path, opposite the ticket office for Durbar Square. If you get a toothache during your trip, be sure to visit the old town's **toothache god** (see p130) – a raggedy old stump of wood covered with hundreds of nails and coins.

Finally, the Indian **snake charmers** who set up shop in front of the New Tibet Book Store on Tridevi Marg always raise a smile, as does the crazy sadhu, dressed as the god Hanuman in a very unrealistic monkey suit, who occasionally haunts Durbar Square.

KATHMANDU'S INDRA JATRA FESTIVAL

Indra, the ancient Aryan god of rain, was once captured in the Kathmandu Valley while stealing a certain flower for his mother, Dagini. He was imprisoned until Dagini revealed his identity and his captors gladly released him. The festival celebrates this remarkable achievement (villagers don't capture a real god every day of the week). In return for his release Dagini promised to spread dew over the crops for the coming months and to take back with her to heaven all those who had died in the past year.

The Indra Jatra festival thus honours the recently deceased and pays homage to Indra and Dagini for the coming harvests. It begins when a huge, carefully selected pole, carried via the Tundikhel, is erected outside the Hanuman Dhoka in Kathmandu. At the same time images and representations of Indra, usually as a captive, are displayed and sacrifices of goats and roosters are made; the screened doors obscuring the horrific face of Seto (White) Bhairab are also opened and for the next three days his gruesome visage will stare out at the proceedings.

The day before all this activity, three golden temple chariots are assembled in Basantapur Sq, outside the home of the Kumari. In the afternoon, with the Durbar Square packed with colourful and cheerful crowds, two boys emerge from the Kumari's house. They play the roles of Ganesh and Bhairab and will each ride in a chariot as an attendant to the goddess. Finally, the Kumari herself appears either walking on a rolled-out carpet or carried by attendants so that her feet do not touch the ground.

The chariots move off and the Kumari is greeted from the balcony of the old palace by the king. The procession then continues out of Durbar Square towards Hanuman Dhoka where it stops out in front of the huge Seto Bhairab mask. The Kumari greets the image of Bhairab and then, with loud musical accompaniment, beer starts to pour from Bhairab's mouth! Getting a sip of this beer is guaranteed to bring good fortune, but one lucky individual will also get the small fish, which has been put to swim in the beer – this brings especially good luck (though probably not for the fish).

Numerous other processions also take place around the town until the final day when the great pole is lowered and carried down to the river.

are brighter but noisier than interior rooms and top-floor rooms are the best, as you stand a chance of getting a view and have easy access to the roof garden. Quite a few hotels bridge the budget and midrange categories by having a range of room standards – these places have been grouped according to their lowest price.

Intense competition between Kathmandu's enormous number of low-priced hostels means that you can find hot showers in even the cheapest places, although they are sometimes solar-heated and are only hot in the late afternoon.

Budget places generally don't have heating, so in winter you'll want the warmer south-facing rooms and garden access, as it's always pleasant to sit outside during the cool, but sunny, autumn and winter days.

Most budget and some midrange places are found in the bustling Thamel district. Midrange and top-end places are widely scattered around Kathmandu, some quite a way from the centre.

Some travellers base themselves further a field, outside Kathmandu in Patan or Bodhnath, to escape the traffic, pollution and commercialism of Thamel (see p172 and p193 for details) and this isn't a bad idea. For something quieter still, there is an increasing number of mostly top-end resorts around the Kathmandu Valley, which offer a peaceful rural atmosphere less than an hour from the centre of Kathmandu.

Thamel

For budget and midrange places the Thamel area is the main locale, and it is a bit of a tourist ghetto. It's a convenient and enjoyable area to stay for a short time, especially to meet fellow travellers or for a budget-priced apple crumble, but you are likely to tire of the place in a couple of days.

In an attempt to establish some order, we have somewhat arbitrarily divided the Greater Thamel area into: Thamel, around the two main intersections; Paknajol, to the north; Bhagwan Bahal, to the northeast;

Jyatha, to the southeast; and Chhetrapati, to the southwest.

BUDGET

Central Thamel

Kathmandu Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4700800; www.ktmgh.com; s US\$2-50, d US\$4-60; ☺) The KGH is a bit of an institution. It was the first hotel to open in Thamel and still serves as the central landmark – everything in Thamel is 'near the Kathmandu Guest House'. In strictly dollar terms you can get better rooms elsewhere, but most people enjoy the bustling atmosphere and it's often booked out weeks in advance during the high season. There's BBC TV in the foyer, a front wi-fi-enabled courtyard and a very pleasant rear garden that acts as a haven from the Thamel mayhem. Facilities include a mini-cinema and even a sauna – this is budget travel in the deluxe category!

The cheapest rooms without bathroom form part of the original 13-room guesthouse and really aren't up to much – you'll certainly get better-value rooms elsewhere – but at least the common showers are clean and hot. In the newer wing, the best-value rooms are probably the garden-facing rooms.

Hotel Horizon (Map p136; ☎ 4220904; www.visitnepal.com/hotelhorizon; s US\$-10, d US\$8-15, deluxe s/d US\$15/20) A good choice down an alley off the main street in southern Thamel, making it a quiet and central option. It has a range

of rooms at reasonable prices, all with bathroom, most of which are bright and spacious, and there are some nice communal seating areas. The mid-priced (US\$8) rooms are the best value; more than this and you are really just paying for a bathtub.

Hotel Potala (Map p136; ☎ 4700159; s/d/tr without bathroom from Rs 125/175/250) Bang in the beating heart of Thamel, this small Tibetan-anun backpacker place is cheap and cheerful, though the rooms are dark and the hot water iffy. The rooftop and balconies overlook Thamel's main drag. Rooms facing inside are darker but much quieter; try for a room on the 5th floor. The deluxe rooms have better mattresses and are worth the extra Rs 25. It's down an alleyway near the Maya Cocktail Bar.

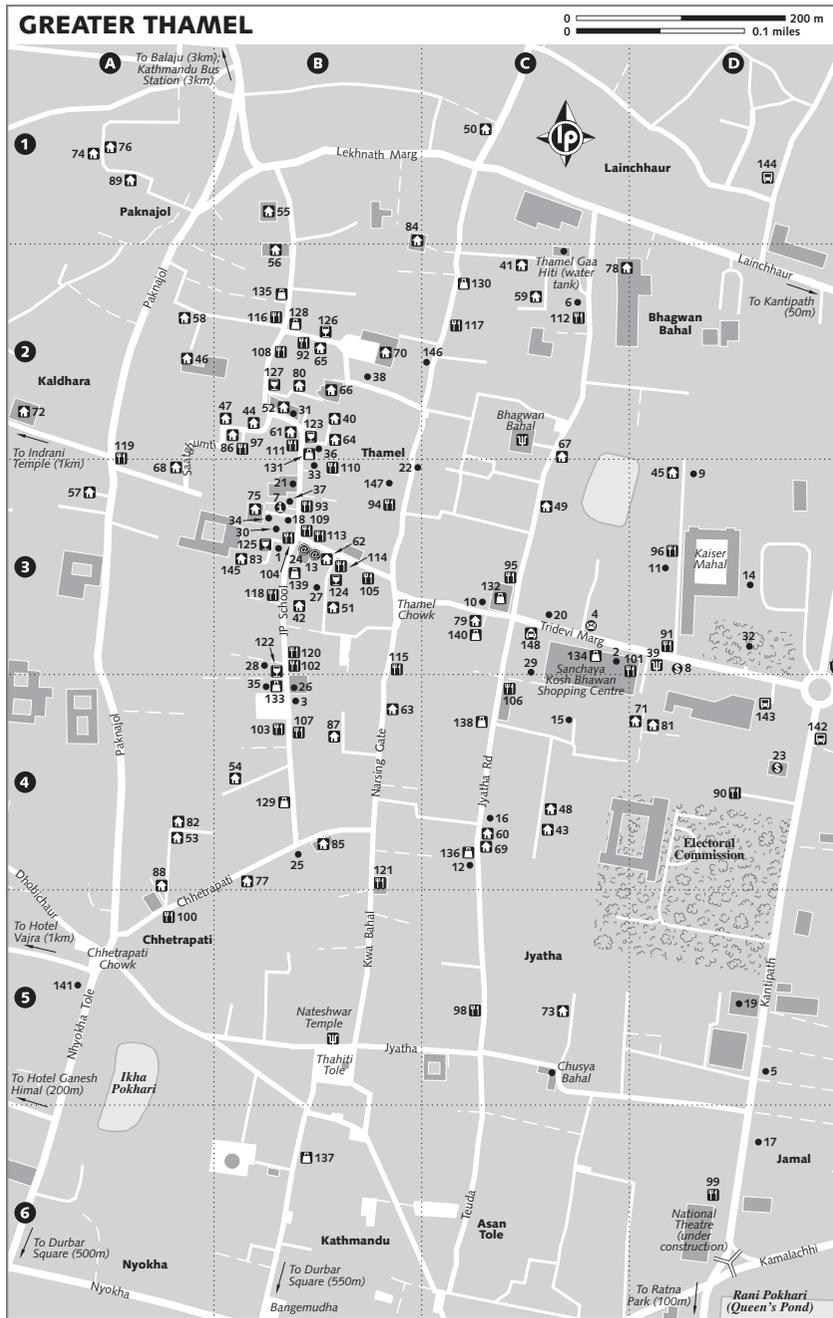
Marco Polo Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4251914; marcopolo@wlink.com.np; d with/without bathroom Rs 420/200, deluxe Rs 560) The rather morose management adds to a certain boarding school feel here but it's a popular place with a convenient location on the eastern edge of Thamel, near traffic-soaked Tridevi Marg. The rooms at the top and back are surprisingly quiet and bright, especially the deluxe rooms; others are noisier and darker. There are no single prices.

Student Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4251551; krishna@student.wlink.com.np; s/d with bathroom Rs 300/500; ☺) Right next door to Marco Polo and a similar deal. It's quiet and clean but the

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Ganesh Himal (Map p116; ☎ 4243819, 4263598; www.ganeshhimal.com; s/d budget US\$7/9, s/d standard US\$9/12, deluxe US\$14/17, discounts of 15-20%) Our pick for comfort on a budget is this well-run and friendly place, a 10-minute walk southwest of Thamel – far enough to be out of range of the tiger balm salesmen but close enough to restaurants for dinner. The rooms are among the best value in Kathmandu, with endless hot water, satellite TV and lots of balcony and garden seating, plus a sunny rooftop. The deluxe rooms are more spacious, a little quieter and come with a bath tub. Here's a tip – bring earplugs, as the residential neighbourhood can be a bit noisy. Make a reservation and you'll get a free airport pickup.

Kantipur Temple House (Map p136; ☎ 4250131; www.kantipurtemplehouse.com; s/d US\$50/60, deluxe US\$70/90, discounts of 40-50%) Hidden down an alley on the edge of the old town, at the southern end of Jyatha, this boutique-style hotel has been built in old Newari-temple style with a fine attention to detail. The spacious rooms are tastefully decorated, with traditional carved wood and *dhaka* (hand-woven) cloth bedspreads, commissioned from local fair trade shops. This place is doing its best to be eco-friendly – guests are given cloth bags to use when shopping and bulk mineral water is available free of charge, so you don't need to buy plastic bottles. In fact there's no plastic anywhere in the hotel. The new block encircles a traditional courtyard and there's garden and rooftop seating. The old town location is close to almost anywhere in town, but taxi drivers might have a hard time finding it.



INFORMATION		SLEEPING		DRINKING		ENTERTAINMENT																																																																																																																																																					
Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) Office.....(see 2)	Barnes & Noble Bookhouse.....1 B3	Bookworld.....2 C3	DHL.....(see 13)	Diki Continental Exports.....3 B4	Everest Postal Care.....4 C3	FedEx.....5 D5	Gift for Aid.....6 C2	Green Hill Tours.....7 B3	Himalaya Bank.....8 D3	Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre (HBMC).....9 D3	Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA).....10 C3	International Training & Research Centre (ITC).....11 D3	International Mountain Explorers Connection (IMEC).....12 C4	Internet Centre.....13 B3	Kaiser Library.....14 D3	Kathmandu Environmental Education Project (KEEP).....15 C4	Kathmandu Institute of Nepali Language.....16 C4	Mandala Bookpoint.....17 D6	Nepal Book Depot.....18 B3	Nepal Vipassana Center.....19 D5	New Tibet Book Store.....20 C3	Pilgrims Book House.....21 B3	Porters' Progress.....22 B3	Sita World Travel (Western Union).....(see 2)	Standard Chartered Bank.....23 D4	Standard Chartered Bank ATM.....(see 42)	Standard Chartered Bank ATM.....(see 34)	Thamel Nepali Language Institute.....(see 33)	The Cybernet Café.....24 B3	United Books.....(see 103)	Walden Book House.....25 B4	Wayfarers.....26 B4	Acme Guest House.....40 B2	Annapurna Guest House.....41 C2	Arcadia Apartments.....42 B3	Fuji Guest House.....43 C4	Holy Lodge.....44 B2	Hotel Blue Horizon.....45 D3	Hotel Courtyard.....46 A2	Hotel Down Town.....47 B2	Hotel Dynasty.....48 C4	Hotel Earth House.....49 C3	Hotel Encounter Nepal.....50 C1	Hotel Excelsior.....51 B3	Hotel Garuda.....52 B2	Hotel Hama.....53 A4	Hotel Horizon.....54 B4	Hotel Manang.....55 B1	Hotel Marshyangdi.....56 B2	Hotel Metropolitan Kantipur.....57 A3	Hotel New Florida.....58 A2	Hotel Norbu Linka.....59 C2	Hotel Norling.....60 C4	Hotel Northfield.....61 B2	Hotel Potala.....62 B3	Hotel Puskar.....63 B4	Hotel Red Planet.....64 B2	Hotel Shree Tibet.....65 B2	Hotel Tashi Dharghey.....66 B2	Hotel Tokyo.....67 C2	Hotel Tradition.....68 A3	Hotel Utse.....69 C4	Hotel Vaishali.....70 B2	Imperial Guest House.....71 D4	International Guest House.....72 A2	Kantipur Temple House.....73 C5	Kathmandu Garden House.....74 A1	Kathmandu Guest House.....75 B3	Kathmandu Peace Guest House.....76 A1	Khangsar Guest House.....77 B4	Malla Hotel.....78 C2	Marco Polo Guest House.....79 C3	Mustang Guest House.....80 B2	Mustang Holiday Inn.....81 D4	Nirvana Garden Hotel.....82 A4	Pheasant Lodge.....83 B3	Pilgrims Guest House.....84 B1	Potala Guest House.....85 B4	Prince Guest House.....86 B2	Student Guest House.....(see 79)	Thorong Peak Guest House.....87 B4	Tibet Guest House.....88 A4	Tibet Peace Guest House.....89 A1	1905.....90 D4	Bakery Café.....91 D3	BK's Place.....92 B2	Brezel Bakery.....93 B3	Chang Cheng Restaurant.....94 B3	Dahua Restaurant.....95 C3	Dechenling Beer House.....96 D3	Delima Momen Café.....97 B2	Dolma Gado Center.....98 C5	Dudh Sagar.....99 D6	Everest Steakhouse.....100 A5	Fire & Ice Restaurant.....101 C3	Four Season Restaurant.....(see 13)	Helena's.....102 B3	Himalatte Café.....103 B4	Hot Bread.....104 B3	K-Too Beer & Steakhouse.....105 B3	Kilroy's of Kathmandu.....106 C4	Koto Restaurant.....107 B4	Krua Thai Restaurant.....108 B2	La Dolce Vita.....109 B3	Nargila Restaurant.....(see 36)	New Orleans Café.....110 B3	Northfield Café.....111 B2	Nuovo Marco Polo.....112 C2	Old Tashi Delek Restaurant.....113 B3	Pilgrims Feed 'N Read.....(see 21)	Pumpnickel Bakery.....114 B3	Roadhouse Café.....(see 42)	Sandwich Point.....115 B3	Thakali Banchnha Kitchen.....116 B2	Thamel House Restaurant.....117 C2	Third Eye Restaurant.....118 B3	Utse Restaurant.....(see 69)	Via Via Café.....119 A2	Weizen Bakery.....120 B3	Yak Café.....121 B4	Yin Yang Restaurant.....(see 118)	Full Moon.....(see 121)	Himalayan Java.....(see 91)	J-Bar.....(see 91)	Jatra.....122 B3	Just Juice 'n' Shakes.....123 B2	Maya Cocktail Bar.....124 B3	Pub Maya.....125 B3	Rum Doodle Restaurant & Bar.....126 B2	Sam's Bar.....127 B2	Tom & Jerry Pub.....(see 36)	Gandharba Organisation.....(see 31)	Kathmandu Guest House Theatre.....(see 75)	Advanced Photo Finisher.....128 B2	Amrita Craft Collection.....129 B4	Aroma Garden.....130 C2	Bandari Photo Shop.....131 B2	Best Shopping Centre.....132 C3	Color Link.....133 B4	Hicola.....134 C3	Paper Park.....135 B2	Papa Chengreshi Thanka Printing School.....136 C4	Prayer Flag Shops.....137 B6	Shona's Alpine Rental.....138 C4	Snapper Photo.....139 B3	Tea World.....140 C3	Bike Hire.....141 A5	Bus Stop for Pokhara Tourist Buses.....142 D4	Ecotrek.....(see 10)	Greenline.....143 D4	Minibus to Nagarkot.....144 D1	Pheasant Motor Bikes.....145 B3	Singh Motorbike Centre.....146 C2	Tashi Delek Nepal Treks & Expeditions.....147 B3	Taxi Stand.....148 C3

buildings are so crammed in that there's little natural light and no views. The rooms out the back are much better and solo travellers can often get these double rooms for a single price, which is a good deal.

Hotel Red Planet (Map p136; ☎ 4700879; redplanet_thamel@hotmail.com; s/d from Rs 375/530, deluxe Rs 600/830, discounts of 15%) Tucked away by the bend in the road just north of Kathmandu Guest House, this is a good Thamel cheapie, and not too noisy, despite its central location. Rooms are clean and good value with decent bathrooms; try to get a garden-side room with a balcony.

Acme Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4700236; www.acmeguesthouse.com; s/d US\$5-20/8-25, discounts of 30-40%) Next to the Hotel Red Planet, the rooms here are quite large and there is an open lawn area, which is something of a rarity in crowded Thamel. The rooms with balcony overlooking the lawn are the best value; those at the back can be dark.

Thorong Peak Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4253458, fax 4251008; s/d/q without bathroom US\$8/12/18, deluxe s/d US\$14/18, discounts of 30%) A clean and well-looked after place, off the main street in a small cul de sac. Most rooms are light and airy and there are nice communal balconies and a rooftop terrace, though it's a little overpriced. It doesn't get much sunlight in winter.

There are dozens of other places, including the **Hotel Puskar** (Map p136; ☎ 4262956; s Rs 150-250, d Rs 250-450), with a wide range of rooms in various blocks (including some real stinkers with dark, sweaty bathrooms) and the very basic but cheap **Pheasant Lodge** (Map p136; ☎ 4417415; s/d without bathroom Rs 100/150), tucked around an alleyway south of the Kathmandu Guest House.

Paknajol

This area lies to the north of central Thamel and can be reached by continuing north from the Kathmandu Guest House, or by approaching from Lekhnath Marg.

Not far from the steep Paknajol intersection with Lekhnath Marg (northwest of Thamel) are a few pleasant guesthouses. They're away from traffic, a short walk from Thamel (but it could be a million miles), and they have beautiful views across the valley towards Balaju and Swayambhunath.

Tibet Peace Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4381026; www.tibetpeace.com; s Rs 210-700, d Rs 210-1050) Friendly and family-run, this is a quiet and

mellow hangout, with a lovely garden, small restaurant with a wide range of herbal teas and BBC World in the foyer. There's a wide range of rooms in several buildings so have a dig around before committing.

Kathmandu Peace Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 43 80369; www.ktmpeaceguesthouse.com; s with/without bathroom US\$8/5 d with/without bathroom US\$12/6, s/d deluxe with bathroom US\$12/16, discounts of 25%) Further along the road, this is a little more upmarket, offering rooms with satellite TV in either the slightly ramshackle old wing or the better new block sporting piney fresh furniture. There are fine views from the rooftop towards Nagarjun.

Kathmandu Garden House (Map p136; ☎ 4381 239; www.hotel-in-nepal.com; s with/without bathroom Rs 300-400/200 d with/without bathroom Rs 400-500/250) A small and intimate guest house that is cosy and deservedly popular. The upper floor doubles with hot-water shower are best but always seem to be occupied. The views from the roof are excellent and there are nice sitting areas and a lovely garden, where you can sit back and marvel at the staff cutting the grass by hand (literally!).

Hotel Encounter Nepal (Map p136; ☎ 4440534; www.encounternepal.com; old block s/d without bathroom US\$3/5, s/d with bathroom from US\$5/6, new block s/d US\$8/15, deluxe \$15/20; ☎) A good-value place to the north of Thamel, in a more lived-in part of Kathmandu. The hotel consists of an old and new block separated by a garden. The best old block rooms are sunny, spacious and good value, and the spiffier new block has nice corner rooms with views over the valley, some with balcony. The only downer is that you take your life in your hands crossing diabolical Lekhnath Marg to get here.

Pilgrims Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4440565; pilgrimsghouse@yahoo.com; s/d without bathroom US\$4/6, s/d with bathroom US\$6-8/8-15; ☎) The first thing that appeals about this secluded and well-managed place in northern Thamel is the outdoor garden restaurant and bar. The wide range of rooms fit most budgets, from top-floor rooms with a sofa and balcony, to the cheapest singles, which are little more than a box. It's a popular place so you may have to take what's available for the first night and then upgrade as rooms become available.

Hotel New Florid (Map p136; ☎ 4701055; www.hotelflorid.com.np; s/d without bathroom US\$5/7, s/d with

bathroom US\$8/10) This is one of several small guesthouses just north of central Thamel, down a lane west of Advanced Photo Finisher. There is a pleasant garden at the rear and no buildings behind so there's a feeling of space that is often lacking in Thamel. The large doubles overlooking the garden are bright, spacious and best. Doubles overlooking the road are noisier but come with a common balcony. You'll need to negotiate a discount to get good value here.

HolyLodge (Map p136; ☎ 4700265; holylodge@wlink.com.np; s/d from Rs 200/350, with bathroom up to Rs 500/700, deluxe Rs 700/1050) This place offers neat, clean rooms but there's a sad lack of garden, sitting areas or views, especially in the warrenlike back building, which has the cheaper rooms. Deluxe rooms on top of the back building have TV and AC.

Hotel Down Town (Map p136; ☎ 4700471; www.hoteldowntown-nepal.com; r with/without bathroom from Rs 350/250) One door down from Holy Lodge, this decent Thamel cheapie has a wide range of rooms, the best of which are clustered around the rooftop. There are a couple of nice communal sitting areas and balconies but no single room rates. The website makes it look much more glamorous than it actually is...

Prince Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4700456; princeguesthouse@hotmail.com; s/d Rs 350/500) Across the road from Down Town, this is a very decent budget place, cheered up by potted plants and a pleasant rooftop. Rooms have hot water bathrooms and some have a TV. The upper floor rooms are much brighter.

Hotel Metropolitan Kantipur (Map p136; ☎ 4266 518; www.kantipurhotel.com; s/d from US\$6/9, deluxe US\$12/16, discounts of 10%) Just west of the Thamel action, this is a decent find, with a nice garden, a rooftop restaurant and friendly staff. Rooms are spacious, though levels of maintenance vary. There's even a small Kumari Temple in the corner of the grounds.

Via Via Café (Map p136; ☎ 4700184; www.viavia.cafe.com; s/d without bathroom Rs 250/350) A Belgian-Nepali café with half a dozen pokey rooms in its century-old building. It's right on a major road junction so don't expect a lie-in in the mornings (staff even provide ear plugs!). It's a bit too jammed in for some but there are some nice touches like reading lights and it's also a sociable option, especially for a small group. Be sure to book in advance.

Hotel Shree Tibet (Map p136; ☎ 4419902; sri.tibet@csl.com.np; s/d US\$10/15, deluxe US\$20, discounts of 20-30%) It's easy to miss this upper budget Tibetan-run place and most people do (it's often deserted). It's a clean and quiet place with cosy, clean rooms decorated with Tibetan prayer flags, although some rooms are dark and smallish due to the buildings being very close together. The bigger deluxe rooms are a better bet for doubles. The small restaurant serves decent Tibetan food.

Hotel Tashi Dargey (Map p136; ☎ 4700030; www.hoteltashidargey.com; s/d US\$20/25, deluxe US\$45/40, discounts of 60-70%; ☎) A pretty good upper budget choice in the heart of things, down a back alley with entrances on two different roads. It has a wide range of slightly old-fashioned but spacious rooms, the best of which are on the upper floors and on the sunny south side. Deluxe rooms come with air-con/heating and have a large bathroom and are good value at the discounted rate of US\$10/12.

Another acceptable cheapie is the **Mustang Guest House** (Map p136; ☎ 4426053; chitaur@mos.com.np; s/d without bathroom Rs 130/180, s/d with bathroom Rs 200/250), tucked away down an inconspicuous laneway, with decent, quiet rooms but a dearth of natural light.

Bhagwan Bahal

This area to the northeast of Thamel takes its name from a Buddhist monastery. Some travellers like the area because it is quieter than Thamel proper, and has not yet been completely taken over by restaurants, souvenir shops and travel agencies.

Annapurna Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4420159; www.annapurnaguesthouse.com; r US\$4-6) Further north near the Hotel Norbu Linka; also known as Hotel Crown, this guest house is down a side alley. The rooms are smallish but clean and comfortable and most come with private bathroom.

Hotel Earth House (Map p136; ☎ 4418197; www.hotelearthhouse.com; s/d without bathroom Rs 150/250, s/d with bathroom Rs 200/300) The caged stairwells make this place feel a little institutional and the cheaper rooms ain't pretty. However, it does have friendly staff, a nice rooftop garden and a variety of rooms. The rooms at the back are best as they are quieter and brighter.

The nearby **Hotel Tokyo** (Map p136; ☎ 4424683; r without bathroom Rs 150, s/d with bathroom Rs 300/400) is a similar deal.

Chhetrapati

This area is named after the important five-way intersection (notable by its distinctive bandstand) to the southwest of Thamel. The further you get from Thamel, the more traditional the surroundings become.

Khangsar Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4260788; www.khangsarguesthouse.com; s/d Rs 200/300) Friendly, central and good value, this is one of the best of the cheapies. Rooms come with an anorexically thin but clean bathroom with (generally) hot water, plus there's a Korean restaurant and a rooftop bar for cold beers under the stars. TV costs an extra Rs 50.

Hotel Hama (Map p136; ☎ 4251009; hama@info.com.np; s/d Rs 250/300, s/d cnr r Rs 600/700) The draws at this quiet place are the bright corner rooms, the sunny balconies, and the small garden in front of the hotel. Try not to get landed with one of the stuffy cheaper rooms, which aren't half as nice. It's right opposite the Tibet Guest House.

MIDRANGE

Central Thamel

Hotel Garuda (Map p136; ☎ 4700766; www.garuda-hotel.com; s/d US\$10/15, standard US\$15/20, deluxe US\$25/30) The good news is that this busy place is bang in the centre of bustling Thamel, about 100m north of the Kathmandu Guest House. Unfortunately it's bang in the bustling centre of Thamel... Some rooms are dark and claustrophobic so look around. Budget rooms don't have the deluxe room's TV or balcony, but are quieter and better value. There are great views from the rooftop. There's a definite mountaineering connection going on here – there are lots of signed climbing photos on the walls and John Krakauer mentions staying here in his bestseller *Into Thin Air*.

Hotel Excelsior (Map p136; ☎ 4257748; www.excelsiornepal.com; economical s/d US\$10/14, standard US\$20/28, deluxe US\$32/40, discounts of 60%) The Excelsior isn't a bad central choice. The standard rooms are a bit musty but probably offer the best value. The small, stuffy 'economic' rooms are in a separate block across the road and smell like your granny's spare room. Best thing about staying here is the classy rooftop garden.

Hotel Northfield (Map p136; ☎ 4700078; www.hotelnorthfield.com; s/d US\$8/12, standard US\$20/25, deluxe US\$25/35; ☎) This new add-on to the popular Northfield Restaurant is right in the eye of

the Thamel storm and doesn't do itself any favours by having noisy rooms on a bend in Thamel's main street. Still, it's well run and friendly and things quieten down at night.

Hotel Vaishali (Map p136; ☎ 4413968; www.hotelvaishali.com, www.vaishalihotel.com; s/d US\$90/110, discounts of 40%; ☎ ☎) From the marbly foyer to the pink rose décor, this hotel feels a bit out of place in the heart of budget Thamel. Rooms are spacious, clean and modern, if a little dull, with central air-con and satellite TV but they're let down a bit by the bathrooms. A bonus here in summer is the small outdoor swimming pool – like the hotel it's more functional than stylish.

Hotel Blue Horizon (Map p136; ☎ 4421971; www.hotelbluehorizon.com; Tridevi Marg; s US\$8-30, d US\$12-60, discounts of 30%; ☎ ☎) There's a wide range of comfortable, bright modern rooms here but the best thing is the secluded location down an alleyway off Tridevi Marg. It's close to Thamel but it's also super easy for transport around the city, plus the location is quiet. The mid-priced corner rooms with a sofa are the best value and the top-priced suites are good for families.

The **Hotel Manang** (Map p136; ☎ 4410993; www.hotelmanang.com; s/d US\$55/65, deluxe US\$80/90, discounts of 30%; ☎) and **Hotel Marshyangdi** (Map p136; ☎ 4700105; www.hotelmarshyangdi.com; s/d standard US\$60/70, deluxe US\$75/85, discounts of 66%) are similarly solid but dull modern three-star blocks in the north of Thamel. Beware the standard rooms at the latter as they have no natural light.

Paknajol

Hotel Courtyard (Map p136; ☎ 4700648; www.hotelcourtyard.com; s/d US\$45/60, ste US\$90, discounts of 50%) For something a little more stylish, this is a good choice, particularly now that discounts make it a steal. Built in a traditional style with oil bricks and Newari-style carved wooden lintels, it's very insulated from the Thamel madness, there are nice sitting areas and the rooms are big enough to tango in. Front view rooms are a little pricier.

Hotel Tradition (Map p136; ☎ 4700217; www.hoteltradition.com; s/d standard US\$30/40, deluxe US\$55/65, discounts of 50%) At eight storeys, this is probably the tallest building in the area and a good choice. The rooms are comfortable and well furnished (though some are a bit small) and the views from the sixth-floor terrace restaurant are sensational. The hotel

is located on the snaking side road known as Saatghumti, or 'Seven Bends'. Reservations are a good idea in high season.

International Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4252299; www.ighouse.com; s/d with bathroom from US\$16/20, deluxe s/d US\$20/25, superior US\$25/30, monsoon discounts of 50%) Further west from the Hotel Tradition in an area known as Kaldhara, this is another nicely decorated place with traditional carved woodwork, lots of plants and terrace sitting areas, a spacious garden and one of the best rooftop views in the city. The deluxe rooms come with a garden view and are probably the best value; standard rooms vary and can be small and dark. This area is quieter and much less of a scene than Thamel but still close to plenty of restaurants. Keep an eye open for the stuffed yak...

Bhagwan Bahal

Hotel Norbu Linka (Map p136; ☎ 4410630; www.hotelnorbulinka.com; s/d US\$35/45, ste US\$55-65, discounts of 60%) A modern, secluded place, down an alley opposite the interesting Thamel Gaa Hiti (water tank). The spacious modern rooms aren't as Tibetan as you'd think from the name but they are clean and comfortable and there are a couple of rooms on the rooftop garden area. The opulent suites are great for families and the restaurant is open 24 hours, so if you are jetlagged, with kids, look no further. Credit cards are accepted.

Jyatha

The neighbourhood southeast of Thamel is traditionally known as Jyatha, but the word is also used to describe the main north-south road that runs into the western end of Tridevi Marg.

Turn east a short way down Jyatha Rd, and a couple of twists and turns will bring you to a neat little cluster of modern guesthouses, whose central but quiet location feels a million miles from the Thamel hustle.

Mustang Holiday Inn (Map p136; ☎ 4249041; www.mustangholidayinn.com.np; s/d with bathroom US\$15/20, s/d US\$22/28, deluxe US\$30/40, discounts of 50%) Really, how many times do you get to stay in a hotel owned by the king of a remote Himalayan kingdom? The clean, spacious and comfortable rooms are suitably decorated in Tibetan style with thangkas decked in *khatas* (silk scarfs) and some come with a balcony. It's quiet, great value, has a restau-

rant, nice terraces and is owned by the King of Mustang! What's not to like?

Imperial Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4249339; imperial_guesthouse@hotmail.com; s/d US\$12/15, discounts of 70%) Across the road from Mustang Holiday Inn, this is a cheaper but good option, with a rooftop sitting area that overlooks a small shrine.

Hotel Dynasty (Map p136; ☎ 4263172; www.hotel-dynasty.com.np; s/d without air-con US\$40/50, deluxe with air-con US\$50/60, super deluxe US\$60/70, discounts of 50%; ☎) Tucked away in a lane behind the Hotel Utse, this is a good midrange find frequented by small in-the-know tour groups. It's a modern, upmarket place that even has a lift! The rooms are a good size and come with TV and, in some cases, a balcony. The deluxe rooms are the best value.

Fuji Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4250435; www.fuji-guesthouse.com; s with/without bathroom US\$10/6, d with/without bathroom US\$15/10, s/d deluxe US\$20/30, off-season discounts of 30%) Another well-run place in the same lane as the Hotel Dynasty. It's popular with Japanese travellers and is a little overpriced, but rooms are neat, quiet and spotlessly clean, and the more expensive rooms have balconies, towels and bathtubs. The rooms with shared bathroom are a good deal. Super-deluxe rooms are under construction.

Hotel Utse (Map p136; ☎ 4228952; www.hotelutse.com; Jyatha Rd; s/d standard US\$15/21, s/d deluxe US\$19/25, s/d super deluxe US\$24/30, discounts of 25%) This comfortable Tibetan hotel is owned by Ugen Tsering, one of the original Thamel tourism pioneers, with his long-running and popular Utse Restaurant. It's a well-run hotel, with a good rooftop area and foyer area. Deluxe rooms have nice Tibetan touches and satellite TV but the standard rooms probably offer best value. Super-deluxe rooms have air-con/heating. The roadside rooms are bright but noisy.

Hotel Norling (Map p136; ☎ 4240734; www.hotelnorling.com; standard s/d US\$10/16, deluxe d US\$19-25, discounts of 45%) A thin slice of a hotel next door to the Hotel Utse that is a good-value option. Also Tibetan-run, it has small but neat rooms and a lush rooftop garden. The small single rooms are worth avoiding; deluxe rooms have a larger bathroom but that's the only difference.

Chhetrapati

Potala Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4220467; www.potalaguesthouse.com; s US\$10, d US\$15-20, deluxe US\$35,

discounts of 30%) At the quiet southern end of Thamel is this large popular hotel. The garden is small but pleasant, with a lovely terrace and a rooftop garden. The quiet deluxe rooms, with air-con and wooden floors, are the best bet; the other rooms are older and much plainer, especially the singles.

Tibet Guest House (Map p136; ☎ 4251763; www.tibetguesthouse.com; s/d US\$16/19, main block US\$24/27, s/d deluxe US\$32/35, s/d superior US\$40/44, suite US\$55/59, discounts of 40-50%) You can't go wrong at this well run and popular Manangi Hotel, so book in advance. All the rooms are well-maintained and comfortable; the deluxe rooms are much more spacious. There's a lovely breakfast patio and the superb views of Swayambhunath from the rooftop garden just cry out to be appreciated at sunset with a cold beer. The cheapest rooms, in a separate block across the street, aren't up to much.

Nirvana Garden Hotel (Map p136; ☎ 4256200; www.nirvanagarden.com; s/d US\$25/30, s/d deluxe US\$30/40, discounts of 30%) The relaxing garden here may not quite be nirvana but it is the nicest in Thamel and is a real oasis, making this hotel a very relaxing choice. The clean and fresh deluxe rooms with private balcony are the ones to opt for (ask for a garden view) and offer great midrange value. The standard rooms are much smaller.

Freak Street (Jochne) & Durbar Square BUDGET

Although Freak St's glory days have passed, a few determined rock-bottom budget restaurants and lodges have clung on. Staying here offers two pluses – you won't find much cheaper, there are fewer crowds and you're right in the heart of the old city. On the

downside, the pickings are slimmer and the lodges generally grungier than in Thamel.

Hotel Sugat (Map p115; ☎ 4245824; maryman@mos.com.np; s/d without bathroom from Rs 110/300, with bathroom Rs 300/400) This is one of the better options in the area. The choice here is between the more expensive, nicer and more spacious rooms out back, which don't have views, or the darker, creakier and pokier front rooms, which offer views over Basantapur Sq. There's a fine rooftop area with great views.

Royal Park Guest House (Map p115; ☎ 4247487; www.royalparkguesthouse.com; r with/without bathroom Rs 400/200-300) Almost next door to Hotel Sugat, this is a similar deal; nice views over Basantapur Sq, shame about the headache-inducing carpet. Like the Sugat, you are really paying for the location more than the quality of the rooms. There's a nice rooftop restaurant. Before you get your hopes up, bear in mind that the rooms pictured on the website are from a totally different hotel!

Annapurna Lodge (Map p116; ☎ 4247684; s/d without bathroom Rs 150/200, s/d with bathroom Rs 200/275) Simple but well kept, cheerful and cosy, this is probably the best option in Freak St. The attached Diyalo Restaurant (p149) is a good place to eat and there are evening movies and a laundry service.

Century Lodge (Map p116; ☎ 4247641; www.centurylodge.4t.com; s/d without bathroom Rs 175/275, s/d with bathroom Rs 300/350) One of Freak St's long-term survivors, this place treads a tightrope between atmospheric and dingy but remains fairly popular. The creaky old-wing rooms haven't changed since 1972 (be warned, neither have the mattresses); the new top-floor rooms are cleaner but disappointingly concrete. The nicest rooms

come with a balcony. There's a small library for book rental and some garden seating. Water supplies can be problematic.

Monumental Paradise (Map p116; ☎ 4240876; mparadise52@hotmail.com s/d with bathroom Rs 250/400) A newish place that's a lot more modern than the rest of Freak St. Rooms are clean and fresh, if devoid of charm, though the upper floor back rooms come with a private balcony. There's a good rooftop bar and restaurant and one suite (Rs 600) in the crow's nest has its own balcony and hammock!

Asia Holiday Lodge (Map p116; ☎ 4246579, asia_holiday62@yahoo.com s/d 200/300) Being colour blind is a definite advantage when faced with the snot-green walls and Day-Glo pink bedspreads of this modern place, but if you can get over the appalling décor it's not all that bad. It's impossible to see how the towel-sized bathrooms could physically be any smaller.

Central Kathmandu

Most of the following hotels are within walking distance of Durbar Marg and the Thamel area.

TOP END

Malla Hotel (Map p136; ☎ 4418385; mallahtgrp@mos.com.np; s/d US\$130/156, s/d club deluxe US\$150/182, discounts of 50%; 🍷 🍷) On the northeastern edge of Thamel, west of the new Royal Palace, but still only a five-minute walk to all the Thamel restaurants, the Malla is solid four-star comfort. The slightly anaemic rooms enjoy either pool or garden views. There's a good swimming pool and, best of all, a superb garden, complete with a mini-stupa and even a peacock enclosure.

Shanker Hotel (Map p116; ☎ 4410151; www.shankerhotel.com.np; s/d US\$90/105, discounts of 30%; 🍷) There's nowhere in town quite like this former Rana palace – the kind of place where you expect some whiskered old Rana prince to come shuffling around one of the wooden corridors. The rooms are quirky (some are split level) but for real grandeur you'll have to track down the dining halls and Durbar Hall conference space. The façade's palatial white columns of whipped cream look onto a huge front garden and swimming pool.

Yak & Yeti Hotel (Map p116; ☎ 4248999; www.yakandyeti.com; Newari Wing d US\$185, Durbar Wing d US\$205, discounts of 30-50%; 🍷) This hotel is probably

the best-known in Nepal, due to its connections with the near-legendary Boris Lissanevitch, its original owner. The oldest section of the hotel is part of the Lal Durbar, a Rana palace, which houses the restaurants and casino; these retain traces of an overblown but spectacular Rana-baroque décor. The actual rooms are in two modern wings; the Newari Wing is the older of the two and the rooms incorporate Newari woodcarvings and local textiles without being kitsch. Businesspeople will find an executive floor and a well-equipped business centre. There's also a beautiful garden, two pools, tennis courts and a fitness centre.

Hotel de l'Annapurna (Map p116; ☎ 4221711; www.annapurna.com.np; s/d standard US\$140/150, s/d superior US\$180/190, discounts of 50%; 🍷) 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.

Lazimpat

North of Central Kathmandu is the Lazimpat embassy area. The options in this area are popular with nongovernment organisation (NGO) staff, repeat visitors and business people.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Ambassador (Map p116; ☎ 4410432; ambassador@ambassador.com.np; s/d economy US\$12/15, s/d standard US\$20/25, s/d deluxe US\$30/35, discounts of 20%; 🍷 🍷) A solid rather than stylish choice, with a good restaurant and a small garden; it is on a noisy intersection so try to get a garden-facing, not road-facing room. The wooden-floored rooms are a little bit old-fashioned and can be dim. It's within walking distance of Thamel and Durbar Marg. The hotel's owners also run The Tea House in Nagarkot (see p227).

Hotel Tibet (Map p116; ☎ 4429085; www.hotel-tibet.com; s/d US\$70/80, discounts of 40%; 🍷) Tibetophiles and tour groups headed to or from Tibet like this recommended midrange choice, run by a friendly Tibetan family. The quiet and comfortable 55 rooms come

FREAK STREET – THE END OF THE ROAD

Running south from Basantapur Sq, Freak St dates from the overland days of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when it was one of the great gathering places on 'the road east'. In its hippy prime this was the place for cheap hotels (Rs 3 a room!), colourful restaurants, hash and 'pie' (pastry) shops, the sounds of Jimmy and Janis blasting from eight-track players and, of course, the weird and wonderful foreign 'freaks' who gave the street its name. Along with Bodhnath and Swayambhunath, Freak St was a magnet for those in search of spiritual enlightenment, freedom and cheap dope.

Times change and Freak St (better known these days by its real name, Jochne) is today only a pale shadow of its former funky self. While there are still cheap hotels and restaurants, it's the Thamel area in the north of the city that is the main gathering place for a new generation of travellers. However, for those people who find Thamel too commercialised, Freak St retains a faint echo of those mellower days.

with TV and private bathroom. There's also a great rooftop terrace, a garden and even a meditation chapel. It's just in front of the Radisson Hotel.

Hotel Manaslu (Map p116; ☎ 4410071; www.hotelmanaslu.com; s/d standard US\$28/32, s/d deluxe US\$40/45, discounts of 25%; ♿ ♿) Just beyond Hotel Tibet, this is a very nice modern hotel with a pleasant garden area and a pool fed by Newari-style fountains. The glorious carved windows in the restaurant were brought in from Bhaktapur. For some reason the standard rooms are brighter and have better views than the pricier deluxe rooms. The slightly inconvenient location explains the bargain rates.

Astoria Hotel (Map pp110-11; ☎ 4436180; www.astoria-hotel.com; s/d US\$28/35, s/d deluxe US\$50/60, discounts of 30-50%; ♿ ♿) Further north along Lazimpat, signposted down a secluded alley to the side of the Hotel Shangri-La, is this excellent find. This hotel is tucked away and has pleasant gardens with a vegetable patch, which supplies the swish French restaurant with organic produce. The light and airy rooms are spotlessly clean, and have TV, carpet and nice home touches. The spacious standard rooms are in the block out back; deluxe rooms are bigger and come with air-con.

TOP END

Radisson Hotel (Map p116; ☎ 4423888; www.radisson.com/kathmandu.ne; standard/deluxe US\$175/185, discounts of 30%; ♿ ♿) 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.

Hotel Shangri-La (Map pp110-11; ☎ 4412999; www.hotelshangrila.com; s/d superior US\$120/130, s/d executive US\$150/160, discounts of 35%; ♿ ♿) This hotel is currently being renovated to bring it up to five stars, with a new casino, bar and fitness centre. Until then, the superior rooms are looking pretty tired, so ask for a free upgrade to the much nicer executive wing. The real draw, though, is the relaxing garden and twice-weekly barbeques (Rs 500).

Elsewhere

MIDRANGE

Hotel Vajra (Map p116; ☎ 4271545; www.hotelvajra.com; s/d without bathroom US\$14/16, s/d with bathroom

from US\$33/38, new wing rooms s/d from US\$53/61, discounts of 30-40%) Across the Vishnumati River in the Bijeshwari district, this is one of Kathmandu's most interesting hotels in any price category. The complex feels more like a retreat than a hotel, with an art gallery, a library of books on Tibet and Buddhism, a rooftop bar and an Ayurvedic massage room. The cheapest rooms have shared bathrooms and mattresses that might be too narrow for some couples. The new-wing rooms are much swankier. The only catch is the location, which, though peaceful, makes it tricky for getting a taxi.

TOP END

Soaltee Crowne Plaza (Map pp110-11; ☎ 4273999; www.soaltee.crowneplaza.com; s/d US\$180/190, s/d deluxe US\$200/210, discounts of 60%; ♿ ♿) Space and tranquillity are precious commodities in Kathmandu but the Soaltee has acres of both; 11 acres, to be precise. Spread around the palatial grounds are some excellent restaurants, a lovely poolside area, a casino and even a bowling alley. The price you pay is the crummy location on the western edge of town, a 15-minute taxi ride from the centre.

Dwarika's Hotel (Map pp110-11; ☎ 4470770; www.dwarikas.com; s/d US\$155/165, s/d deluxe US\$200/210, discounts of 15%; ♿ ♿) For stylish design and sheer romance, this outstanding hotel is unbeatable. Over 40 years the owners have rescued thousands of wood carvings from around the valley (from buildings facing demolition or collapse) and incorporated them into the hotel design, which consists of clusters of traditional Newari buildings (including a library and pool) separated by brick-paved courtyards. The end result is a beautiful hybrid – a cross between a museum and a boutique hotel, with a lush, pampering ambience. All the rooms are unique and some have lovely open-plan granite bathrooms. Its only disadvantage is its poor location – on a busy street in the east of town – but finding a taxi is never a problem.

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu (☎ 4491234; www.kathmandu.regency.hyatt.com; d from US\$210, 60% discounts; ♿ ♿) No expense has been spared on this superb palace-style building, from the dramatic entrance of Newari water tanks to the modern Malla-style architecture. It's worth popping in en route to Bodhnath just to admire the gorgeous stupas in the foyer, which set the stylish tone for the

hotel (there's a lamp-lighting ceremony at dusk). As you'd expect, the rooms are furnished tastefully and many have views over nearby Bodhnath stupa. The large swimming pool, tennis courts, excellent fitness centre, good restaurants and popular bar, make this the perfect spot for a splurge, especially when package rates dip as low as US\$50. The Hyatt is a couple of km outside Kathmandu, on the road to Bodhnath.

Long-Stay Accommodation

If you are in and around the valley for some time, it's worth looking into something other than a regular hotel, although bear in mind that most hotels will offer highly discounted long-term rates. You should be able to get a three- or four-bedroom local apartment for about US\$100 to US\$200 per month, or a house for about double this. Many long-term renters prefer to live in Patan.

Arcadia Apartments (Map p136; ☎ 4260187; arcadia@mos.com.np; apt per day/month US\$18/350) It would be weird to self-cater when surrounded by so many great restaurants but if for some reason you do need a kitchen in the heart of Thamel try the top floor of the Arcadia Building. The apartments have basic cooking facilities, fridge, TV, sofa, separate bedroom and a balcony. There are only six apartments, so reserve ahead of time.

The **Intercultural Training & Research Centre** (Map p136; ☎ 4414490) can put you in touch with a Nepali homestay if you contact them in advance. See p357 for more details.

EATING

Kathmandu has an astounding array of restaurants. Indeed, with the possible exception of the canteen at the UN building,

there are few places where you can choose between Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, Korean, Middle Eastern, Italian or Irish cuisines, all within a five-minute walk. And there are even some Nepali restaurants... After long months on the road in India or long weeks trekking in Nepal most travellers find Kathmandu a culinary paradise.

Thamel's restaurant scene has been sliding upmarket for a few years now, with a slew of places now costing US\$5 per meal – still a great bargain but unthinkable a few years ago. However, if you stay away from beer, you can eat until you burst for less than Rs 200. A bottle of beer will nearly double your bill in a budget restaurant.

Thamel

Thamel restaurants spill into Paknajol, Jyatha and Chhetrapati, just like the hotels. The junction outside Kathmandu Guest House is the epicentre of Thamel dining and you'll find dozens of excellent restaurants within a minute's walk in either direction.

Beyond the restaurants listed here, there are dozens of other budget restaurants, all offering the same standard menu of, well, pretty well anything, and all serving remarkably similar and often very bland food. What marks the difference between these places is the atmosphere, music, service and who happens to be there on the night.

BUDGET

Old Tashi Delek Rest (Map p136; mains Rs 90-140) This place, a long-time favourite, feels like a trekking lodge that's been transplanted from the Everest trek into a Thamel time warp. Prices are cheap, the Tibetan momos (and especially the *richosse* momo soup)

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICES

Nargila Restaurant (Map p136; ☎ 4700712; mains Rs 60-150) Across from the Northfield Café, on the 1st floor, this Israeli budget favourite is one of the very few places to offer good Middle Eastern food and is a quiet place to just take a break from the bustle outside. Try a *shwarma* (grilled meat and salad in a pitta; Rs 145) or hummus served with pitta (Rs 70), washed down by a mint tea (Rs 15). The hot waffle with fruit and yogurt (Rs 80) is just the best in Kathmandu. The staff are endearingly brusque.

Koto Restaurant (Map p136; ☎ 4256449; set meals Rs 150-500; ☎ 11.30am-3pm, 6-9.30pm) When you need a break from endless 'same same but different' backpacker food, head for this budget branch of the acclaimed Durbar Marg restaurant. The Japanese flavours are subtle and complex and the bamboo décor is bright, elegant and clean. The sukiyaki 'young person' set meal (Rs 260) is a great deal, with all kinds of salad trimmings, miso soup, green tea and unlimited rice.

are authentic and the spinach mushroom enchilada (Rs 100) is surprisingly good for Tibetan-Mexican food (Tib-Mex?). It's down a corridor, slap bang in the centre of the Thamel action.

Yak Café (Map p136; mains 60-120) Another unpretentious and reliable Tibetan-run place at the other end of Thamel. The booths give it a 'Tibetan diner' vibe and the clientele is a mix of trekkers, Sherpa guides and local Tibetans who come to shoot the breeze over a cigarette and a tube of *tongba* (hot millet beer). The menu includes Tibetan dishes, with good *kothey* (fried momos), and South Indian food, at unbeatable prices. It feels just like a trekking lodge, down to that familiar electronic sound of a chicken being strangled every time a dish is ready.

Delima Garden Café (Map p136; mains Rs 90-250) If you can't decide whether you want baked beans or *tom kha gai*, this garden restaurant down an alleyway away from the traffic in Paknajol covers all the bases. The surroundings are nice but the food is a bit hit and miss. There are plenty of breakfast choices.

Helena's (Map p136; ☎ 4266979; mains Rs 150-295; ☎ 7am-10pm) Helena's is deservedly popular for its set breakfasts (Rs 65), one of the highest rooftops in Thamel, cosy interior and super friendly service, with a wide range of coffee, good cakes, tandoori dishes and steaks. It's warm and cosy in winter. If you are headed off trekking, consider breakfast on the eighth floor a form of high-altitude training.

Chang Cheng Restaurant (Map p136; Centre Point Hotel; veg dishes Rs 80-120, meat Rs 180-300) The real deal for Chinese food, and often full of visiting Chinese business people and Chinese Tibetans who shout, smoke, slurp and burp their way through large portions of wonderfully spicy Sichuanese food.

Dahua Restaurant (Map p136; ☎ 4410247; dishes Rs 60-110) In contrast, this definitely isn't 'real' China – sticky sweet-and-sours and egg foo yong are the rule here – but it's cosy and tasty and the price is right. It's on the eastern edge of Thamel.

Thakali Kitchen (Map p136; ☎ 4701910; veg/non-veg daal bhaat Rs 85/115; ☎ 10am-10pm) If, after having travelled all this way to Nepal, you actually fancy some Nepali food (!), this upstairs restaurant is a modern place popular with local people working in Thamel. Most opt for the daal bhaat but there's also a

range of Newari food such as *aa lang kho*, a dried meat, cheese and radish soup.

Utse Restaurant (Map p136; Tibetan dishes Rs 60-80) In the hotel of the same name, this is one of the longest-running restaurants in Thamel and it turns out excellent Tibetan dishes, such as momos (meat/veg-filled ravioli), *kothey* (fried momos) and *talumein* (egg noodle soup). For a group blowout, *gacok* (also spelt *gyakok*) is a form of hotpot named after the brass tureen that is heated at the table and from which various meats and vegetables are served (Rs 675 for two).

MIDRANGE

Yin Yang Restaurant (Map p136; ☎ 4425510; Thai curries Rs 280) Just south of the intersection, this is one of Thamel's most highly regarded restaurants. It serves authentic Thai food cooked by a Thai chef in either garden or floor seating. It's not cheap but the food is a definite cut above the imitation Thai food found elsewhere. The green curry is authentically spicy – the massaman curry (with onion, peanut and potato) is sweeter. There's a good range of vegetable choices.

Third Eye Restaurant (Map p136; mains Rs 200-230) Next door to Yin Yang, and run by the same people, this is a long-running favourite that retains something of the old Kathmandu atmosphere. There's a sit-down section at the front, and a more informal section with low tables and cushions at the back and a rooftop terrace. Indian food is the speciality and the tandoori dishes are especially good.

Roadhouse Café (Map p136; pizzas Rs 260-350; Arcadia Bldg) The big attraction here is the pizzas from the wood-fired oven (we have been assured the wood is off cuts from a Terai timbermill). The pizzas are pretty darn good, and the décor, especially the courtyard out back, is warm and intimate. The starters, pasta dishes and coffees are all good, as is the service. Top it all off with a scoop of Baskin Robbins ice cream for Rs 70. Credit cards are accepted.

Four Season Restaurant (Map p136; ☎ 4701715; Trilok Plaza; dishes 250-280) A great location and some of the tastiest Thai and Indian food in town, make this a good compromise if you fancy a chicken tikka masala but your date wants a green papaya salad. You can sit overlooking the road, in the warm orange and black bar area or on the rooftop under what looks like an aircraft hanger. One of the chefs

is Thai, the other worked at the Rum Doodle for 17 years, so they know their stuff.

K-Too Beer & Steakhouse (Map p136; ☎ 4700043; www.kilroygroup.com; mains Rs 160-450, glass of wine Rs 160-245, plus 13% tax) Run by the same people

who run Kilroy's (see p149), the décor and furnishings here are deliberately rough and ready pub-style, and the food and atmosphere are excellent. Dishes range from Irish stew to spinach and potato salad with honey

NEPALI & NEWARI RESTAURANTS

There is a growing number of restaurants around town that specialise in Nepali (mostly Newari) food (see p102 for a rundown of Newari dishes). These run the gamut from unobtrusive little places in Thamel to fancy converted palaces with cultural shows, linen tablecloths and 15-course banquets. Most places offer a set meal, either veg or nonveg, and you dine on cushions at low tables. The 'cultural shows' consist of musicians and dancers performing 'traditional' song and dance routines. The whole thing is pretty touristy, but it's a fun night out nonetheless. At most places it's a good idea to make a reservation during the high season.

Thamel House Restaurant (Map p136; ☎ 4410388; www.thamelhouse.com; dishes Rs 75-200, set meal veg/nonveg Rs 500/600) In Paknajol, this place is set in a traditional old Newari building and has bags of atmosphere. The food is traditional Nepali and Newari. Ask for the à la carte menu and choose individual dishes or go for the blowout set meal. It's also open for lunch.

Bhanchha Ghar (Map p116; ☎ 4225172; Rs 1000 per person, beer Rs 250; ☎ 11am-10pm) In a traditional three-storey Newari house in Kamaladi, just east of Durbar Marg, next to a Ganesh Temple. There is an upstairs loft bar where you can stretch out on handmade carpets and cushions for a drink, snacks and the obligatory cultural show (try to arrive before 7pm). You can then move downstairs to take advantage of an excellent set menu of traditional Nepali dishes and delicacies. Musicians stroll between the tables playing traditional Nepali folk songs. It's not all that cheap but the food is very good and you can also order a la carte.

Bhojan Griha (Map pp110-11; ☎ 4416423; www.bhojanagriha.com; set menu Rs 997, plus 13% tax) In the same vein as Bhanchha Ghar, but perhaps more ambitious, is Bhojan Griha in a recently restored 150-year-old mansion in Dilli Bazar, just east of the city centre. It's worth eating here just to see the imaginative renovation of this beautiful old building, once the residence of the caste of royal priests. Again, dancers and musicians stroll through the various rooms throughout the evening, representing Nepal's major ethnic groups. Most of the seating is traditional (ie, on cushions on the floor), although these are actually legless chairs, which saves your back and knees. In an effort to reduce waste, plastic is not used in the restaurant and mineral water is bought in bulk and sold by the glass.

Nepali Chulo (Map p115; ☎ 4220475; www.nepalichulo.com, set menu Rs 960, mains Rs 280, plus 13% tax) Closer to Thamel is this new restaurant in the wing of a 157-year-old Rana palace, the Phora Durbar. Most people choose the fixed menu of 11 dishes but ordering à la carte is possible. Choose between floor or table seating but get here before 7pm to catch the live music and dance. A *chulo* is a Nepali-style stove.

Krishnarpan Restaurant (Map pp110-11; ☎ 4470770; ☎ dinner only) 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. Prices range from US\$22 for a six-course meal up to a wallet- (and stomach-) busting US\$34, 22-course extravaganza. Bookings are advisable. If you are coming on Friday, arrive in time for the 6pm dance show in the hotel courtyard.

Baithak Restaurant (Map p116; ☎ 4267346; 12-course set menu Rs 945, mains Rs 250; ☎ 10am-10pm) At Babar Mahal Revisited, southeast of the centre (see p153), this restaurant has a dramatic and regal, almost Victorian, setting, with crystal and linens and where diners are attended by waiters dressed in royal costume and watched over by looming portraits of various disapproving Ranas. The menu features 'Rana cuisine', a courtly cuisine created by Nepali Brahmin chefs and heavily influenced by North Indian Mughal cuisine. The setting is probably the most memorable part of the restaurant. Vegetarians will find plenty to eat here. The attached K2 Bar has a nice terrace for a predinner drink. A *baithak* is a royal suite or state room.

mustard dressing, and the excellent pepper steak (Rs 295) is already a post-trekking classic. There is always some promotion going on here (currently free fried potato skins and an Irish coffee for every main course) and live European football is broadcast on the TV. But really, guys, Barbara Streisand on the stereo – what were you thinking?

Everest Steakhouse (Map p136; steaks Rs 300-450) If K-Too represents the new breed of slickly-run Thamel eateries, then the Everest Steak house is very much old-school. The red curtains haven't changed in 20 years and the waiters can be fascinatingly rude – it's hard to know if they really are taking the piss or not. The menu spreads to 30 types of steak (garlic, pepper, Mexican, even a curry steak...), all imported from Kolkata (Calcutta) and served up rare unless you request well done. It's very popular with European trekking groups but, then, after three weeks' of daal bhaat, anything tastes good.

La Dolce Vita (Map p136; ☎ 4700612; pasta Rs 175-225, pizzas Rs 250) Thamel's best attempt at comfort Italian cuisine offers up such delights as gnocchi, spinach and walnut ravioli, tasty baked potatoes (Rs 55), tiramisu (Rs 125) and wines by the glass (from Rs 175). Choose between the rustic red and white tablecloths and terracotta tiles of the main restaurant, a rooftop garden, the yummy-smelling espresso bar or sunny lounge space; either way the atmosphere and food are excellent. It's right on the corner opposite Kathmandu Guest House.

Nuovo Marco Polo (Map p136; ☎ 4413724; www.kathmanduitalianfood.com; Bhagwan Bahal; mains Rs 150-250) Further out on the fringes of Thamel, this restaurant is also good for authentic Italian food, including Italian *permigiano* cheese and good espresso.

Pilgrims Feed 'N Read (Map p136; ☎ 4700942; mains Rs 110-180, set meal Rs 250) Keep walking past the Self-Help section of Pilgrims Book House and you'll end up in this quiet and classy café, with indoor and garden seating. The focus is on herbal teas (Rs 60 per pot) and vegetarian Indian food (including *dosas*) and there's no shortage of reading material.

Northfield Café (Map p136; breakfasts Rs 150-190, mains Rs 180-270; ☎ 7am-10.30pm) Next door to Pilgrims, this open-air spot is the place for serious breakfast devotees (huevos rancheros included), with fresh juice and smoothies, and bottomless filter coffee (Rs 50). The

Mexican and Indian tandoori dinner dishes are excellent and the sunny garden is a real plus in winter.

New Orleans Café (Map p136; ☎ 4700736; mains Rs 220-390) Hidden down an alley near the Brezel Bakery, New Orleans boasts an intimate candlelit vibe and a great selection of music, often live. It's a popular spot for a drink (see p151) but the menu also ranges far and wide, from Thai curries to Creole jambalaya (Rs 220).

Krua Thai Restaurant (Map p136; ☎ 4414291; soups Rs 210-270, mains Rs 230-430) North of Sam's Bar, this is another good open-air Thai place. The food is reasonably authentic (ie spicy), with good curries, tom yam soup and papaya salad, although some dishes taste more Chinese than Thai. The Thai chef recently passed away so it remains to be seen whether standards will suffer.

Himalatte Café (Map p136; ☎ 4256738; mains Rs 180-285) A North-American coffeehouse feel here, right down to the comfy sofas and Friday night music jams (courtesy of the owner's band). The impressive array of coffees are some of the best in Thamel (Rs 40-70), as are the cheeseburgers (Rs 195). The menu ranges from Caesar wraps to fruit crêpes and the Tuesday and Thursday set meal specials are good value. We recommend the excellent chicken saltimbocca (Rs 210) – cheese, sage and bacon inside a chicken breast. If you are feeling a little fragile, try the hangover helper – carrot juice with ginger and parsley.

Fire & Ice Restaurant (Map p136; ☎ 4250210; 219 Sanchaya Kosh Bhawan, Tridevi Marg; pizzas Rs 240-350, glass of wine Rs 195; ☎ 11am-10pm) Rumour has it that this was a favourite of Prince Dipendra and his girlfriend, before he assassinated his entire family in 2001 (see p38). Regardless, it's an excellent and informal Italian place, serving some of the best pizzas in Kathmandu, imported Italian soft-serve ice cream, seriously good coffee and rousing opera – Italian, of course. It's very popular and you'll need a reservation in the high season.

Dechenling Beer House (Map p136; ☎ 4412158; mains Rs 120-350, fixed meal Rs 390) Quality Tibetan and Indian food is served up in this attractive beer garden and it's one of the few places in town to offer interesting Bhutanese dishes (Rs 220), such as *kewa dhatsi* (potatoes and cheese curry). The *thentuk* (Tibetan noodle soup, Rs 120) is the best

in Thamel. If you can't decide, opt for a set meal at Rs 350 to Rs 390.

Via Via Café (Map p136; ☎ 4700184; www.viaviacafe.com; closed Mon; mains Rs 120-240) This century-old red house at the end of Seven Bends is part of a Belgian-run chain of travellers' cafés that is part restaurant, part lounge bar, and part cultural centre. The food is European, with some specifically Belgian touches, and the brunch menu includes French toast, crêpes and Greek omelette with spinach, cheese and black olives (Rs 120). If you like the food, sign up for the weekly cookery course (see p105).

Kilroy's of Kathmandu (Map p136; ☎ 4250441; www.kilroygroup.com; ☎ 7am-10pm) Named after the self-promoting Irish owner and head chef, this place is a definite cut above the average Thamel restaurant. The menu ranges from Balti chicken (Rs 295) to beef and Guinness hotpot (Rs 355) and interesting hybrids such as seafood *thugpa* (Tibetan noodle soup) with lemongrass (Rs 360), plus great desserts, especially the bread and butter pudding (Rs 185). The menu is posted online. There's always some kind of special going on, from Friday specials to champagne brunches. You can sit inside, or outside in the shady garden, complete with waterfall.

Freak Street (Jochne)

Freak St has a number of restaurants where you can find good food at lower prices than Thamel. Even if you're staying in other areas of the city it's nice to know there are some good places for lunch if you're sightseeing around Durbar Sq.

Diyalo Restaurant (Map p116) At the Annapurna Lodge, this is a cosy, popular little garden restaurant with a large menu, including crêpes, burgers and a few Chinese and Indian dishes, all for less than Rs 90.

Kumari Restaurant (Map p116; mains Rs 70-90, set Nepali meals Rs 60-80) Next to the Century Lodge, this friendly hang-out attracts the densest collection of dreadlocked travellers in Kathmandu and is one of very few places that seems to have hung onto some of the mellowness of times past. All the travellers' favourites are here and the prices are some of the best in town.

Ganesh Restaurant (Map p116; mains Rs 70-90) A slightly gloomy but good vegetarian place, with generous portions of such dishes as lasagne and spinach mushroom burgers.

There are two lovely *chaityas* in front of the restaurant.

Snowman Restaurant (Map p116; cakes Rs 30-40) A long-running and mellow place, this is one of those rare Kathmandu hang-outs that attracts both locals and backpackers, drawn to some of the best cakes and crême caramel in town. The chocolate cake has been drawing travellers for close to 40 years now (it's not the same cake...). When John Lennon starts singing 'goo goo g'joob' on the stereo it really does feel very 1967...

Festive Fare Restaurant (Map p115) Overlooking Basantapur Sq, this restaurant has unsurpassed views from its top-floor terrace and attracts more of a tour-group crowd. Prices are about double those of the Freak St cheapies.

A cheaper nearby option is **Café de Cosmopolitan** (Map p115; mains Rs 90-150).

Central Kathmandu

The restaurants in the Kantipath and Durbar Marg areas are generally more expensive than around Thamel, although there are a few exceptions. See the last few listings here and the boxed text, p147 for some of Kathmandu's worthwhile splurges.

BUDGET

Dudh Sagar (Map p136; ☎ 4412047; Kantipath; dishes Rs 35-60; ☎ 8am-8pm) This is the place to reacquaint yourself with South Indian snacks like *dosas* (crêpes filled with potato curry) and *idly* (pounded rice cakes), topped off with Indian sweets like *barfi* (fudge) and *gulab jamun* (deep-fried milk balls in rose-flavoured syrup). A special *masala dosa* followed by a *dudh malai* (cream cheese ball in chilled pistachio milk) makes a great meal for less than Rs 70.

MIDRANGE & TOP-END

Koto Restaurant (Map p116; ☎ 4226025; Durbar Marg; dishes Rs 250-300, set menu Rs 500) 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 (see p145).

Seoul Arirang (Map p116; ☎ 4232105; Durbar Marg; mains Rs 200, set menus Rs 350-500) 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; Rs 200). The owner is Korean but the chefs are Nepali. The picture menu guarantees no nasty surprises.

Ghar-e-Kebab (Map p116; dishes Rs 350-500) Outside and run by the Hotel de l'Annapurna, this has some of the best North Indian and tandoori food in the city. Indian miniatures hang on the walls and in the evenings classical Indian music is played and traditional Urdu *ghazals* (love songs) are sung. A complete meal for two, including drinks, costs about Rs 2000, and you get stung for bread and rice at Rs 100 each. Try one of the traditional sherbets for dessert.

Chimney Room (Map p116; ☎ 4248999; mains Rs 600-1100; ☺ dinner only) At the Yak & Yeti Hotel, northwest of the centre, this is one of Kathmandu's most famous restaurants, named after the famous open fireplace. It now serves mostly continental cuisine, with the excellent borscht and chicken à la Kiev two of the last links with its Russian roots.

1905 (Map p136; ☎ 4225272; Kantipath; mains Rs 200-700) You can dine with ambassadors and 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!). Lunches are a great deal, with wraps and specials around Rs 195 (the chef's roots are showing with the cheese and Branston pickle sandwich) and there's a great Sunday brunch. Dinner is a more serious affair so dress up for dishes such as Roquefort, apricots and Asian pear salad Rs 395, or salmon fishcakes in saffron and vermouth sauce (Rs 675).

Elsewhere

BUDGET

Lazimpat Gallery Café (Map p116; ☎ 4428549; Lazimpat) This friendly place occupies a unique niche, somewhere between a greasy spoon and an art café, with a menu boasting both sausage, bacon and beans (Rs 110) and carrot and coriander soup (Rs 60). It's run by a British former VSO worker and so is popular with local volunteers. It's great for cheap, light lunch if you're out in Lazimpat.

MIDRANGE & TOP-END

Mike's Breakfast (Map p110-11; ☎ 4424303; breakfasts Rs 160-290; ☺ 7am-9pm) As the name suggests, this place specialises in big American-style breakfasts (Mike is a former Peace Corps worker), and it does them well. It's a bit out of the way but it's certainly a laid-back way to start (and occupy most of) the day, in the attractive, leafy garden of an old Rana house. The breakfast menu includes excellent waffles with yogurt, fruit and syrup (Rs 210) and great eggs Florentine (Rs 260); all prices include organic Nepali coffee. Lunch extends to Mexican quesadillas and salad/soup combos. Friday is pizza night and the barbecue fires up Sunday evenings (Rs 250). While you're here take a look at the excellent Indigo Gallery (see p127). The restaurant is in the suburb of Naxal, about a 15-minute walk from the top end of Durbar Marg.

Royal Hana Garden (Map p116; ☎ 4416200; www.royalhana.com; Lazimpat; mains Rs 260-420; ☺ 10.30am-10pm) This place is a bit of a find – there are two outdoor hot-spring baths (admission Rs 280, includes towel and shampoo) 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.

Chez Caroline (Map p116; ☎ 4263070; mains Rs 200-550; ☺ 9.30am-10pm) In the Babar Mahal Revisited complex (p153), Caroline's is a swanky (pretentious even?) outdoor restaurant popular with expat foodies. It offers French-influenced main courses such as 'wild mushroom tart with walnut sauce', quiche and crêpes, plus a wide range of patisseries, teas and wines. After a swift couple of glasses of pastis (liquorice-flavoured liqueur), head upstairs for some steamy salsa dancing at Latin Quarter (see p152).

Dwarika's Hotel (p144) has a candlelit Friday night poolside barbecue (Rs 675 plus 13% tax) and dance show that makes for a great splurge. See the boxed text, p147 for details of the hotel's Krishnarpan Restaurant.

Quick Eats

Weizen Bakery (Map p136; mains Rs 150-280) Down from the Yin Yang, this bakery restaurant serves good vegetarian food. It has a pleasant garden and is a nice quiet place for breakfast, with newspapers to read and

music playing in the background. The bakery out front has decent cakes, breads (particularly the pretzels!) and pastries, with bakery goods (but not cakes) discounted by 50% after 8pm.

Pumpernickel Bakery (Map p136) Bleary-eyed tourists crowd in here every morning for fresh croissants, yak-cheese sandwiches, pastries and filter coffee in the pleasant garden area at the back. The restaurant is self service.

Hot Bread (Map p136) The bakery in the supermarket across the road does a roaring trade in sandwiches, bread rolls, pizza slices and pastries. The ham and cheese rolls (Rs 65) make a great lunch on the run. Bakery items are discounted by 50% after 9.30pm.

Brezel Bakery (Map p136) This nearby bakery is also pretty good, especially for breakfast.

BK's Place (Map p136; chips Rs 75-125) Has a steadily growing reputation for good old-fashioned chips (French fries), with a variety of sauces, as well as good momos. It's a tiny place, west of the Rum Doodle.

Sandwich Point (Map p136; rolls Rs 50-70; ☺ 24hr) A tiny place back at the main Thamel Chowk, this is a good little spot for a wide variety of rolls; perfect for the late-night munchies.

Dolma Momo Center (Map p136) This is typical of the Tibetan eateries dotted around town – it's just a hole in the wall, and momos and a few stains are the only things on the menu. But the momos are excellent, and at Rs 12 to Rs 16 for a plate and Rs 5 for milk tea, they're top value. Head south from the Hotel Utse.

Bakery Café (Map p136; ☎ 4422616; www.nanglos.com; Tridevi Marg; ☺ 7am-9.30pm) With branches on the edge of Thamel, on Durbar Marg and in Patan, this buzzy chain offers excellent value coffees and snacks for when you just need to take a break over an Americano and a plate of momos. The management have commendably hired deaf staff, which is perhaps one reason why the music is so bad. See also p193.

Self-Catering

For trekking food such as noodles, nuts, dried fruit and cheese, there are a number of small supermarkets in Thamel, including the Best Shopping Centre (Map p136) on the edge of Thamel at the end of Tridevi Marg.

The Bluebird supermarkets (Map p136) have a wide variety of goods. There's a

branch by the main bridge across the Bagmati River to Patan, and another branch in Lazimpat, near the French embassy (both are on Map p116). The Kasthamandap Bazaar Supermarket (Map p116), just off Durbar Marg, also has a good selection.

DRINKING

There are a few bars scattered around Thamel, all within a short walk of each other. Just poke your nose in to see which has the crowd and style that appeals. Most places have a happy hour between 5pm and 8pm, with two-for-one cocktails.

Rum Doodle Restaurant & Bar (Map p136; ☎ 4701 208; mains Rs 220-350; ☺ 10am-10pm) Named after the world's highest mountain, the 40,000½ft Mt Rum Doodle (see p21), this famous bar is still milking a dusty (1983!) *Time* magazine accolade as 'one of the world's best bars'. It's long been a favourite meeting place for mountaineering expeditions – Edmund Hillary, Reinhold Messner, Ang Rita Sherpa and Rob Hall have left their mark on the walls – and trekking groups have added hundreds of giant yeti trek report footprints. The restaurant serves up steaks, pasta and pizza and there's often live music. You can eat here free for life – the only catch is that you have to conquer Everest first!

Maya Cocktail Bar (Map p136; cocktails Rs 200; ☺ 4pm-11pm) is a long-running favourite. The two-for-one cocktails between 4pm and 7pm (with free popcorn) are a guaranteed jump-start to a good evening.

Pub Maya (Map p136) This place is associated to the Maya, but it's noisier.

Tom & Jerry Pub (Map p136) Close to Nargila Restaurant, this is a long-running, rowdy upstairs place with pool tables (Rs 50 per half hour) and a dance floor. Thursday is ladies' night.

Jatra (Map p136; ☎ 4211010; mains Rs 160-220) An intimate and pretty cool venue for a beer or dinner, with indoor and outdoor seating. Friday nights bring live music jams; on Wednesdays ladies get a free cocktail.

J-Bar (Map p136; ☎ 4418209; ☺ 6pm-midnight Tue-Fri & Sun, 3pm-2am Sat; drinks Rs 250-300, plus 13% tax) At the back of Himalayan Java, the J-Bar kicks in around 10pm when the Thamel bars shut and keeps going to 2am on Fridays and Saturdays. It's more like New York than Nepal, with cream leather interiors and pricey drinks, but it's a place

to meet Nepal's beautiful set. After 10pm access is via the side alley.

Sam's Bar (Map p136; ☎ 4-11pm) This is a cosy place with reggae every Saturday.

Full Moon (Map p136; ☎ 6pm-11pm; beer Rs 175) A tiny chill-out bar and den of iniquity, with a mixed Nepali-foreign clientele.

Via Via Café (see p146) This café has a small but sociable bar, with a happy hour from 4pm to 7pm, and Friday and Saturday night club music in the downstairs lounge.

Himalayan Java (Map p136; ☎ 4422519; Tridevi Marg; coffee Rs 45-70, breakfast Rs 120-160) Above the Bakery Café, this modern and buzzing coffeehouse serves good teas, coffees and snacks. There's a sunny balcony, lots of sofas, a nonsmoking section, and big-screen TV for the football, but from certain angles it feels a bit like a hotel foyer. It's popular with cool middle-class Nepalis.

Just Juice 'n' Shakes (Map p136; drinks Rs 25-90) Little more than a hole in the wall, hidden down a side alley, with just four cramped seats, but the juices, espresso and fruit/yogurt smoothies are just great. Try a carrot juice with lemon and ginger.

ENTERTAINMENT

Nepal is an early-to-bed country and even in Kathmandu you'll find few people on the streets after 10pm, especially when the capital's political situation is tense. Most bars close their doors by 11pm, though a few keep serving those inside.

Bands play at various Thamel restaurants on Friday and Saturday nights in the high season, particularly at Himalatte, Jatra and New Orleans – just follow your ears.

Beyond this, you could take in a Bollywood blockbuster or try to earn back your flight money at one of half a dozen casinos. Major sporting events such as Premier League football and Formula 1 grand prix are televised in all the major bars.

There are also several cultural performances which generally involve local youths wearing a variety of dress over their jeans and performing traditional dances from Nepal's various ethnic groups, accompanied by a live band that includes a tabla, harmonium and singer.

Casinos

Kathmandu's casinos are all attached to upmarket hotels and open 24 hours. Dust

off your tuxedo, polish up your best Sean Connery impersonation (*Aah, Mish Money-penny...*) and make a beeline for the **Casino Royale** (Map p116; ☎ 4271244), set in a former Rana palace at the Yak & Yeti Hotel. Hang around the tables long enough and staff will ply you with free drinks and a dinner buffet (with Russian dancing girls!).

The other casinos, like **Casino Anna** (Map p116; ☎ 4225228) at the Hotel de l'Annapurna, attract a mainly Indian crowd.

At all casinos you can play in either Indian rupees or US dollars, and winnings (in the same currency) can be taken out of the country when you leave. The main games offered are roulette and blackjack, and the main clients are Indians. Nepalis are officially forbidden from entering.

Music & Dance

There are a few performances of Nepali music and dancing in the restaurants of the top-end hotels but little is scheduled.

The **New Himalchuli Cultural Group** (Map pp110-11; ☎ 4415280; himalchuli@enet.com.np) is a dance troupe that performs nightly at a crummy restaurant in Lazimpat. The hour-long show costs Rs 350 and starts at 7pm in summer (October to April) and 6.30pm in winter (May to September). Ring in advance to check that a performance is planned.

Kalamandapa Institute of Classical Nepalese Performing Arts (Map p116; ☎ 4271545; admission with tea Rs 400) Nepali dances (and occasional theatre) are performed here at the Hotel Vajra most Tuesdays at 7pm. Phone ahead to check schedules. There are sometimes Newari music concerts (Rs 500) on Fridays or Sunday evenings.

Gandharba Association (Map p136; ☎ 4700292; http://gandharbas.nyima.org) This is an organisation for the city's musician caste. There are informal music jams between 5pm and 7pm at their offices on the third floor above Equator Expeditions (tourists are welcome) but they play in local restaurants such as the Northfield Café (see p148). Individual musicians offer music lessons for around Rs 100 per hour (see p357) and they also sell their own CDs.

Upstairs Jazz Bar (Map p116; ☎ 4410436) This place in Lazimpat has live jazz in its tiny bar every Wednesday and Saturday that is patronised by an interesting mix of locals and expats.

Latin Quarter (Map p116; 4254260; www.salsanepal.com; drinks Rs 200-300) 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 (see below).

Weekly **sitar concerts** accompany dinner at Feed 'N' Read Restaurant in Pilgrim's Book House in Thamel.

Cinemas

As made famous by the title of Pico Iyer's book *Video Night in Kathmandu* (see p22), a dwindling number of Thamel restaurants show Western movies almost as soon as they hit the cinemas in the West. There's no charge to watch the films as long as you order dinner but the food is average at best and the film sound quality is often atrocious, since the films are pirate copies (it's not uncommon to see someone's head walking past the camera on screen!) You'll see the movies chalked up on pavement blackboards.

Kathmandu Guest House Minitheatre (Map p136; admission Rs 200) The Kathmandu Guest House shows nightly films in its 25-seater theatre.

Jai Nepal Cinema (Map p116; ☎ 4442220; www.jainepal.com; stalls Rs 100-140, balcony Rs 175) On the south side of the new Royal Palace; shows some foreign films and is the best in town.

Kumari Cinema (Map p116) This cinema has the same owners and prices as the Jai Nepal and shows more foreign films in English.

Elsewhere, Bollywood-style Hindi and Nepali films are the usual fare. Entry charges are minimal (Rs 30) and the films are well worth attending, since understanding the language is only a minor hindrance to enjoying these comedy-musical spectacles. Indians call them 'masala movies' as they have a little bit of everything in them.

SHOPPING

Everything that is turned out in the various centres around the valley can be found in Kathmandu, although you can often find a better choice, or more unusual items, in the centres that produce the items – Jawlakhel (southern Patan) for Tibetan carpets; Patan for cast metal statues; Bhaktapur for wood-carvings; and Thimi for masks.

Thamel in particular can be a pretty stressful place to shop, what with all the tiger balm sellers, rickshaw drivers and high speed motorbikers. Dive into a side street or garden haven when stress levels start to rise.

Amrita Craft Collection (Map p136; ☎ 4240757; www.amrita.com.np) This is a good place to start, with a broad collection of crafts and clothing. Subtract 20% from its fixed prices and you get a good benchmark for what you should aim to pay on the street if you don't mind haggling. The branch across the road has the larger selection.

Babar Mahal Revisited (Map p116) This unique complex of old Rana palace outbuildings, originally built in 1919, has been redeveloped to house a warren of chic clothes shops, designer galleries, handicraft shops and even a wine shop, as well as a couple of top-end restaurants and bars. It's aimed squarely at local expats and wealthy locals so prices are as high as the quality. It's southeast of the city near the Singh Durbar government offices.

The royal palace of the Singh (or Singha) Durbar, now home to Nepal's government, was built in 1907. With over 1700 rooms, it was once the largest private residence in Asia, until fire destroyed 90% of the complex in 1973.

Aroma Garden (Map p136; ☎ 4420724) As the name suggests, this is Thamel's sweetest-smelling shop. It's a good one-stop shop for incense, essential oils, soaps and almost anything else that smells great.

There are dozens of shops in Thamel that sell hand-made paper products from photo albums to paper lamps. One of the better shops is **Paper Park** (Map p136; ☎ 4700475; www.handmadepaperpark.com), next to the Hotel Marshyangdi.

Bronze Statues

Patan is the place to shop for statues (see p194). This is one area where research is vitally important, as quality and prices do not necessarily correlate. The best shops in central Kathmandu are on Durbar Marg; **Curio Arts** (Map p116; ☎ 4224871; www.devasarts.com) is a good place to start.

Clothing

Kathmandu is the best place for ready-to-wear Western clothes. Embroidered T-shirts

are a popular speciality (our favourite has 'Same Same...' on the front and '...But Different' on the back!) and you can custom any design or logo, preferably on your own higher quality t-shirt.

A few tailors in central Thamel and Lazimpat stock Chinese silks and can make pretty much anything that you can explain, including copies of your favourite shirt or dress. There are lots of funky hats, felt bags, jumpers etc, particularly on the twisting road known as Saatghumthi, but please think twice before buying those red stripy juggling pants... Always try clothes on before handing over the cash.

Popular and unique items include felt bags (from Rs 250) and impossibly cute baby-sized North Face fleeces (Rs 300) or Tibetan jackets.

Curios

An endless supply of curios, art pieces and plain old junk is churned out for the tourist trade. Most does not come from Tibet but from the local Tamang community and doesn't date back much further than, well, last month, but that doesn't put most people off. Basantapur Sq is the headquarters for this trade, but before you lock wits with these operators, visit the **Amrita Craft Collection** (Map p136; ☎ 4240757).

Gems & Jewellery

Buying gems is always a risky business unless you know what you're doing – see p359 for a warning on gem scams. Be immediately suspicious of anyone who tells you that you will be able to make an enormous profit – if this was possible and legal they would do it themselves.

There are dozens of jewellery shops in Kathmandu – including in Thamel, on New Rd and Durbar Marg. The merchandise is produced both in India and locally. When walking between Thamel and Durbar Sq you'll often come across the tiny silver workshops.

The prices for silver jewellery are very low compared with what you'd pay at home, and many people have jewellery made to order. You buy the stones or draw the design and they'll make it up, usually in just a day or two. The quality is usually excellent, but be sure to agree on a price before giving the go-ahead.

Handicrafts

For general handicrafts such as handmade paper, ceramics and woodwork – much of it made by disadvantaged or minority groups – the best places are the showrooms of the nonprofit development organisations that are based in the Kopundul district of Patan. Two of these shops, **Mahaguthi** (Map pp110-11; ☎ 4438760; ☎ 10am-6.30pm) and **Sana Hastakala** (Map pp110-11; ☎ 4436631), have outlets in Lazimpat. See p194 for details.

Other nearby fair trade shops include **Folk Nepal** (Map p116; ☎ 4426009; ☎ 9am-7pm) and **Third World Craft Nepal** (Map p116; ☎ 2090500; www.thirdworldcraft.com), which although not as interesting are worth a quick look.

Maheela is an NGO that makes clothes, cushions, scarves, bags and Lao-like weavings from *dhaka* cloth, as well as carpets. The organisation is part of the Women's Foundation (see p60) and 25% of profits are donated to women's shelters and to educational, legal assistance and counselling programmes, including for those affected by Nepal's political violence. Their showroom is currently in Patan but plans to move to Thamel in 2006.

Indian Goods

Since the war in Kashmir killed the tourist trade there, many Kashmiris have migrated to Nepal to sell traditional crafts such as carpets, cushions, tapestry, woollen shawls and papier-mâché. These guys are excellent salespeople, so buy with caution.

You'll also find a fair amount of embroidered clothing, cushions and bed linen from Gujarat and Rajasthan. Prices are higher than if you buy in India, but considerably less than if you buy in the West. Tridevi Marg is lined with colourful Indian bedspreads.

Photography

Bandari Photo Shop (Map p136; ☎ 4700604) in central Thamel is a reliable source of film and can print out digital shots, as can **Color Link** (Map p136; ☎ 4251468; JP Rd) further south and **Advanced Photo Finisher** (Map p136) in the north of Thamel.

Nicola Tridevi Marg (Map p136; ☎ 4250163); Lazimpat (Map p116; ☎ 4429284) is fairly reliable and can handle colour prints and E-6 or Ektachrome slides. Mounted slide processing will cost you around Rs 400 for 36 slides;

prints costs Rs 360 for 36 photos. There are branches in Thamel and Lazimpat.

Ganesh Photo Lab (Map p116; ☎ 4216898), in an alley southwest of Durbar Sq, is an unlikely looking but reputedly good place for B&W processing.

New camera equipment can be a good deal in Nepal and the range of cameras and lenses is good. New Rd in central Kathmandu is the best place to look. In Thamel try **Snapper Photo** (Map p136; ☎ 4700494; JP School Rd). Just be sure to ascertain whether what you are buying has an international warranty.

Tea

One reliable place for high-quality tea is **Tea World** (Map p136; ☎ 4252588), down a long corridor beside the Student Guest House in Thamel. The manager offers free tasting and will tell you a lot about the teas on offer. Prices range from Rs 100 to Rs 600 per 100g. See p370 for more on Nepali tea.

Thamel's tea shops carry a wide range of spices and masala mixes.

Thangkas

The main centre for thangkas is just off Durbar Sq, and this is where you'll find the best salespeople (not necessarily the best thangkas). For modern work there are plenty of places in Thamel.

Phapa Chengreshi Thangka Painting School (Map p136) You can see thangkas being painted on the spot at this school in Thamel.

Dharmapala Thangka Center (Map p116; ☎ 4223 715; www.thangka.de) Down an arcade, off Durbar Marg, this is a showroom for a local school of thangka painting. You can see the thangkas being painted at the nearby **workshop** (Map p116).

Tibetan Thangka Gallery (Map p116; ☎ 4428863) Just past the Hotel Ambassador, this is another good little place. Thangkas are painted on the spot (you can watch the artists at work) and many pieces from here end up in the Durbar Sq shops with higher price tags.

Tibetan Antiques

Kathmandu seems to be the global clearing house for a continual stream of antiques from Tibet, including thangkas, carpets, jewellery, storage chests, religious objects, saddles and clothing. Since the Chinese have done their utmost to destroy Tibetan culture over the last 50 years, removing some of

what remains to safety is perhaps more morally acceptable than some other 'collecting' that goes on in Nepal. There are a number of good shops on Durbar Marg, but don't go without a very healthy wallet.

For prayer flags and Tibetan and Bhutanese cloth, the best place is the street in front of the Katesimbhu Stupa. Choose between cheaper polyester and better quality cotton flags and remember, this is your karma that we are talking about.

Trekking Gear

Thamel has some excellent trekking gear for sale, though don't think that you are getting the genuine article. Most of the 'Columbia' fleeces and 'North Face' jackets are made locally but with imported fleece and Gore-Tex. See p328 for details on hiring and buying trekking gear. For reliable rentals and purchase try **Shona's Alpine Rental** (Map p136; ☎ 4265120).

One useful tip: you can revitalise an old down sleeping bag by having a reliable trekking shop add 500g to 1kg of down, for around US\$20 per kilo. Most places do an excellent job.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

See p376 for details of getting to/from Kathmandu both by air and by land from neighbouring countries.

Air

There are three important rules with flights out of Kathmandu: reconfirm, reconfirm and reconfirm! This particularly applies to Royal Nepal Airlines (RNAC); at peak times when flights are heavily booked you should reconfirm when you first arrive in Nepal and reconfirm again towards the end of your stay. Even this may not guarantee you a seat – make sure you get to the airport very early as people at the end of the queue can still be left behind. Thai doesn't require reconfirmation.

For a list of airline offices in Kathmandu see p376.

DOMESTIC AIRLINES

The various domestic airlines have sales offices around the city but locations and phone numbers seem to change with the weather. Anyway, it's far less hassle to buy tickets through a travel agency and you'll

probably get a better deal this way. See p376 for an overview of domestic airlines.

RNAC has computerised booking only on five routes: Pokhara, Jomsom, Lukla, Bharatpur and mountain flights. These can be booked at the main **RNAC office** (Map p116; ☎ 4248614; Kantipath; 🕒 9am-1pm & 2-6pm) on the corner with New Rd.

All other RNAC domestic flights are booked in a haphazard manner at a small **domestic office** (Map p116; ☎ 4224497, 4226574; 🕒 10am-1pm, 2-5pm) just around the corner. Here it seems the booking clerk keeps issuing tickets as long as people keep fronting up with money. With no apparent reservation charts to speak of, the potential for over-booking is high. Confirm more than once, and get to the airport early. The other domestic carriers are much better organised.

Bus

LONG DISTANCE BUSES

The **Kathmandu bus station** (Map pp110-11; Ring Rd, Balaju) is north of the city centre. It is officially called the Gongbu Bus Park, but is generally known as the Kathmandu Bus Terminal, or simply 'bus park'. This bus station is basically for all long-distance buses, including to Pokhara and destinations in the Terai. It's a huge and confusing place and there

are very few signs in English but most of the ticket sellers are very helpful. There's often more than one reservation counter for each destination. Bookings for long trips should be made a day in advance – Thamel travel agents will do this for a fee.

See the table, left for a list of long-distance destinations served from Kathmandu. Bus No 23 (Rs 7) runs to the bus station from Lekhnath Marg on the northern edge of Thamel.

The exceptions to this are the popular tourist buses to Pokhara (seven hours, Rs 250) that depart daily at around 7am from a far more convenient location at the Thamel end of Kantipath (see Map p136). Buses are comfortable and you get a fixed seat number with your ticket. For more details see p263.

Greenline (Map p136; ☎ 4257544, www.catmando.com/greenline; Tridevi Marg; 🕒 7am-5.30pm) offers air-con deluxe services that are considerably more expensive than the tourist buses (but include lunch). There are daily morning buses to Pokhara (US\$12, seven hours) and Chitwan (US\$10, six hours), with a lunch break and bus change in Kurintar. The Lumbini service is currently on hold. You should book a day in advance. They also offer 'drive there, fly back' packages to Pokhara (US\$59) and Chitwan (US\$59 to US\$67).

BUSES FROM KATHMANDU BUS STATION

Destination	Km	Duration (hr)	Cost (Rs) night/day	Ticket window
Besisahar	150	6	175 bus, 235 minibus	25 & 27
Bhairawa/Sunauli	282	8-10	280/230 (Rs 305 minibus)	23 & 24
Biratnagar	541	18	525/-	9
Birganj	298	10	250 night bus or minibus	15 & 17
Butwal	237	7-9	261/207, 282 minibus	22, 23, 24
Dhunche	119	8	-/159 minibus	28
Gorkha	141	5	-/120 big bus	25
Hile	635	24	608/-	7
Ilam	697	13	700/-	3
Janakpur	375	12	410/380 minibus	11 & 14 (day bus)
Kakarbhitta	610	18	607/530	2 & 29
Mahendranagar	695	18	667/667	6
Narayangarh	146	5	150	17
Nepalganj	531	12	520/500	19
Pokhara	202	8	200/250 minibus	15, 16 & 25 (minibus)
Tansen (Palpa)	302	10-12	300/235	23 & 24
Trisuli Bazaar	68	4	78	30

* Duration is daytime driving time. Night buses take around 50% longer, with a sleep stop

Golden Travels (Map p116; ☎ 4220036; Woodlands Hotel, Durbar Marg) also runs similar services, departing at 7am, to Pokhara (US\$12) and Sunauli (Rs 525), changing buses in Kalanki.

THE KATHMANDU VALLEY

Buses for destinations within the Kathmandu Valley, and for those on or accessed from the Arniko Hwy (for Jiri, Barabise, and Kodari on the Tibetan border) operate from the **City (Ratna Park) bus station** (Map p116), also known as the old bus stand, in the centre of the city on the eastern edge of Tundikhel parade ground. The station is a bit of a horror; drenched in diesel fumes, with no English signs and not much English spoken. Keep shouting out your destination and someone will eventually direct you to the right bus.

Services include to Banepa (Rs 20), Dhulikhel (Rs 25), Barabise (Rs 86; last bus 4pm), Kodari (7am, Rs 160), Jiri (departures between 5.30am and 8am; Rs 247, express Rs 290 to Rs 320). Unless otherwise noted buses depart when full.

As with anything in Nepal, however, there are exceptions to the rule. Buses to Bhaktapur (Rs 12, 45 minutes) run from a **stand** (Map p116) on Bagh Bazar.

A single direct minibus to Nagarkot (Rs 150, three hours) leaves from just north of Leknath Marg, north of Thamel, at 1.30pm – see the Greater Thamel map.

Buses to Pharping (Dakshinkali) leave from Shahid Gate (Martyrs' Memorial) at the southern end of the Tundikhel parade ground (Map p116), as well as the Ratna Park station.

Buses to Bungamati, Godavari and Chapa-gaon in the southern valley leave from Patan – see p195.

Car

Although you cannot rent cars on a drive-yourself basis they can be readily rented with a driver from a number of operators. The rental cost is high, both in terms of the initial hiring charge and fuel. Charges are as high as US\$50 per day, although they can be lower, especially if you are not covering a huge distance.

Wayfarers (see p114) can arrange car hire for a one-way drop to Pokhara (Rs 5500) or Chitwan (Rs 4100). Sightseeing around the Kathmandu Valley costs around RS 2500 per day depending on the itinerary.

Taxis

A better option than hiring a car is to hire a taxi for the day. Between several people, longer taxi trips around the valley, or even outside it, are affordable. A half-/full-day sightseeing trip within the valley costs around Rs 800/1500. For longer journeys outside the valley count on about Rs 2500 per day plus fuel, which is generally cheaper than hiring a car through a travel agency.

GETTING AROUND

The best way to see Kathmandu and the valley is to walk or ride a bicycle. Most of the sights in Kathmandu itself can easily be covered on foot, and this is by far the best way to appreciate the city. If and when you run out of steam, there are plenty of reasonably priced taxis available.

To/From the Airport

Kathmandu's international airport is called **Tribhuvan Airport** (Map pp110-11; ☎ 4472256) after the late king; the area's former name Gaucher (literally 'cow pasture') speaks volumes about Kathmandu's rapid urban expansion. See p376 for details of arrival and departure procedures.

Getting into town is quite straightforward. Both the international and domestic terminals offer a prepaid taxi service, currently fixed at Rs 350 to Thamel.

Once outside the international terminal you will be confronted by hotel touts, who are often taxi drivers making commission on taking you to a particular hotel. Many hold up a signboard of the particular hotel they are connected with, and if the one you want is there, you can get a free lift. The drawback with the taxis is that the hotel is then much less likely to offer you a discount, as it will be paying a hefty commission (up to 50% of the room) to the taxi driver. If you book a room in advance, most hotels will pick you up direct for free and there's no commission.

Public buses leave from the main road – about 300m from the terminal – but they're only really practical if you have very little luggage and know exactly how to get to where you want to go.

From Kathmandu to the airport you should be able to get a taxi for Rs 200 during daylight hours, around Rs 250 for a late or early lift.

Cycle-Rickshaw

Cycle-rickshaws cost Rs 30 to Rs 50 for most rides around town – because you have to negotiate all fares they can actually be more expensive than going by taxi. The tourist rate from Thamel to Durbar Sq is Rs 40. You *must* agree on a price before you start.

Bicycle

Once you get away from the crowded streets of Kathmandu, cycling is a pleasure, and if you're in reasonable shape this is the ideal way to explore the valley. See p80 for general information on biking and some route ideas.

Mountain bikes start at around Rs 150 per day for poor-quality Chinese- or Indian-made bicycles, fine for light use around the city. Imported bicycles can be rented for around Rs 400, and this is generally money well spent. Check the brakes before committing and be certain to lock the bike whenever you leave it.

For longer trips around the valley, the major mountain bike companies such as Dawn Til Dusk, Himalayan Mountain Bikes and Massif hire out high-quality bikes with front-suspension for around Rs 600. Bike Nepal and Nepal Mountain Bike Tours are a bit cheaper but the former's bikes are pretty battered. See p83 for company details.

If you want to make an early start, most are happy to give you the bike the evening before. For all bikes, negotiate discounts for rentals of more than a day.

Bus

Buses are very cheap, but often unbelievably crowded and limited in where they can go to in Kathmandu. The smaller minibuses are generally quicker and can be useful to places like Bodhnath and Patan if you can work out the routes.

Motorcycle

There are a number of motorcycle rental operators in Thamel. Officially, you will need an international driving licence, however no-one ever checks. You will have to leave a deposit of either your passport or air ticket. For Rs 350 per day you'll get a 125cc Indian-made Honda road bike, which is generally fine for road trips in the Kathmandu Valley. A 250cc trail bike costs around Rs 600 per day.

Singh Motorbike Centre (Map p136; ☎ 4418594; ☎ 8am-7pm) is a reliable place for in Thamel.

Pheasant Motor Bikes (Map p136) in the courtyard of the Pheasant Lodge has somewhat slippier prices, ranging from Rs 350 for a Yamaha RX 125 to Rs 600 for a Hero Honda or Exciter.

Motorcycles can be great fun outside the town, once you master the traffic. The main problem is getting out of Kathmandu, which can be a stressful, choking and dangerous experience. You will need a pair of goggles and some kind of face mask (available in most pharmacies).

Fuel currently costs Rs 67 (and rising) per litre and you'll only need a couple of litres for a day trip. Beyond the ring road petrol stations are few and far between.

Safa Tempos

These electric and ecofriendly three-wheeled vans serve various routes around town from a confusing collection of stands alongside the main post office on Kantipath (Map p116). Unfortunately few drivers speak English, there are few English signs and the routes can be fiendishly complicated. The tempos are green; petrol driven *tuk-tuk*'s are blue. Blue signs marked with the white outline of a tempo indicate a stop.

Taxi

Taxis are quite reasonably priced. The charge for a metered taxi is Rs 8 flagfall and Rs 3 for every 200m; drivers don't usually take too much convincing to use the meter for short trips, although from major tourist centres you may have to negotiate. Shorter rides around town (including to the bus station) rarely come to more than Rs 60. Night-time rates cost 50% more between 8pm and 6am. Most taxis are tiny Suzuki Marutis, which can just about fit two backpackers and their luggage.

Taxis can be booked in advance on ☎ 4420987, at night call ☎ 4224374.

Other approximate taxi fares from Thamel include:

Pashupatinath Rs 90

Bodhnath Rs 130

Patan Rs 110 to 130

Bhaktapur Rs 350

Changu Narayan Rs 600

Nagarkot Rs 700

Dhulikhel Rs 1000

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