

# Around the Kathmandu Valley



The fertile, mountain-sheltered Kathmandu Valley is the historic heart of Nepal, where the Himalaya's most sophisticated kingdoms rose and fell and where Nepali art and culture were developed and refined. In many ways the Kathmandu Valley *is* Nepal.

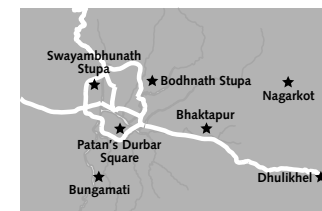
The artistic richness of the valley is reflected in the six Unesco World Heritage sites that lie scattered around the valley like jewelled confetti. They include the ancient Buddhist stupas of Swayambhunath (affectionately known as the 'Monkey Temple') and Bodhnath. The Pashupatinath Temple ranks as Nepal's most important Hindu site and attracts pious pilgrims and dreadlocked sadhus (holy men) from all over the subcontinent. Newari architecture reaches its pinnacle in the breathtaking Durbar squares of Patan and Bhaktapur, the third and most traditional of the valley's three former kingdoms. Just outside Bhaktapur is the Changu Narayan Temple, an open-air museum of stone-carved masterpieces. All these sites are easily visited as day trips from Kathmandu.

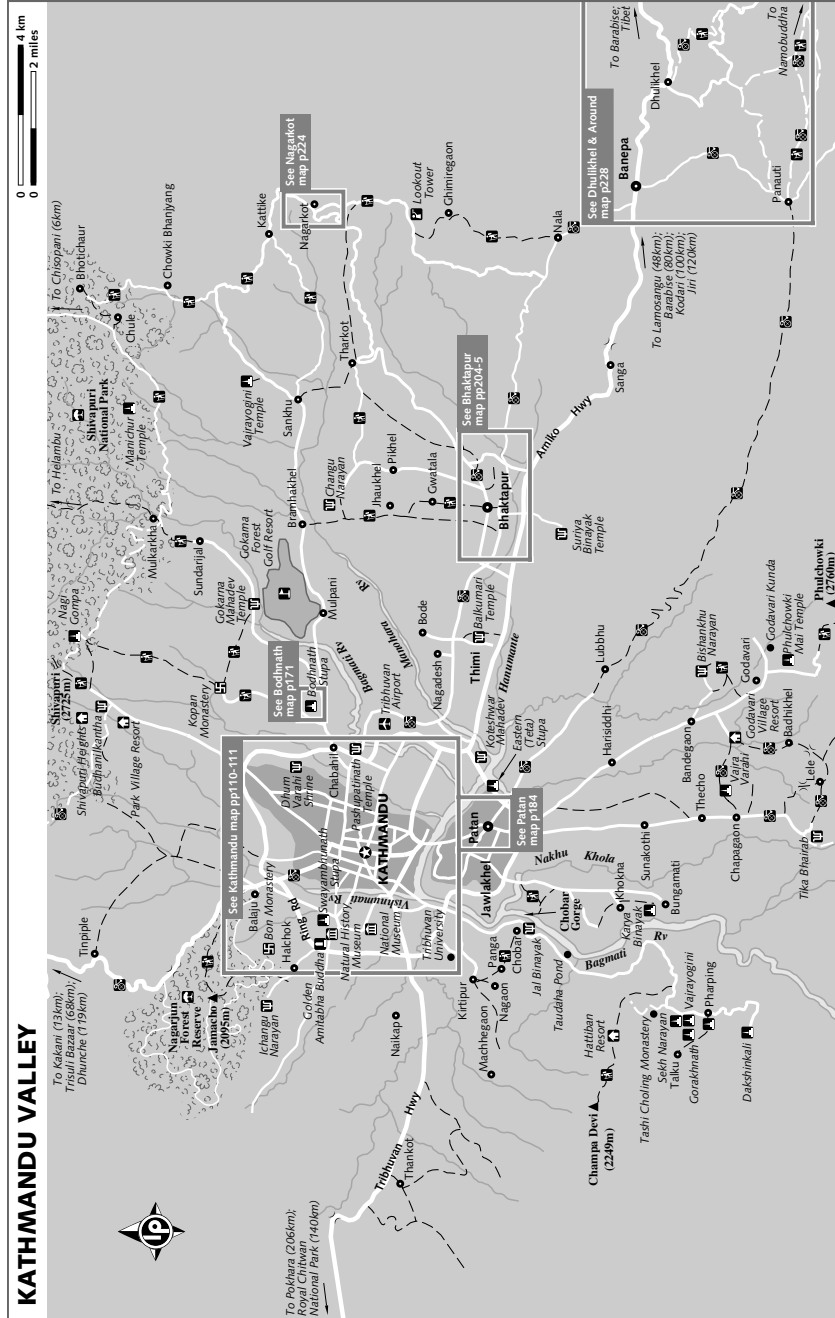
The valley has a host of lesser-known, but still wonderful, temples, viewpoints and traditional Newari villages, and half the fun is getting to and from these sights, by foot, mountain bike or motorbike. Many people miss out on these sights in a feverish rush to get to Chitwan, Pokhara or Everest, but the irony is that you'll find far fewer tourists just 10km outside Kathmandu than you will jostling for a view at Everest Base Camp.

With a rapidly expanding population of 1.5 million the valley has certainly changed over the years, but aspects of traditional life endure. Rural life continues to move to the rhythms of the seasons and spectacular festivals, and the timeless demands of the fields, the family and the gods remain the fundamental priorities of most people's lives.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- View the stunning Newari architecture of **Patan's Durbar Square** (p186), with its superb art museum
- Explore the fascinating backstreets of **Bhaktapur** (p196), Nepal's most intact medieval town
- Follow Tibetan refugees around the Buddhist stupa of **Swayambhunath** (p162), with its excellent views of Kathmandu
- Get a taste of Tibetan culture at the **Bodhnath Stupa** (p170), the largest in Nepal
- Order room service and savour the Himalayan views direct from your hotel balcony in **Nagarkot** (p223) or **Dhulikhel** (p227)
- Take a bike ride out to the lovely traditional Newari village of **Bungamati** (p220)





## History

An important entrepôt on the trade route from India to Tibet, the Kathmandu Valley has long been a cultural and racial melting pot, with migrations from all directions adding to the stew. This fusion has resulted in a unique Newari culture that found its expression in the valley's superb art and architecture. For more information on Newari culture see p44 and p47.

The Newari golden age peaked in the 17th century when the valley consisted of three glorious but rival city-states, all of which grew rich from the transit trade. It was during the reign of the Malla kings (see p30), particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries, that many of the valley's finest temples and palaces were built, as each kingdom strove to outshine the other.

The unification of Nepal in 1768 by Gorkha's King Prithvi Narayan Shah signalled the end of the Kathmandu Valley's fragmentation. Nepali, an Indo-European language spoken by the Khas of western Nepal, replaced Newari as the country's language of administration.

## Climate

In summer (May to September) Kathmandu and the valley can get very hot, with temperatures often above 30°C. Even in the winter months (December to February) the bright sunny days often reach 20°C, although with nightfall the mercury may plummet to near freezing.

It never snows in the Kathmandu Valley, but climb higher to the valley edge at Nagarkot and it gets significantly colder, so bring a jumper.

## Dangers & Annoyances

The Kathmandu Valley remains largely immune to the political violence wracking the

rest of the country, largely due to a strong-arm presence. Rural areas to the east and on either side of the road to the Tibetan border are considered Maoist strongholds.

Women in particular should avoid hiking alone in remote corners of the valley. Don't venture out during a *bandh* (strike) and avoid travelling outside the valley after dark. For general security advice see p359.

## Getting Around

If you intend to do any biking, hiking or just plain exploring it's worth getting Nepa Maps' 1:50,000 *Around the Kathmandu Valley* (Rs 450) or Himalayan Maphouse's *Biking Around Kathmandu Valley* (Rs 550), both are available in Kathmandu.

## BICYCLE & MOTORBIKE

By far the easiest and most economical way of getting around the valley is by bicycle or motorbike. Bicycle speed allows you to appreciate your surroundings and gives you the freedom to wander wherever you like. If you are aiming for somewhere on the rim of the valley, make sure you have a multigeared mountain bike (see p158 for places to hire bikes in Kathmandu). A reasonably fit person can cycle almost anywhere in the valley and return to Kathmandu before dusk.

See the Outdoor Activities chapter for details on the demanding but rewarding routes from Kathmandu to Dhulikhel (p84); Panauti to Patan (p85); and the Scar Route through Shivapuri National Park (p83).

Other excellent DIY day-trip itineraries that combine a great ride with some lesser-visited cultural gems include the following:

- Kirtipur to Chobar to Pharping and then Dakshinkali
- Bungamati to Khokna and onto Chobar
- Chapagaon to the Lele Valley to Badhikhel and to Bishanku Narayan

### TOP FIVE TEMPLES IN THE KATHMANDU VALLEY

The following five are our favourite temples in the valley:

- Changu Narayan (p165) – A treasure house of sculpture at this Unesco World Heritage site.
- Gokarna Mahadev (p212) – A visual A to Z of Hindu iconography.
- Vajrayogini Temple (p214) – Peaceful and powerful spot visited by troops of playing monkeys.
- Budhanilkantha (p182) – Impressive monolithic stone carving of a sleeping Vishnu.
- Dakshinkali (p219) – Spooky place of blood sacrifices and wrathful goddesses.

- Budhanilkantha to Nagi Gomba to Mul-karkha to Sundarjal to Gokarna Mahadev
- Nagarkot to Vajrayogini Temple to Sankhu and onto Bodhnath
- Bodhnath to Gokarna Mahadev Temple to Sankhu and Vajrayogini Temple.

### BUS & TAXI

Buses and minibuses service all of the roads, but although they're cheap, they are uncomfortable and limiting. If you are part of a group or if the budget allows, you could consider hiring a car or taxi (Rs 600 to 800 per half day, or Rs 1000 to 1500 per full day).

### FOOT

There are a great many interesting walks around the valley, the best of which link up some of the most interesting sights in the valley and avoid backtracking by bus or bicycle. See below for our favourite walks. Other excellent day hikes include from Nagi Monastery (in Shivapuri National Park) to Kopan Monastery, and from Nagarkot to Sankhu or Changu Narayan. For something more extreme, try the full-day cardio-hikes up to the peaks of Shivapuri, Phulchowki or Nagarjun.

If you don't have the time for an Everest or Annapurna trek but still want to hit some trails for a couple of days, it's possible to link up a series of day hikes around the valley to form a multiday trek of anything from two days to a week, staying in lodges and hotels and taking in a combination of Panauti, Namobuddha, Dhulikhel, Banepa, Nagarkot, Chisopani, Sundarjal, Budhanilkantha and Kakani.

#### TOP FIVE VALLEY HIKES

Get the blood moving with these excellent half-day hikes.

- Nagarkot to Nala via Ghimiregaon (p224)
- Dhulikhel to Panauti via Namobuddha (p230)
- Gokarna Mahadev to Bodhnath, via Kopan Monastery (p214)
- Kirtipur to the Jal Binayak Temple via Chobar (p216)
- Hattiban to Champa Devi (p219)

### ORGANISED TOURS

**Wayfarers Travel Service** (Map p136; ☎ 4266010; www.wayfarers.com.np; Thamel, Kathmandu) offers one-day guided walks of the settlements of the southern valley rim: Kirtipur, Khokna, Bungamati and Chapagaon. It also offers a three-day guided 'Valley Vistas' hike, which take in Sankhu, Namobuddha, Dhulikhel and Nagarkot. Day hikes cost US\$30 per person with a guide, transport, lunch and breakfast, or US\$20 if you travel by bus. Three-day hikes cost US\$110, including accommodation, lunch, breakfast and a porter guide.

See p82 for information on organised mountain-bike trips around the valley

## AROUND KATHMANDU

The sights in this section can all be visited as easy day trips, or even half-day trips, from the capital.

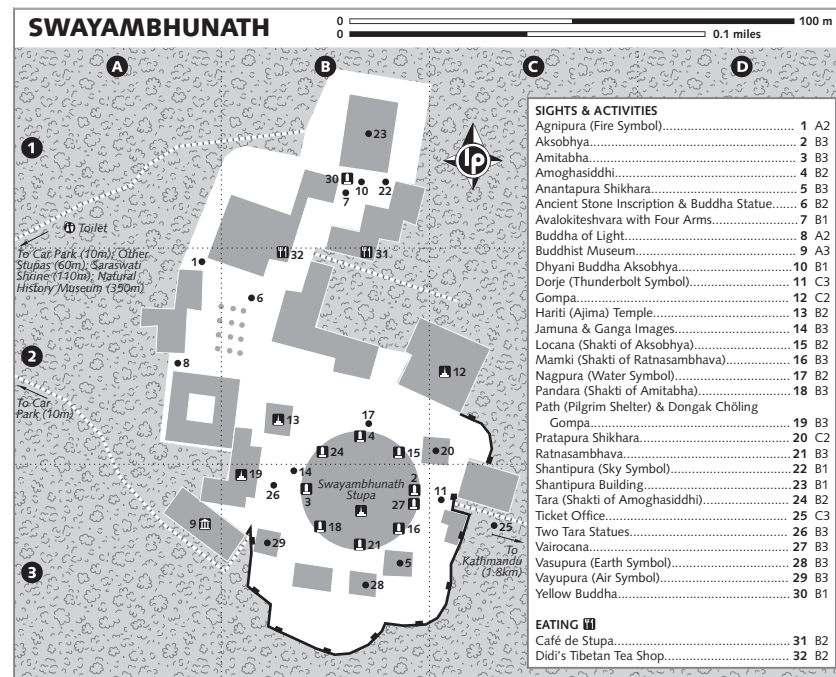
### SWAYAMBHUNATH

The great Buddhist temple of **Swayambhunath** (admission Rs 75), on the top of a hill west of Kathmandu, is one of the most popular and instantly recognisable symbols of Nepal. The temple is known affectionately as the 'Monkey Temple', after the large troop of handsome monkeys that guards the hill and amuses visitors and devotees with tricks (including sliding gracefully down the banisters of the main stairway to the temple).

Legends relate that the Kathmandu Valley was once a lake (geologists agree on this point) and that the hill on which Swayambhunath stands was 'self-arisen' (*swayambhu*), much like a lotus leaf risen from the muddy waters of the lake (see also the boxed text, p217). It is also said that Emperor Ashoka paid a visit to the site over 2000 years ago.

An inscription indicates that King Manadeva ordered work done here in AD 460 and certainly by the 13th century it was an important Buddhist centre. In 1346 Mughal invaders from Bengal broke open the stupa in the search for gold. King Pratap Malla added the stairway in the 17th century.

From its hilltop setting, Swayambhunath offers fine views over Kathmandu and the valley. It's particularly striking in the early evening when the city is illuminated, and the site is also very attractive under the soft glow of moonlight. There are several curio



shops around the stupa, as well as a couple of reviving cafés.

### Sights

#### EASTERN STAIRWAY

Although you can get closer to the temple by vehicle from the west, the long climb up the eastern stairway is by far the best way of approaching Swayambhunath. Look for the trinity of yellow-and-red stone Buddhas at the base of the hill. Halfway up the steps there is another small collection of stonework, including a scene depicting the birth of the Buddha, with his mother Maya Devi grasping a tree branch and the Buddha taking seven miraculous steps immediately after his birth. You'll see Tibetan astrologers reading fortunes here.

As you climb the final (steepest) stretch, look for the pairs of animals – Garudas, lions, elephants, horses and peacocks – the 'vehicles' of the Dhyani Buddhas. Near the end of the climb is the ticket office (there's another one around the back of the site). When you reach the top, remember to walk around the stupa in a clockwise direction.

### GREAT THUNDERBOLT

As well as building the great stairway, Pratap Malla added a pair of *shikharas* (cornucoblike Indian-style spires) and the stone snow lions and *dorje*, which visitors see immediately upon reaching the top of the stairs. *Dorje* is the Tibetan word for this thunderbolt symbol; in Sanskrit it is called a *vajra*. In Tantric thought the *dorje* symbolises male force or compassion and the bell symbolises female wisdom. Around the pedestal supporting Swayambhunath's mighty *dorje* are the animals of the Tibetan calendar.

### STUPA

Atop the soaring swell of the whitewashed dome, a gold-coloured square block depicts the watchful eyes of the Buddha, which gaze out across the valley in each direction. The question mark-like 'nose' is actually the Nepali number *ek* (one) and a symbol of the unity of all life. Between and above the two eyes is a third eye, which symbolises the Buddha's insight.

Set around the base of the central stupa is a continuous series of prayer wheels, which

## STUPA SYMBOLISM

The Buddhist stupas of Swayambhunath and Bodhnath are among the most impressive and most visited monuments in Nepal, as well as the most complex. The earliest stupas were simply domed burial mounds, built to hold relics of the Buddha, but they have evolved over the centuries to become complex structures that represent Buddhist philosophy.

The lowest level of the stupa is the plinth, which may be simply a square platform, but may also be terraced, as at Bodhnath. Atop the plinth is the hemispherical *kumbha* (dome; *kumbha* literally means 'pot'), which is freshly whitewashed each year.

Atop the dome is a *harmika*, a square base usually painted on each side with a pair of eyes. Topping the *harmika* is a tapering section of 13 stages, said to represent the 13 stages of perfection on the way to nirvana. The stupa is topped by a protective umbrella.

The five elements are also represented in the stupa's structure: the base symbolises earth; the dome water; the spire fire; the umbrella air; and the pinnacle ether.

pilgrims, circumambulating the stupa, spin as they pass by. Each prayer wheel carries the sacred mantra *om mani padme hum* (hail to the jewel in the lotus). The prayer flags fluttering from the lines leading to the stupa's spire also carry Tibetan mantras. Also here, at cardinal points, are statues of the Dhyanī Buddhas (Vairocana, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, Amoghāsiddhi and Aksobhya) and their shaktis (consorts).

## STUPA PLATFORM

The great stupa is only one of many points of interest at Swayambhunath. Two white temples in the Indian *shikhara* style, both dating from 1646, flank the *dorje* at the top of the stairs.

Behind the stupa, adjacent to a poorly lit museum of Buddhist statuary, is a **path** (pilgrim shelter) with an open ground floor and a Kargyud-school gompa above it.

North of the pilgrim shelter is the pagoda-style **Hariti (Ajima) Temple**, with a beautiful image of Hariti, the goddess of smallpox. This Hindu goddess (to the Newars she is known as Ajima), who is also responsible for fertility, illustrates the seamless interweaving of Hindu and Buddhist beliefs in Nepal.

Near the Hariti Temple are pillars on which figures of many gods and goddesses are seated. Look for the figures of Tara making the gesture of charity, with an upturned palm. Actually, there are two Taras, Green Tara and White Tara, who are sometimes believed to be the two wives, Chinese and Nepali, of King Songtsen Gampo, the first royal patron of Buddhism in Tibet. The Taras are two of the female consorts to the Dhyanī Buddhas. Nearby bronze images of

the river goddesses **Jamuna** and **Ganga** guard an eternal flame in a cage.

Back at the northeast corner of the complex is a Kargyud school gompa where, with a great deal of crashing, chanting and trumpeting, a service takes place every day at around 4pm. Inside the gompa is an inner pilgrim path that encircles a 6m-high figure of Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha.

Symbols of the five elements – earth, air, water, fire and ether – can be found around the hilltop. Behind the Anantapura *shikhara* are **Vasupura**, the earth symbol, and **Vayupura**, the air symbol. **Nagpura**, the symbol for water, is the muddy pool just north of the stupa, while **Agnipura**, the symbol for fire, is the red-faced god on a marble stone on the northwestern side of the platform. **Shantipura**, the symbol for the sky, is north of the platform, in front of the Shantipura building. Also here are statues of a yellow Buddha and an Avalokiteshvara with four arms.

## AROUND THE STUPA

A smaller stupa stands on the hillock just west of the main stupa, with an adjacent gompa, a huge tangle of prayer flags and an important **shrine** to Saraswati, the goddess of learning. At exam time, many scholars come here to improve their chances and schoolchildren fill the place during Basant Panchami, the Festival of Knowledge.

The **Natural History Museum** (admission Rs 30; ☎ 10am–5pm Sun–Fri, closed government holidays), below Swayambhunath by the road that climbs to the west entrance, has a quirky collection of stuffed animals (see p132), including a sarus crane, Himalayan monal pheasant and a pangolin.

There are Tibetan settlements, shrines and monasteries scattered around the base of the Swayambhunath hill. It's worth investing an hour or so to join the elderly Tibetan pilgrims in a clockwise *kora* (pilgrim circuit) of the entire hill, past hundreds of prayer wheels (some 9m tall), chapels, and stone carvings. The route dips to the left just before the Natural History Museum to skirt a pool and later passes a huge golden Amitabha Buddha statue on the west side, before returning via the north side of the hill.

## NATIONAL MUSEUM

Around 800m south of Swayambhunath, the **National Museum** (admission foreigner/SAARC/Nepali Rs 50/10/5; ☎ 10.30am–4.30pm Wed–Sun & 10.30am–2pm Mon–Apr–Oct, 10.30am–3pm Wed–Mon Nov–Mar) is a bit hit-and-miss, but has a fine collection of religious art and is worth a visit. A visit can easily be combined with a trip to Swayambhunath.

The history section has a rather eclectic collection that includes some moon rock and whale bones, a number of moth-eaten stuffed animals, some horrific-looking weaponry and a fine portrait gallery. The most interesting exhibit is a leather Tibetan cannon seized in the 1792 Nepal–Tibet War; the most eccentric is an electrical contraption that fires a normal rifle. The dull Numismatic Museum sets the tone for the Postal Museum, where some visitors have apparently passed out from the sheer tedium of it all.

The art gallery, in contrast, displays a superb collection of mainly Hindu statues and carvings (stone, wood, bronze and terracotta), housed in a 19th-century former Rana palace. Some pieces date to the 1st century BC. You can climb to the roof for fine views of Swayambhunath.

Also worth a look is the Gallery of Buddhist art, which offers an excellent and informative overview of Buddhist art and iconography, with a strong emphasis on Tibetan art.

Ticket sales stop an hour before closing time. It costs Rs 50 to bring in a camera. Bags must be deposited at the gate.

## Eating & Drinking

If you need a break, you can grab a reviving cup of milk tea at the hole-in-the-wall **Didi's Tibetan Tea Shop**, or stop and get lunch at tourist-oriented **Café De Stupa**.

## Getting There & Away

You can approach Swayambhunath by taxi (Rs 80), by bicycle or as part of an easy stroll from Kathmandu. See the map on pp110–11 for an overview of the area.

Taxis can drop you at the bottom of the eastern stairway or at the car park atop the western side. The latter is closer to the stupa but the steep eastern pilgrim stairway offers the more interesting approach.

**Safa tempo** No 20 (Rs 7) shuttles between Swayambhunath's eastern stairway and Kathmandu's Sundhara district (near the main post office).

## WALKING & CYCLING

There are two popular walking or bicycle routes to Swayambhunath – using both offers a pleasant circuit, either in the direction described or in reverse.

Starting at the Chhetrapati Tole junction near Thamel, the road descends to the Vishnumati River (with the Swayambhunath stupa clearly visible in the distance), and passes three interesting temples. The **Indrani Temple**, just beside the river on the Kathmandu side, is chiefly notable for the brightly coloured erotic scenes on its roof struts and its cremation ghats (riverside steps).

Across the river and just upstream is the **Shobabaghwati Temple**. A footpath runs from here up the steep hill to the **Bijeshwari Temple**, from where the road continues to Swayambhunath. This final section passes a couple of teahouses and shops selling rosary beads.

The alternative route starts at Durbar Sq, and follows Maru Tole (Pie Alley) down to the Vishnumati River, where a footbridge crosses to the western side by some stone cremation ghats. From here, the path heads north, then west, through a Tibetan district and past the National Museum.

## ICHANGU NARAYAN

At the edge of the valley floor, about 3km northwest of Swayambhunath, the shrine of **Ichangu Narayan** (admission free; ☎ dawn–dusk) – not to be confused with Changu Narayan east of Kathmandu – is one of the Valley's important Vishnu shrines. This two-storey, 18th-century temple is fronted by two square stone pillars bearing Vishnu's symbols, a *sankha* (conch) and a *chakra* (disc), atop a tortoise. The site was consecrated in 1200



and an earlier temple was built here after a famine in 1512. The walk here is probably of more interest than the temple itself.

The 3km road to Ichangu Narayan begins at Kathmandu's Ring Rd, opposite the statue of Amitabha Buddha, on the western side of the Swayambhunath hill. The track climbs a steep hill to Halchok village (look back for the views) and continues past three Mughal-style Shiva shrines and a bamboo swing (erected anew each year during the Dasain festival) to the temple compound. Going back to Kathmandu by bicycle is one long downhill breeze, but you'll certainly work up a sweat getting to the temple.

## PASHUPATINATH

Nepal's most important Hindu temple (admission Rs 250, under-10s free) stands on the banks of the holy Bagmati River, on the eastern fringes of Kathmandu, not far from the Tribhuvan Airport. Pashupatinath is also one of the most important Shiva temples on the subcontinent and draws devotees and sadhus (wandering Hindu holy men) from all over India.

Shiva is the destroyer and creator of the Hindu pantheon and is best known in his 'terrible' forms, particularly in Nepal as the cruel and destructive Bhairab, but he also has peaceful incarnations including those of Mahadev and Pashupati, the lord of the beasts. As the shepherd of both animals and humans, Pashupati shows Shiva's most pleasant and creative side.

Pashupati is considered to have a special concern for Nepal and, accordingly, he features in all official messages from the king. Before commencing an important journey, the king will always pay a visit to Pashupatinath to seek the god's blessing. Nepal's Dalit (untouchable) community was only allowed access to the shrine in 2001.

You can visit Pashupatinath as a half-day trip from central Kathmandu or en route to Bodhnath, as the two sites are an interesting short walk apart. Of all the valley's entry fees Pashupatinath offers the least value, as many of the temple buildings are closed to non-Hindus.

## Sights

### PASHUPATINATH TEMPLE

Non-Hindus are not allowed in the main temple so you'll have to be satisfied with

## RESPECT FOR THE DEAD

The cremations along the Bagmati often attract a crowd of tourists – cameras and video cameras at the ready – watching like vultures from the opposite bank. Photography is permitted, but please be discreet; many tourists behave with an amazingly insensitive disregard for the funeral parties, some even muscling their way between the mourners to get close-ups of the burning pyre! However extraordinary the sights might seem, this is a religious ceremony, often marking a family tragedy, and the participants should be accorded respect. Behave as you would wish people to behave at a funeral in your home town.

glimpses from outside the compound. From the main western entrance you may catch a flash of the mighty golden backside of Nandi, Shiva's bull. The temple dates from the 19th century but the bull is about 300 years old. The black, four-headed image of Pashupati inside the temple is said to be even older; an earlier image was destroyed by Mughal invaders in the 14th century.

For non-Hindus there is more to be seen by heading east of the taxi stand to the riverbanks, where you can look down into the temple from the terraced hillside on the opposite bank.

En route to the riverbanks you'll pass the **Panch Deval** (Five Temples), a former five-shrined complex that now acts as a social welfare centre for a heartbreaking collection of destitute local elderly. A donation box offers a way for visitors to directly contribute. The ticket office is just before the entry to the riverbank.

## THE RIVERBANKS OF THE BAGMATI

The Bagmati is a holy river and, like Varanasi on the Ganges, Pashupatinath is a popular place to be cremated. The burning ghats (called Arya Ghats) immediately in front of the temple, north of the footbridges, are for the cremation of royalty, though you'll often see ritual bathing taking place in the river here. Ten members of the royal family were cremated here after the massacre (see the boxed text, p38).

Just north of the main bridge across the Bagmati, but still on the western bank of the

river, is the 6th-century **Bachhareshwari Temple**, with Tantric figures, painted skeletons and erotic scenes. It is said that at one time the Maha Shivaratri festival activities included human sacrifices at this temple.

The six square **cremation ghats** just south of the bridges are for the common people and there is almost always a cremation going on here. The log fires are laid, the shrouded body lifted on top and the fire lit with remarkably little ceremony. It's a powerful place to contemplate notions of death and mortality.

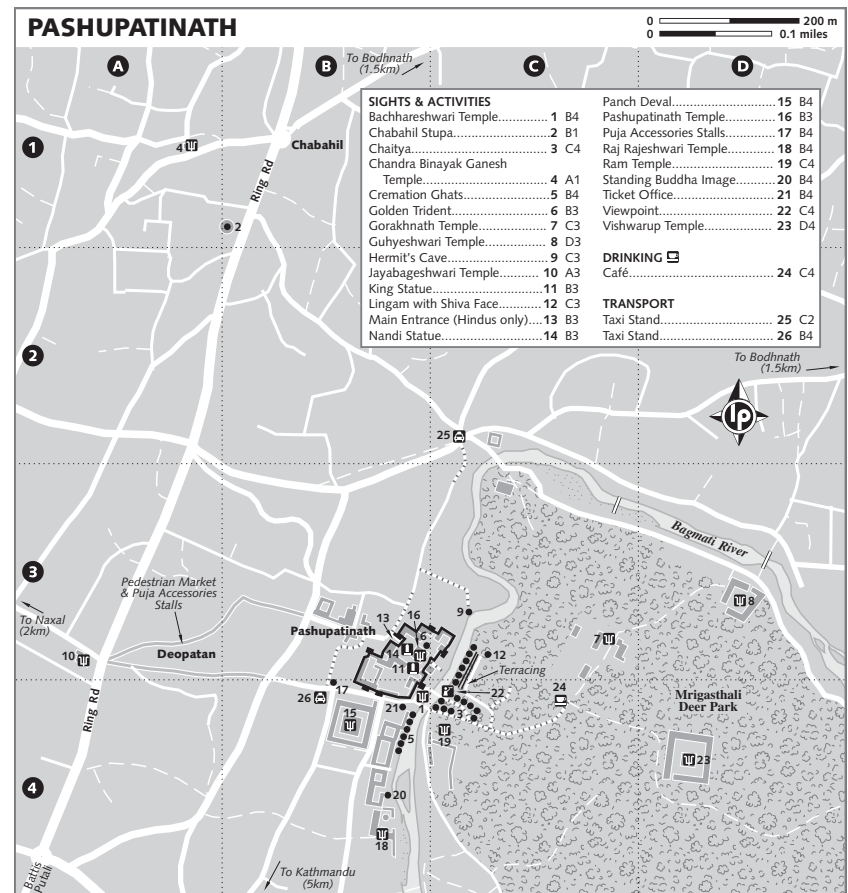
Right at the southern end of the western embankment, past the funeral pyres, is a half-buried, but still quite beautiful, 7th-century **standing Buddha image**.

Two footbridges cross the Bagmati River. Facing the temple from across the river are 11 stone *chaityas* (small stupas) each containing a lingam (a phallic symbol of Shiva's creative powers).

From the northern end of the embankment you can see the **cavelike shelters**, once used by hermits and sadhus. These days the yogis (yoga masters), babus and sadhus head for the elaborately frescoed **Ram Temple**, next to the main bridge, especially during the festival of Maha Shivaratri (see p168).

## THE TERRACES

Climb up the steps from the eastern riverbank to the terrace, where you can look down into the Pashupatinath Temple from



several convenient benches. The central two-tiered pagoda dates from 1696. Look for the enormous **golden trident** rising up on the right (northern) side of the temple and the golden figure of the king kneeling in prayer under a protective hood of *nagas* (snake spirits) on the left side. Behind the temple, you can see a brightly coloured illustration of Shiva and his *shakti* (female aspect) looking out over the temple.

At the northern end of this terrace is a **Shiva lingam** on a circular pedestal. A finely featured face of the god has been sculptured on one side of the lingam. It is an indication of the richness of Nepal's artistic heritage that this piece of sculpture, so casually standing on the grassy terrace, is actually a masterpiece dating from the 5th or 6th century!

The hillside is now home to the **Mrigasthali deer park**, a fitting blending of nature and religion, as Shiva is said to have frolicked here once in the shape of a golden deer.

#### GORAKHNATH & VISHWARUP TEMPLES

The steps continue up the hill from the terraces to the Gorakhnath Temple complex at the top of the hill. A red and white *shikhara*, fronted by a towering Shiva trident, is the main structure, but surrounding this is a jungle of temples, sculptures and *chaityas*, with Shiva imagery everywhere. Images of the bull Nandi stand guard, tridents are dotted around, lingams rise up on every side and monkeys play in the treetops, creating a peaceful and evocative atmosphere.

Non-Hindus can't enter the Vishwarup Temple, off to the east, so continue instead beyond the Gorakhnath Temple down to the river. You'll soon get views of the Bodhnath stupa rising up in the distance.

#### GUHYESHWARI TEMPLE

The Guhyeshwari Temple is dedicated to Shiva's *shakti* in her terrible manifestation as Kali. Entry is banned to non-Hindus, and the high wall around the temple prevents you from seeing anything except the four huge gilded snakes arching up to support the roof finial. Guhyeshwari was built by King Pratap Malla in 1653 and the temple stands in a paved courtyard surrounded by *dharamsalas* (pilgrims' resthouses).

The temple's curious name comes from *guhya* (vagina) and *ishwari* (goddess) – it's the temple of the goddess' vagina! Legend

has it that when Shiva was insulted by his father-in-law, Parvati was so incensed that she burst into flames and it was this act of self-immolation that gave rise to the practice of *sati* (or *suttee*), where a widow is consigned to the same funeral pyre as her deceased husband. The grieving Shiva carried off the corpse of his *shakti* but as he wandered aimlessly, the body disintegrated and this is where her *yoni* (genitals) fell.

#### Festivals & Events

Pashupatinath is generally busiest (with genuine pilgrims, not tourists) from 6am to 10am and again from 6pm to 7.30pm. The best time to visit the temple is on **Haribodhini Ekadashi** – 11 days after the full and new moon each month. On those days there will be many pilgrims and in the evening the ringing of bells will indicate that the *arati* (light) ceremony is to take place.

In February/March each year, the festival of **Maha Shivaratri** celebrates Shiva's birthday with a great fair at the temple. Pilgrims come from all over Nepal and India for this festival, and if you're in Kathmandu at the time you shouldn't miss it.

The **Bala Chaturdashi** fair takes place in November/December, bringing with it lots of pilgrims, stalls and a fairlike atmosphere. Pilgrims burn oil lamps at night and bath in the holy Bagmati the following morning. Pilgrims then move through the complex, scattering sweets and seeds for their deceased relatives to enjoy in the afterlife.

#### Getting There & Away

The most convenient way to Pashupatinath is by taxi (Rs 100 from Thamel), though it's also an easy (but stressful) bicycle ride.

Most people are dropped off at a stand southwest of the main temple but you can also approach from the ring road to the west, by the Jayabageshwari Temple (with its painting of Bhairab), through the suburb of Deopatan, where twin lanes are lined with stalls selling marigolds, incense, *rudraksha* beads (made from dried seeds), conch shells and other essential religious paraphernalia.

If you want to walk on from Pashupatinath to Bodhnath, it's a pleasant and short (20 minutes) walk through villages and farmland, past strings of prayer flags and *dhobi* washing, accompanied by the sounds of Hindi music. Take the footbridge across

#### DIPANKHA JATRA

The Dipankha Jatra is a remarkable day-long 60km pilgrimage that happens once every blue moon. Not literally a blue moon but almost; a planetary combination of a full moon in the month of Ashwin, the first or last day of the month, a Sunday or Monday, a lunar eclipse and other planetary configurations. Unsurprisingly, it doesn't happen very often – twice in the last 50 years, in fact. Over 100,000 people joined the pilgrimage in 2005 to 140 sacred sights in the Kathmandu Valley, including Patan, Bungamati, Ichangu Narayan, Swayambhurnath and Pashupatinath.

the river right in front of the Guhyeshwari Temple and head north for five minutes, then turn right at the signposted junction, by a tree temple. At the next junction follow the Buddha's example and take the middle (straight) path. You eventually come out on the main road, right across from the main Bodhnath stupa.

#### CHABAHIL

The Chabahil Stupa is like a small replica of Bodhnath, about 1.5km west of Bodhnath, in Kathmandu's northeastern suburbs. The original stupa is said to have been built by Ashoka's daughter, Charumati. It certainly predates Bodhnath, and around the main stupa are a number of small *chaityas* from the Licchavi period, dating back to some time between the 5th and 8th centuries. The site includes a 1m-high, 9th-century statue of a bodhisattva, which is claimed to be one of the finest pieces of sculpture in the valley.

Nearby is the small **Chandra Binayak Ganesh Temple** (Map p167), with a double roof in brass. Ganesh's shrew stands on a pillar in front of the shrine, waiting on the tiny image of the god inside.

#### BODHNATH (BOUDHA)

On the eastern side of Kathmandu, just north of the airport and around 6km from Thamel, is **Bodhnath** (admission foreigner/SAARC Rs 50/20), home to one of the world's largest stupas. The village, also known as Boudha (pronounced *boe-da*), is the religious centre for Nepal's considerable population of Tibetan exiles, and the sidestreets are full

of maroon-robed Tibetan (and foreign) monks, gleaming monastery roofs and shopfronts full of Tibetan texts and yak butter. This is one of the few places in the world where Tibetan culture is accessible, vibrant and unfettered.

Bodhnath has always been linked to Tibetan Buddhism and Lhasa. A major trade route coming from Lhasa went through Sankhu, and Bodhnath therefore lies at the Tibetan traders' entry to Kathmandu. One can easily imagine the traders giving thanks for their successful journey across the Himalaya, or praying for a safe return. People (including mountaineers and Sherpas) still come here to pray before undertaking a journey in the Himalaya.

Many of today's Tibetans are refugees who fled Tibet following the unsuccessful uprising against the Chinese Communists in 1959. They have been both energetic and successful in the intervening years, as the large houses surrounding Bodhnath testify. Apart from the local Tibetans and Nepalis there's a sizeable community of foreign Buddhist students, which contributes to occasional bitchy factional tensions between the different schools (apparently the lessons on nonattachment aren't going so well...).

Late afternoon is a good time to visit Bodhnath, when the group tours depart and the place once again becomes a Tibetan village. Prayer services are held in the surrounding gompas and, as the sun sets, the community turns out to circumambulate the stupa – a ritual that combines religious observance with social event. It's a wonderful feeling to be swept around by the centrifugal force of faith – remember to walk around the stupa in a clockwise direction.

Most people visit for an hour or two before returning to Thamel but the accommodation and facilities in Bodhnath are good and it's not a bad place to be based, especially if you have an interest in Tibetan culture. The atmosphere of cultural exchange and spiritual curiosity is unrivalled.

#### Information

Internet access is available at **Dharana Internet** (per hr Rs 30; ☎ 6am-10pm), on the west side of the stupa, and **Dharma Internet** (per hr Rs 25, ☎ 7am-9pm), which has broadband connections, north of the stupa. The ticket office is at the main southern entrance to the stupa.

## VISITING TIBETAN MONASTERIES

The crash of cymbals, thump of Tantric drums, murmuring of Tibetan chants and wafting smells of yak butter and juniper incense combine to make a visit to a gompa (Tibetan monastery) a dramatic and sometimes moving experience. What you'll soon notice beyond this is that monasteries share a remarkable continuity of design, decoration and symbolism.

All gompas are decorated with impressive mural paintings and thangkas (paintings on cotton, framed in brocade and hung). The subjects are usually either meditational deities, revered past lamas or ritual mandalas (diagrams that represent the forces of the universe and aid meditation). As you enter a monastery you will commonly see murals of the four guardian protectors and the Wheel of Life, a highly complex symbolic diagram representing the Buddha's insights into the way humans are chained by desire to the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Rigid rules govern these traditional arts, stressing spirituality, order and symmetry over originality, flair and personal expression.

Symbolism extends throughout the monastery: prayer wheels (sometimes 10m high) are filled with thousands of Buddhist prayers which are 'activated' with each turning of the wheel; prayer flags work on a similar precept and are printed in the five elemental colours. On the monastery roof you'll see the statue of two deer on either side of the Wheel of Law, symbolising the Buddha's first sermon at the deer park of Sarnath.

Past the rows of monks' cushions, the main monastic prayer hall is headed by an altar adorned with seven bowls of water, butter lamps, and offerings of grain and fruit. Here you'll find the main statues, often of the Past, Present and Future Buddhas, along with pictures of the Dalai Lama and other lamas related to the monastery's particular school of Tibetan Buddhism. Fierce protector deities often occupy side chapels and loose-leafed Tibetan manuscripts line the side walls.

## Cultural Considerations

Visitors are welcome in most monasteries, and to keep the good faith please bear in mind the following guidelines, particularly if prayers are in progress.

- Remove your shoes and hat before you enter a gompa.
- Ask before taking photos and avoid taking photos during a service.
- Smoking is not permitted anywhere in the main compounds.
- Do not step over or sit on the monks' cushions, even if no-one is sitting on them.
- During ceremonies, enter quietly and stand by the wall near the main entrance; do not walk around in front of the altar, or between the monks, or cross the central area of the temple.
- It is appropriate to make an offering, especially if you do take photographs. A *khata* (white scarf) is traditional, but these days rupees are also appreciated; monasteries depend for their existence on the donations of the faithful. Pilgrims touch the money to their forehead before donating it.

## Sights

### THE BODHNATH STUPA

There doesn't seem to be much agreement on how old the Bodhnath site is, but it is likely that the first stupa (*chörten* in Tibetan) was built some time after AD 600, after the Tibetan king, Songtsen Gampo, was converted to Buddhism by his two wives: the Nepali princess Bhrikuti and Wencheng Konjo from China. The stupa was said to have been built by a prince as penance for unwittingly killing his father. The current stupa structure was probably

built after the depredation of the Mughal invaders in the 14th century.

Stupas were originally built to house holy relics. It is not certain if there is anything interred at Bodhnath, but some believe that there is a piece of bone that once belonged to the Buddha.

Around the base of the stupa's circular mound are 108 small images of the Dhyani Buddha Amitabha (108 is an auspicious number in Tibetan culture). A brick wall around the stupa has 147 niches, each with four or five prayer wheels bearing the

mantra *om mani padme hum*. Access to the inner stupa is gained through the northern entrance, where there is a small shrine dedicated to Ajima, the goddess of smallpox. It's possible to walk up to the upper layers of the stupa. Pilgrims find a private space in the inner lower enclosure and perform full-body prostrations. It's a powerful, evocative place that's brought alive by the Tibetan pilgrims who circumambulate the stupa, twirling their prayer wheels, chatting and murmuring prayers.

For more on the symbolic structure of stupas, see the boxed text, p164.

## THE GOMPAS

A number of monasteries have been rebuilt since the 1960s but none compares with the great monasteries of Tibet, Ladakh or Bhutan. Most are closed during the middle of the day. See the boxed text, opposite for some guidelines on visiting the gompas.

**Tsamchen Gompa** is the only gompa that opens directly onto the stupa (on the western side). There are some fine paintings and a magnificent Maitreya (Jampa in Tibetan),

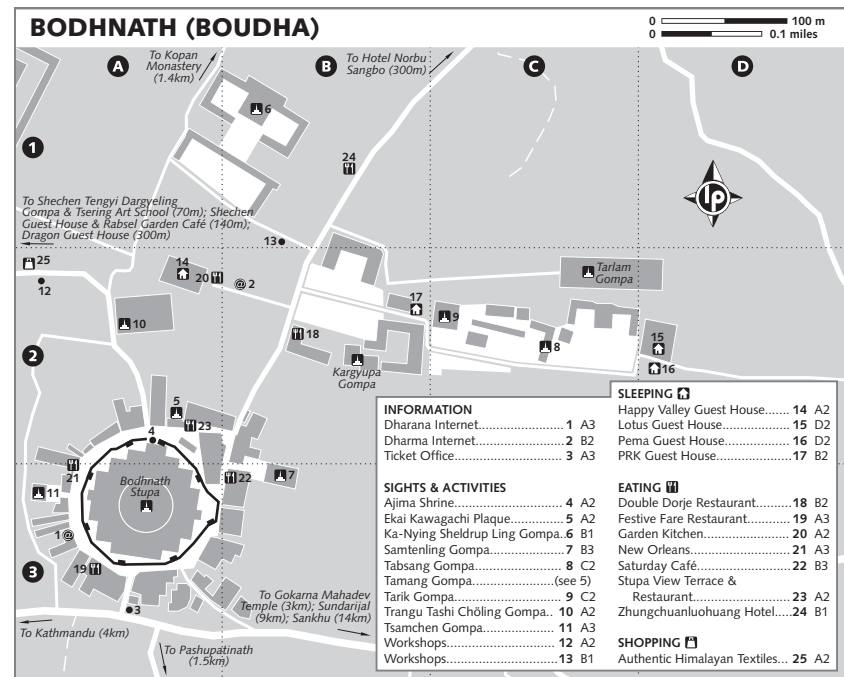
the Future Buddha, covered in beautiful embroideries. Don't miss the massive enclosed prayer wheel on the left of the entrance.

The new **Tamang Gompa** and Guru Lhakhang are currently being built on the north side of the stupa enclosure. A small plaque here honours Ekai Kawaguchi (1866–1945), the first Japanese to make it to Tibet (he passed through Bodhnath in 1899). For an excellent account of his remarkable travels see Scott Berry's book *A Stranger in Tibet*, available in Thamel bookshops.

East of the stupa, the Gelugpa **Samtenling Gompa** is the oldest monastery in Bodhnath.

The Sakyapa school **Tarik Gompa** to the northeast of the stupa does not have the imposing architectural unity of the others – it has obviously been built in stages over a number of years – but there are some high-quality frescoes inside the ground-floor chapel and you can climb upstairs to a splendidly adorned Sakyamuni Buddha. Just east of here is **Tabasang Gompa**, a Kargyud monastery.

North of here, down a side alley, is the large 'white gompa' of **Ka-Nying Sheldrup Ling**





**Gompa**, one of the largest monasteries in Bodhnath, with nice gardens and a richly decorated interior with some fine paintings and thangkas. The gompa hosts a popular annual seminar on Vajrayana training in November (see p357). You'll hear the tap-tap-tapping of handicraft workshops in the street leading up to the monastery.

Northwest of the stupa, the impressive **Shechen Tengyi Dargyeling Gompa** was established by the famous Nyingmapa lama Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche to act as an exiled version of Shechen Gompa in eastern Tibet. It has a large and thriving community of over 180 monks and is a popular destination for Tibetan pilgrims. The fine interior decorations are the work of artists from Bhutan. To the right of the main building is the Tsering Art School (see p181).

### Festivals & Events

The **Losar** (Tibetan New Year) festival in February or March is celebrated by crowds of pilgrims. Long copper horns are blown, a portrait of the Dalai Lama is paraded around, and masked dances are performed.

### Sleeping

There are a number of excellent guesthouses in the tangle of lanes north and east of the stupa, which offer an interesting and infinitely peaceful alternative to basing yourself in Kathmandu. Prices are marginally higher than in Thamel.

**Lotus Guest House** (☎ 4472320; s/d without bathroom Rs 250/350, with bathroom Rs 290/390, deluxe r Rs 490-750) The next-door Tabsang Gompa runs this very pleasant two-storey option. Rooms are spotlessly clean and spacious, and there is a large garden and sitting area. Upper-floor rooms are best.

**Pema Guest House** (☎ 4495662; pemaguesthouse@hotmail.com; r with/without bathroom Rs 650/450, deluxe r Rs 850) A multistorey place right across the lane from the Lotus Guest House, with comfortable rooms, clean bathrooms and lots of sun in winter. Ground-floor rooms are darker and slightly cheaper.

**Shechen Guest House** (☎ 4479009; www.shechen-guesthouse.com; s/d/tr Rs 580/800/1210, discounts of 15% May-Aug) There's a nice mix of tourists and dharma students in this well-run guesthouse attached to Shechen Gompa. Rooms are spacious and comfortable and there's a relaxing garden and excellent vegetarian

restaurant. It's an excellent choice if you are interested in Tibetan Buddhism.

**Dragon Guest House** (☎ 4496117; dragon@ntc.net.np; s/d without bathroom Rs 280/380, d with bathroom Rs 550) This friendly, family-run place is one of Bodhnath's best-kept secrets. The owners (from Mustang) cater to most needs, there's a small garden, a good vegetarian restaurant, a library and a useful little shop. The sunny side rooms on the upper floor are the best. It's in the backstreets northwest of the stupa; the easiest way to find it is to head north out of the main gates of Shechen Guest House.

**PRK Guest House** (☎ 4465055; www.sakyatharig.org.np; s Rs 700, d Rs 1000-1500) The Pal Rabten Khangsar is a new and surprisingly stylish guesthouse run by next-door Tharig Gompa. Rooms are well tended and decorated with Tibetan rugs and bedspreads, and there's a small library.

**Happy Valley Guest House** (☎ 4471241; happy@mos.com.np; s/US\$15-25, d/US\$20-30, ste US\$40-45, discounts of 25%) A modern midrange hotel north of the main stupa, this is another good choice, popular with visiting Western Buddhists and tour groups. It has excellent rooftop views out over the stupa, but only the deluxe rooms have views. There's a good library of books and magazines in the lobby.

**Hotel Norbu Sangpo** (☎ 4482500; www.norbu-sangpo.com; s/d US\$30/40, discounts of 50%) A highly recommended modern midrange place in the north of the town, with 26 bright, comfortable and spacious rooms and a nice garden. Corner rooms are generally the best. Suites with kitchen (but no appliances) and living room are available from US\$250 per month.

### Eating

There are a number of restaurants around the stupa itself. The views are often more inspiring than the food, but what views! Buddhist Bodhnath is nirvana for vegetarians.

**Double Dorje Restaurant** (☎ 4488947; dishes Rs 50-120) A cosy Tibetan-run place that's popular with backpackers and the local dharma crowd, both attracted to the sofa seating and low prices. There's plenty of Western food, plus Tibetan specials, but don't be in a hurry as service can be slow. This is a great place to try out Tibetan butter tea and *tsampa* (Rs 50; on the menu as 'champa') – roasted barley meal that tastes a bit like porridge.

(Continued on page 181)

(Continued from page 172)

**Stupa View Terrace & Restaurant** (☎ 4480262; mains Rs 140-250) For good food with a stupendous view this German-run place has a range of vegetarian dishes and good pizza (from a clay oven), plus some unusual dishes such as Middle Eastern *meze*, 'sliced zucchini with mint and olive-oil bread' and special candle-lit meals during the full moon.

**Saturday Café** (☎ 2073157; mains Rs 100-200) On the east side of the stupa square, come here for good cakes and cookies, organic coffee and frozen sorbet, plus light vegan and organic meals, such as ginger tofu and vegetables, or tomato, lentil and coriander soup. Come early for a seat on the rooftop.

**Festive Fare Restaurant** (set meals Rs 510, snacks Rs 200) On the southwest side of the stupa, this place serves up set meals to tour groups. The rooftop tables have fabulous views.

**Rabsel Garden Café** (Rs 85-120; ☎ 11am-8.30pm; Shechen Guest House) For some peace and quiet, head past the row of *chörtens* west of the Shechen Tengyi Dargyeling Gompa to this garden oasis. The vegetarian-only dishes stretch to lasagne, quiche, soup with homemade bread and veggie wraps, and there are good daily specials.

**Zhungchuanluohuang Hotel** (☎ 4495914; dishes Rs 100) This may be a bit of a mouthful, but it's a damn good-tasting mouthful. It's a bit unnerving to see Chinese characters in the heart of Tibetan Bodhnath but the authentic Sichuanese food is tasty. Try *gongbaojiding* (chicken with chilli and peanuts).

There are plenty of other places to eat, including a branch of **New Orleans** (see p148) and the relaxed **Garden Kitchen** (☎ 4470760).

For those on a shoestring budget, there are plenty of small Tibetan eating houses in the streets behind the stupa that serve up authentic Tibetan *thugpa* (noodle soup) – any place with a curtain across an open door is probably one.

### Shopping

There are lots of shops around the stupa selling Tibetan crafts, prayer wheels, prayer flags and Tibetan cowboy hats, most imported from China, but you'll have to negotiate hard to get a decent price.

**Authentic Himalayan Textiles** (☎ 4490073; ☎ 9am-7pm) 'From exile to textiles' could be the slogan here. It specialises in antique

striped Tibetan aprons, known as *pangden*, that have been collected from across the Himalaya (each region has its own characteristic design). Older pieces are used to create patchwork wall hangings, cushions and bags. Any spare threads are rewoven into carpets, even the carpet dust is reused in paper production! Products aren't cheap but you can be sure that only traditional vegetable dyes have been used.

**Tsering Art School** (☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat; Shechen Tengyi Dargyeling Gompa) The shop at this art school has an on-site tailor and workshop that produces thangkas, incense and clay sculptures. The shop also sells incense, CDs and a few Buddhist books.

Bodhnath has lots of tailors who can whip you up a traditional Tibetan dress or cloak in a couple of days.

### Getting There & Away

Buses to Bodhnath depart regularly from Kathmandu's City (Ratna Park) bus station (Rs 7, 30 minutes). The *Safa* tempos that leave from Kantipath in Kathmandu (routes 2 and 28) are slightly quicker. A taxi is by far the easiest option at around Rs 130. The road to Bodhnath is very busy and a bit of a nightmare for bicycles.

There's also an interesting short walk between Bodhnath and Pashupatinath (see p168), or you could combine Bodhnath with a visit to Gokarna Mahadev Temple and Kopan Monastery (see the boxed text, p214).

### AROUND BODHNATH Kopan Monastery

The **Kopan Monastery** (☎ 4481268; www.kopan-monastery.com), a popular centre for courses on Buddhism and other Tibetan-related subjects, stands on a hilltop to the north of Bodhnath. If you've ever thought of learning a little more about Tibetan Buddhism, this could well be the place to do it.

The centre has short courses on Tibetan medicine, thangka painting and other subjects, but the major attraction for Westerners are the 10-day residential courses introducing Buddhist psychology and philosophy. See p357 for more details.

Kopan's founder, Lama Thubten Yeshe, died in 1984, and a young Spanish boy, Osel Torres, was declared his reincarnation. The young reincarnation, who was partly the



inspiration for Bernardo Bertolucci's film *Little Buddha*, no longer resides at Kopan.

You can visit Kopan on the pleasant walk between Bodhnath and the Gokarna Mahadev Temple (see the boxed text, p214).

## BALAJU

The industrial centre of Balaju is less than 3km north of Thamel, just beyond the Ring Rd, but the capital has virtually swallowed up this nearby suburb. The only reasons to come here are to see the sleeping Vishnu image in Mahendra Park or hike in the nearby Nagarjun Forest Reserve.

The 18th-century gardens at Balaju, now known as **Mahendra Park** (admission Rs 5; ☎ 7am-7pm), are somewhat of a disappointment – there's a lot of concrete and litter. Most interesting are the statues in the right-hand corner as you enter the park. The famous Balaju Vishnu image is said to be a copy of the older image at Budhanilkantha.

Apart from the Vishnu image, there are a couple of small temples, an interesting group of *chörtens* (Tibetan Buddhist stupas) and lingams. The 19th-century **Shitala Mai Temple** stands in front of the Vishnu image. The 22 painted waterspouts from which the park takes its local name, Bais Dhara Balaju, are in the centre of the park.

## Getting There & Away

Tempos, buses and minibuses (No 23, Rs 5) go to Balaju from Lekhnath Marg, on the northern edge of Thamel. A taxi from Thamel costs around Rs 70.

## NAGARJUN FOREST RESERVE

On the hill behind Balaju is the walled **Nagarjun Forest Reserve** (admission per person Rs 10, per car/motorcycle/bicycle Rs 100/30/10; ☎ 7am-7pm, 7am-5pm in winter), also known as the Rani Ban (Queen's Forest), which is home to pheasants, deer, monkeys and a couple of military posts. This, along with the former Gokarna Park and Phulchowki, is one of the last significant areas of untouched forest in the valley.

A winding unpaved road and a much more direct footpath lead to the summit (2095m), which is a popular Buddhist pilgrimage site (the reserve is named after the Buddhist saint Nagarjuna). There's a small shrine at the summit to Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche in Tibetan) and a viewing tower offers one of the valley's widest moun-

tain panoramas, stretching on a clear day all the way from the Annapurnas to Langtang Lirung, via Machhapuchhare, Manaslu and the Ganesh Himal (a plaque at the bottom of the tower identifies all the peaks). There are also grand views of Kathmandu and its valley laid at your feet to the south.

It's possible to make an enjoyable two-hour cardio-hike up to the summit from near the main gate but there are some security issues to consider (see below).

An excellent sign by the main entry gate specifies an entry fee of Rs 100 if you want to bring an elephant into the park.

## Dangers & Annoyances

In October 2005 the reserve was temporarily closed to foreigners after two female foreign hikers were murdered here in separate incidents. Don't hike alone here, be sure to register at the main gate and sign out afterwards.

## Getting There & Away

The main entrance to the reserve, Phulbari gate, is about 2km north of Balaju (a 5km bicycle ride from Thamel). It's not a pleasant walk along the busy main road from Balaju so it makes sense to take a taxi to the gate. It's also possible to exit the park at the Mudkhu Bhanjyang gate, 3km further to the north-west, though check this when you register.

## BUDHANILKANTHA

Vishnu has many incarnations and in Nepal he often appears as Narayan, the creator of all life, the god who reclines on the cosmic sea. From his navel grew a lotus and from the lotus came Brahma, who in turn created the world. Ultimately everything comes from Vishnu, and at **Budhanilkantha** (admission free; ☎ dawn to dusk) the legend is set in stone.

The 5m-long image of Vishnu as Narayan was created in the 7th or 8th century from one monolithic piece of stone and is the most impressive, if not the most important, Vishnu shrine in the country. It was sculpted during the Licchavi period, probably somewhere outside the valley, and laboriously dragged here.

Narayan lies peacefully on a most unusual bed: the coils of the multiheaded snake, Ananta (or Shesha). The snake's 11 hooded heads rise protectively around Narayan's head. Narayan's four hands hold the four symbols of Vishnu: a *chakra* disc (represent-

ing the mind), a conch shell (the four elements), a mace (primeval knowledge), and a lotus seed (the moving universe).

During the early Malla period, Vishnuism went into decline as Shiva became the dominant deity. King Jayasthiti Malla is credited with reviving the popularity of Vishnu, and he did this in part by claiming to be an incarnation of the multi-incarnated god. To this day, the kings of Nepal make the same claim and because of this they are forbidden, on pain of death, from seeing the image at Budhanilkantha.

The sleeping Vishnu image, which lies in a small sunken pond enclosure, attracts a constant stream of pilgrims, and prayers take place at 9am every morning (the best time for photos due to the angle of the sun).

Vishnu is supposed to sleep through the four monsoon months, waking at the end of the monsoon. A great festival takes place at Budhanilkantha each November, on the day Vishnu is supposed to awaken from his long annual slumber (for dates see p366).

Non-Hindus cannot enter the enclosure, but there are some unobstructed views from outside the fence surrounding it. There is a Rs 5 parking fee.

## Sleeping

**Park Village Hotel** (☎ 4375280; www.kghhotels.com; r US\$60-90, discounts of 50%) If you need to escape Kathmandu, this peaceful midrange retreat just downhill from the Vishnu image may fit the bill. The villa-style accommodation is set in a five-acre garden, with a health club, spa, sauna and pool, and most rooms come with some sort of balcony. The excellent standard rooms are as good as the deluxe, so save yourself US\$10 for an Ayurvedic massage or drinks by the pool. The hotel is run by the Kathmandu Guest House (p135) and you'll often get the best discount (and maybe free transport) by booking there.

**Shivapuri Heights** (☎ 4372518, 9841 371927; www.escape2nepal.com; per person full board US\$55) Perched on the hillside above Budhanilkantha, this three-bedroom house floats high above the chaos of Kathmandu. The fully furnished house is equipped with stunning valley views, even from the living room, a CD/DVD player, library, open fireplace and even your own personal chef. As a secret getaway for a romantic couple (you're guaranteed to have the place to yourself) or a relaxing weekend

break from Kathmandu it's hard to beat. The ground-floor room has an ensuite bathroom and the two upper-storey loft rooms share a bathroom, so it's also great for families. Staff will help arrange transport when you make a booking (essential).

## Getting There & Away

The No 5 minibuses are the fastest and easiest way to get to Budhanilkantha (Rs 8, route 5), though there are also tempos (from Sundhara) and buses (from the Kathmandu City (Ratna Park) bus station). Pick up a ride from the northern end of Kantipath. The shrine is about 100m east of the terminus. From Thamel a taxi costs around Rs 200 one way.

By bicycle it's a gradual, uphill haul of 15km – hard, sweaty work rewarded with a very pleasant return trip. You could pause at the Dhum Varahi Shrine (see p127).

## SHIVAPURI NATIONAL PARK

The northern part of the Kathmandu Valley forms the **Shivapuri National Park** (☎ 4371644; admission foreigner/SAARC/Nepali Rs 250/25/10, car Rs 75, motorbike Rs 15), upgraded to national park status in 2002 to protect the valley's main water source, as well 177 species of birds, orchids, rhesus monkey and even, it is alleged, leopard and bear.

Several good hikes and mountain-bike routes criss-cross the park. The Scar Rd is one of the best biking routes in the valley and follows the old forestry road through the western part of the park – see p83 for details.

The Tibetan nunnery of **Nagi Gompa** is perched near the Tarebhir cliffs, on the lower slopes of the park, 3km from the main gate above Budhanilkantha. Bodhnath's Ka-Nying Sheldrup Ling Gompa holds retreats here for foreign students every November. It's a very bumpy 20-minute 4WD drive or a 1½ hour hike up to the nunnery, which has lovely views and is home to about 100 nuns.

From the gompa it's possible to hike up about 800 vertical metres (three hours) to Shivapuri peak (2725m), via Baghdwar (where the source of the holy Bagmati River pours out of two tiger mouths), then back down via the Pani Muhan water tank (near the park entrance), for a very long day of around seven hours. This is a serious hike that you shouldn't do alone. Take a map, plenty of water and preferably a guide.

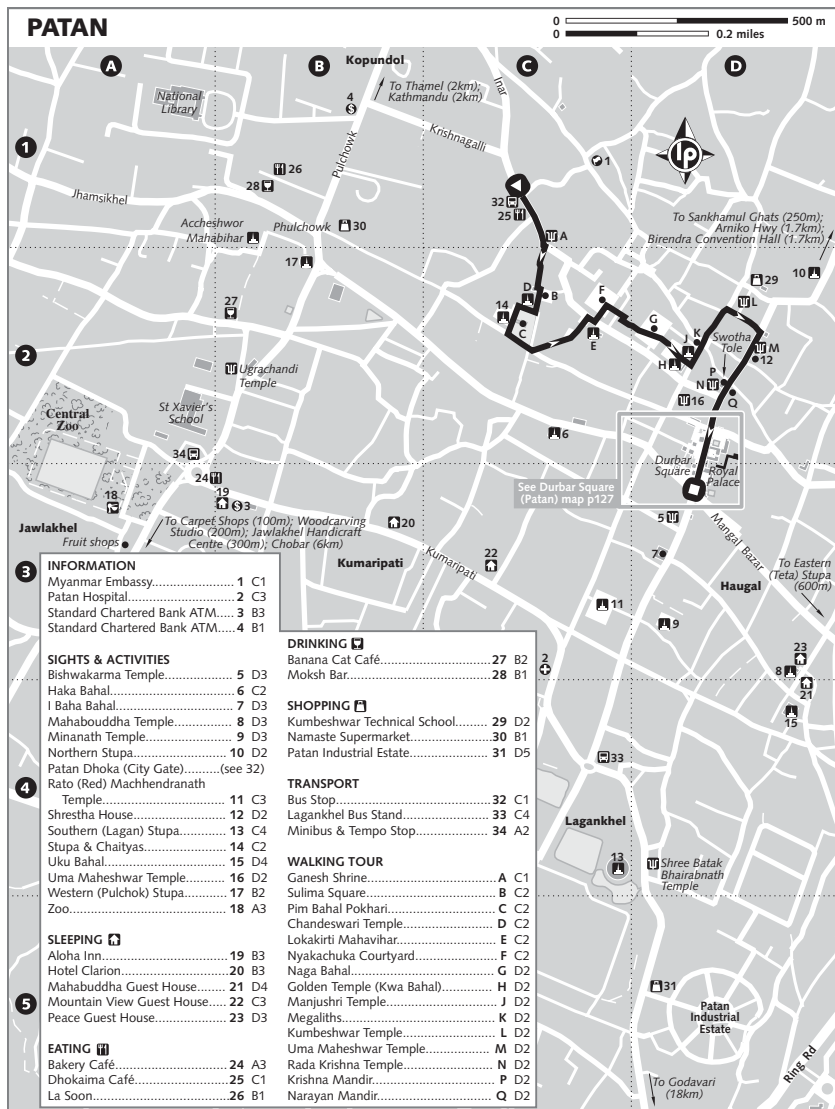
An excellent alternative is to walk downhill from Nagi Gomba to Budhanilkantha, or continue down the ridgeline south to Kopan (three hours) and Bodhnath.

Another good mountain-bike or hiking option from Nagi Gomba is to follow the dirt road east to Mulkarkha and then descend to Sundarjal – a mostly level 11km trip.

## PATAN

☎ 01 / pop 190,000

Patan (*pa-tan*) is separated from Kathmandu by the Bagmati River and is the second-largest town in the valley. It has historically been known by its Sanskrit name



### PATAN WALKING TOUR

The Patan Tourist Development Organisation has developed a fascinating walk that winds its way through the complex interlinked courtyards and laneways of the old town. The route gives a great insight into the communal lifestyle and traditional structure of Newari villages, with their many *bahal* (courtyards), *hiti* (water tanks) and *tun* (wells). It's great fun diving through the tunnelled passageways into hidden courtyards.

The walk is marked on Map p184 and outlined briefly here, but is described in more detail in a recommended small booklet entitled *Patan Walkabout* (Rs 100). The booklet is hard to find these days but you might be able to get a photocopied version from the Dhokaima Café (see p193). The walk starts at the Patan Dhoka, ends at Durbar Sq and takes about an hour.

### The Route

Walk through Pathan Dhoka to the nearby **Ganesh shrine (A)** and its popular water well, then turn right into **Sulima Sq (B)**, with its central 17th-century Shiva shrine. On the east side of the square is the semi-destroyed house of a famous 16th-century Tantric master; on the south side is a shrine with a fine wooden balustrade.

Continue south to the **Pim Bahal Pokhari (C)** pond and go round it anticlockwise, past the **Chandeswari Temple (D; 1663)** to a large 600-year old whitewashed stupa that was damaged by the Muslim invader Shams-ud-din in the 14th century.

At the road junction take the angled road northeast past some fine wooden windows to an open courtyard. On the south side is the **Lokakirti Mahavihar (E)**, once a monastery and now a school. As you enter the monastery compound you will step over the wooden frame of the chariot used to transport Rato Machhendranath during his festival (see the boxed text, p191). Masked dances are performed at festival time on the *dabali* (platform) in front of the monastery.

Look for the alley leading north off the square, signposted 'Bhaskar Varna Mahabihar', to the **Nyakachuka Courtyard (F)**. There's always something going on in this interesting courtyard. Look for the central stupas and the deities painted over the lintels on the right (east) side of the square. Head to the eastern wall, to the end of a row of four stupas, and go through the covered entrance, across an alley, into another courtyard, the **Naga Bahal (G)**. Walk past the statue of a golden bull to a *hiti* (water tank) and look for the painting of a *naga* (snake) on the wall behind, repainted every five years (most recently 2006) during the Samyak festival.

Go through the eastern passageway to a further courtyard with the red-walled Harayana library in the corner. Follow a diagonal path to a lovely stupa with prayer wheels in its four corners. Behind is an excellent carved wooden monastery shrine room and a sacred well. Pass through the nearby wooden *torana* into the back courtyard of the **Golden Temple (H; see p190)**. After visiting the temple, exit east onto the main street, turn left and after 10m, next to a money-changer, you'll see a sign for yet another courtyard, the **Manjushri Temple (J)**. From here continue north past a group of ancient **megaliths (K)**, possibly the oldest objects of worship in the entire Kathmandu Valley, down to the **Kumbeshwar Temple (L; see p190)**. From here head east and then south back to Durbar Sq via the **Uma Maheshwar Temple (M; see p190)** and Swotha Tole, with its pagoda-style **Rada Krishna Temple (N)**, Indian-influenced **Krishna Mandir (O)** and Garuda-faced **Narayan Mandir (P)**.

Lalitpur (City of Beauty) and its Newari name, Yala.

Patan's Durbar Sq is full of temples, with a far greater concentration of architecture per square metre than in Kathmandu or Bhaktapur. Moreover, more than 600 stupas and 185 *bahals* are scattered throughout the fascinating backstreets.

Patan makes a great full day trip from Kathmandu. It is possible to stay the night

here, although it's so close to Kathmandu that it's not really necessary. The choice of hotels and restaurants is limited, but you'll likely have the town largely to yourself at the beginning and end of the day.

### HISTORY

Patan has a long Buddhist history, and the four corners of the city are marked by stupas said to have been erected by the great

Buddhist emperor Ashoka around 250 BC. Inscriptions refer to the city's 5th-century palaces. The town was ruled by local noblemen until King Shiva Malla of Kathmandu conquered the city in 1597, temporarily unifying the valley. Patan's major building boom took place under the Mallas in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

## ORIENTATION

Durbar Sq forms the heart of Patan. From here, four main roads lead to the four Ashoka stupas (see the boxed text, p192). Jawlakhel, to the southwest of the city, has a major Tibetan population and is the centre for carpet weaving in the valley. South of Jawlakhel is the Kathmandu ring road.

Kathmandu buses stop at Patan Dhoka, the original entrance to the city, about a 15-minute walk from Durbar Sq. Taxis might drop you here, but will probably go to the south side of Durbar Sq, known as Mangal Bazar. The Lagankhel bus station, 10 minutes' walk south of Durbar Sq, near the Southern (Lagan) Stupa, has a few bus services to the southern Kathmandu Valley.

## INFORMATION

**Patan Hospital** (p184; ☎ 5521034), in the Lagankhel district, is the best in the Kathmandu Valley (see p113).

There are Standard Chartered Bank ATMs on Kumaripati and Pulchowk Rds.

## SIGHTS

Patan's sights are centred around its Durbar Sq but there are several temples located to the south. Don't miss the walking tour of the courtyards and pools to the north (see the boxed text, p185).

### Durbar Square (Patan)

As in Kathmandu, the ancient Royal Palace of Patan faces on to **Durbar Square** (Royal Square; Map p187; admission foreigner/SAARC Rs 200/25; ticket office ☎ 7am-7pm) and this concentrated mass of temples is undoubtedly the most visually stunning display of Newari architecture to be seen in Nepal.

The square rose to its full glory during the Malla period (14th to 18th centuries), and particularly during the reign of King Siddhinarayana Malla (1619–60). Patan's major commercial district, the Mangal Bazar, runs to the southern edge of the square.

The entry fee is payable at the southern end of Durbar Sq. For repeated visits to Durbar Sq ensure that your visa validity date is written on the back of your ticket.

### BHIMSEN TEMPLE

At the northern end of Durbar Sq, the Bhimsen Temple (Map p187) is dedicated to the god of trade and business, which possibly explains its well-kept and prosperous look. Bhimsen, a hero of the Mahabharata, was said to be super strong. Look out for the place settings with bowls, spoons and cups nailed on the roof struts as offerings.

The three-storey temple has had a chequered history. Although it is not known when it was first built, an inscription records that it was rebuilt in 1682 after a fire. Restorations also took place after the great 1934 earthquake, and again in 1967. A lion tops a pillar in front of the temple, while the brick building has an artificial marble façade and a gilded façade on the 1st floor.

### MANGA HITI

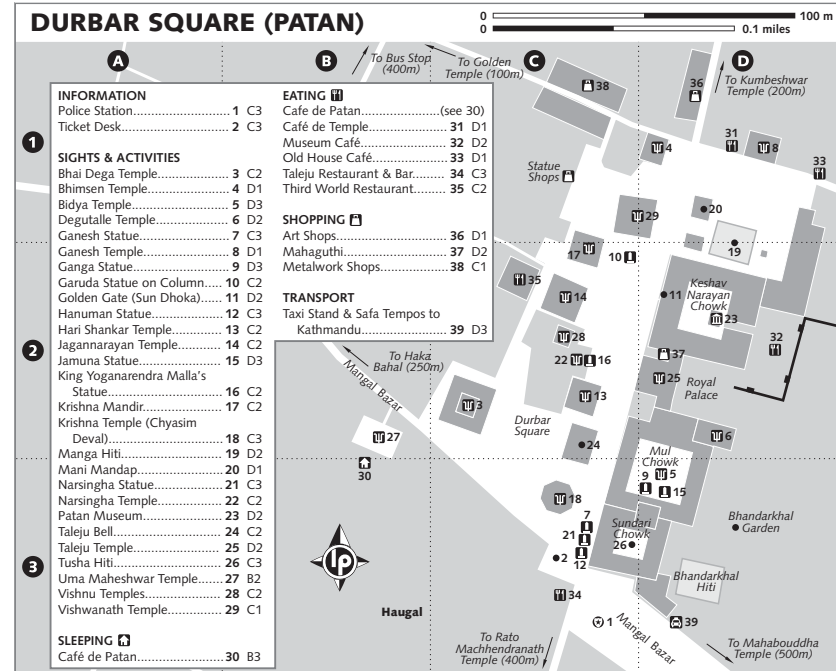
Immediately across from Bhimsen Temple is the sunken Manga Hiti (Map p187), one of the water conduits with which Patan, and even more so Bhaktapur, are so liberally endowed. This one has a cruciform-shaped pool and three wonderfully carved stone *makara* (mythological crocodiles) head waterspouts. Next to it is the **Mani Mandap**, twin pavilions built in 1700 and used for royal coronations.

### VISHWANATH TEMPLE

South of the Bhimsen Temple stands the Vishwanath (Shiva) Temple (Map p187). This elaborately decorated two-roofed temple was built in 1627 and has two large stone elephants guarding the front entrance. The pillars are particularly ornate. Shiva's vehicle, the bull, is on the other side of the temple, while inside is a large lingam. The temple has been restored in recent years.

### KRISHNA MANDIR

Continuing into the square, the third temple you reach is the Krishna Mandir (Map p187), which was built by King Siddhinarayana Malla. Records indicate that the temple was completed with the installation of the image on the 1st floor in 1637. With



its strong Mughal influences, this stone temple is clearly of Indian design, unlike the nearby brick-and-timber, multiroofed Newari temples. The 1st and 2nd floors of this temple are made up of a line of three miniature pavilions, from the top of which rises a *shikhara*-style spire. Musicians can often be heard playing upstairs.

Krishna is an incarnation of Vishnu, so the god's vehicle, the man-bird Garuda, kneels with folded arms on top of a **column** facing the temple. The stone carvings along the beam above the 1st-floor pillars recount events of the Mahabharata, while on the 2nd floor there are scenes from the Ramayana. These fine friezes are accompanied by explanations in Newari of the narrative scenes. Non-Hindus are not allowed inside.

A major festival is held here in August/September (Bhadra) for Krishna's birthday, Krishnasthami.

### JAGANNARAYAN TEMPLE

The two-storey Jagannarayan (or Char Narayan) Temple (Map p187) is dedicated to Narayan, one of Vishnu's incarnations.

Dating from 1565, it is reputed to be the oldest temple in the square, although an alternative date in the late 1600s has also been suggested. The temple stands on a brick plinth with large stone lions, above which are two guardian figures. The roof struts are carved with explicit erotic figures.

### KING YOGANARENDRA MALLA'S STATUE

Immediately north of the Hari Shankar Temple is a tall column (Map p187) topped by a figure of King Yoganarendra Malla (1684–1705) and his queens. The golden figure of the kneeling king, atop a lotus bud and protected by the hood of a cobra, has been facing towards his palace since 1700. On the cobra's head is a bird figure; legend has it that as long as the bird remains there the king may still return to his palace. A door and window of the palace are always kept open and a hookah (a water pipe used for smoking) is kept ready for the king should he return. A rider to the legend adds that when the bird flies off, the elephants in front of the Vishwanath Temple will stroll over to the Manga Hiti for a drink!



## NEWARI TOWNS

The Newars have over the centuries created an urban culture unequalled in the Himalaya. The cities and towns of the Kathmandu Valley are a compact network of interlocking squares, courtyards, twisting alleyways, ponds and temples, often centred on a main square. Though modern building methods have affected aesthetics and village structure, much of the traditional structure remains. Decorated with carved windows and doorways, statues and shrines, and filled with locals drying grain, fetching water from the local carved well, or resting on a pilgrim's shelter, a Newari town is a remarkable synthesis of art and everyday life.

The family house was the starting point for urban development. Rich Newars build hand-somely proportioned brick houses that are up to five storeys high with tiled roofs. Symbolically a Newari house becomes ritually purer as you ascend floors. The *chhyali* (ground floor) is used for commerce or the stabling of animals, or both. The *mattan* (first floor) consists of a bedroom and a room for visitors. Windows are small and latticed for both privacy and security. The *chota* (second floor) is the most active floor in the house and holds the living room, bedrooms and workshop for weaving and the like. It also houses a *dhukuti* (storeroom). Windows on this floor are larger and have outward-opening shutters. The *baiga* (attic floor) has the kitchen and dining room, a *pukakuthi* (shrine room) and a roof terrace.

Newari community life developed when a series of houses was built in a rectangle around a chowk (courtyard or square), often by a single clan or extended family. The chowk, with its water supply and a temple or shrine, became the centre of day-to-day life, as it is today to a large extent. Elaborately decorated *hitis* (water tanks) provide a communal washing area and running water. Shrines, temples and *pathi* (platforms used by the community and travellers) were erected over time by philanthropists.

In larger towns like Patan, monastery complexes were built and run by a unique cooperative religious and social institution known as a *guthi*. Today many of the *bahals* (monastery courtyards) formerly run by the *guthis* have been converted into courtyard communal living spaces (Patan alone has over 260 *bahals*). Here, the markets buzz, children play, women chat and work (weaving, washing, drying grain), old people doze in the sun, men talk over the community's business, and religious ceremonies take place, as they have for centuries.

Behind the statue of the king are three smaller **Vishnu temples**. The small, brick and plaster *shikhara*-style temple was built in 1590 and is dedicated to Narsingha, Vishnu's man-lion incarnation.

## HARI SHANKAR TEMPLE

This three-storey temple to Hari Shankar (Map p187), the half-Vishnu, half-Shiva deity, has roof struts carved with scenes of the tortures of the damned – a strange contrast to the erotic scenes on the Jagan-narayan. It was built in 1704–05 by the daughter of King Yoganarendra Malla.

## TALEJU BELL

Diagonally opposite Taleju Temple, the large bell (Map p187), hanging between two stout pillars, was erected by King Vishnu Malla in 1736. An earlier bell, erected in 1703, was then moved to the Rato Machhendranath Temple. Petitioners could ring the bell to alert the king to their grievances.

Shop stalls occupy the building under the bell platform, and behind it is a lotus-shaped pool with a bridge over it.

## KRISHNA TEMPLE

This attractive, octagonal stone temple (Map p187), also known as the Chyasm Deval, completes the 'front line' of temples in the square. The stairway to it, which faces the palace's Sundari Chowk, is guarded by two stone lions. It was built in 1723 and, like the Krishna Mandir, is a stark contrast to the usual Newari pagoda temple designs.

## BHAI DEGA TEMPLE

Behind the Krishna Temple stands the squat Bhai Dega, or Bisheshvar (Map p187), dedicated to Shiva. It's a singularly unattractive temple, although it is said to contain an impressive lingam. A few steps back from the square is another stone *shikhara*-style **Uma Maheshwar Temple**, clearly owing inspiration to the square's important Krishna Mandir.

## ROYAL PALACE

Forming the whole eastern side of the Durbar Sq is the Royal Palace of Patan (Map p187). Parts of the palace were built in the 14th century, but the main construction was during the 17th and 18th centuries by Siddhinarsingh Malla, Srinivasa Malla and Vishnu Malla. The Patan palace predates of Kathmandu and Bhaktapur. It was severely damaged during the conquest of the valley by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1768 and also by the great earthquake of 1934, but it remains one of the architectural highlights of the valley, with a series of connecting courtyards and three **temples** dedicated to the valley's main deity, the goddess Taleju.

## KESHAV NARYAN CHOWK

The northern courtyard of the Royal Palace is entered from the square by the **Golden Gate** (Map p187), or Sun Dhoka. Completed in 1734, this is the newest part of the palace. The courtyard is entered through a magnificent gilded door topped by a golden *torana* showing Shiva, Parvati, Ganesh and Kumar. Directly above it is a golden window, where the king would make public appearances. The bench to the side of the gate is a favourite of Patan's retirees.

## PATAN MUSEUM

The section of the palace around Keshav Narayan Chowk (the former residence of the Malla kings) has been superbly renovated and houses one of the subcontinent's finest **museums** (Map p187; ☎ 5521492; www.patanmuseum.gov.np; admission foreigner/SAARC Rs 250/50; ☎ 10.30am–5.30pm). There have been some modern elements added to the building as part of the renovations, and the result is a beautiful synthesis of old and new.

The main feature of the museum is an outstanding collection of cast-bronze and gilt-copper work, mostly of Hindu and Buddhist deities. One gallery shows the stages involved in the production of hammered sheet-metal relief designs (known as *repoussé*) and the 'lost-wax' (*thajya* in Nepali) method of casting. Gallery H at the back of the complex, near the café, houses some fascinating photos of Patan at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The text gives an excellent introduction to Nepal's Buddhist and Hindu iconography, religion and art and is available as an illustrated museum book (Rs 1000).

You need at least an hour, and preferably two, to do this place justice, and it's worth taking a break at the excellent Museum Café (see p193) before diving in for another round. The café is in a rear courtyard, which was used for dance and drama performances during the Malla period. The museum also has a shop (selling good museum posters) and toilets. Photos are allowed.

For a sneak preview of the museum's highlights and the story of its renovation go to [www.asianart.com/patan-museum](http://www.asianart.com/patan-museum).

## MUL CHOWK

This central courtyard (Map p187) is the largest and oldest of the palace's three main chowks (squares). Unfortunately, it's open haphazardly at best, generally when you slip the caretakers some *baksheesh* (a tip). Two stone lions guard the entrance to the courtyard, which was built by Siddhinarsingh Malla, destroyed in a fire in 1662 and rebuilt by Srinivasa Malla in 1665–66. At the centre of the courtyard stands the small, gilded **Bidya Temple**.

The palace's three Taleju temples stand around the courtyard. The doorway to the Shrine of Taleju or Taleju Bhawani, on the southern side of the courtyard, is flanked by the statues of the river goddesses **Ganga**, on a tortoise, and **Jamuna**, on a carved *makura* (mythical crocodile).

The five-storey **Degutalle Temple**, topped by its octagonal triple-roofed tower, is on the northeastern corner of the square. The larger, triple-roofed **Taleju Temple** is directly north, looking out over Durbar Sq. It was built by Siddhinarsingh Malla in 1640, rebuilt after a fire and again after the 1934 earthquake completely destroyed it. The goddess Taleju was the personal deity of the Malla kings from the 14th century, and Tantric rites were performed to her here.

## SUNDARI CHOWK

South of Mul Chowk is the smaller Sundari Chowk (Map p187), with its superbly carved sunken water tank known as the Tusha Hiti. Unfortunately the courtyard is currently closed. Behind Sundari Chowk, and also not open to the public, is the Royal Garden and Kamal Pokhari water tank. The area is slated for renovation as a park by Unesco.

Back in main Durbar Sq the blocked-off entrance to Sundari Chowk is guarded by



statues of **Hanuman**, **Ganesh** and Vishnu as **Narsingha**, the man-lion. The gilded metal window over the entrance from the square is flanked by windows of carved ivory.

### North Of Durbar Square

The following sights are north of Durbar Sq. They can be visited as part of the Patan Walking Tour (see the boxed text, p185).

#### GOLDEN TEMPLE (KWA BAHAL)

Also known as the Hiranya Varna or Suwarna Mahavihara (Golden Temple), this unique Buddhist **monastery** (Map p184; admission Rs 25; ☞ dawn-dusk) is just north of Durbar Sq. Legends relate that the monastery was founded in the 12th century, although the earliest record of its existence is 1409. The doorway, flanked by gaudy painted guardian lions, gives no hint of the magnificent structure within.

The inner courtyard has a railed walkway around three sides and the entry is flanked by two stone elephants. Shoes and other leather articles must be removed if you leave the walkway and enter the inner courtyard. Look for the sacred tortoises pottering around in the courtyard – they are temple guardians. The main priest of the temple is a young boy under the age of twelve, who serves for 30 days before handing the job over to another boy.

The large rectangular building has three roofs and a copper-gilded façade. Inside the main shrine is a beautiful statue of Sakyamuni (no photos allowed). In the far right of the courtyard is a statue of Vajrasattva wearing an impressive silver-and-gold cape.

In the centre is a small, richly decorated temple with a golden roof that has an extremely ornate *gajur* (bell-shaped top). Inside in the oldest part of the temple is a 'self-arisen' (*swayambhu*) *chaitya*.

The four corners of the courtyard have statues of four Lokeshvaras and four monks, which hold out jackfruits as an offering. On the south side is Tara. A stairway leads up to a upper-floor chapel lined with Tibetan-style frescoes. Finally, as you leave the temple, look up to see a Kalachakra mandala carved into the ceiling.

#### KUMBESHWAR TEMPLE

Directly north of Durbar Sq is **Kumbeshwar Temple** (Map p184), one of the valley's three

#### JANAI PURNIMA AT KUMBESHWAR

Thousands of pilgrims visit the Kumbeshwar Temple during the **Janai Purnima festival** in July or August to worship the silver-and-gold lingam that is set up in the tank. It's a colourful occasion: bathers immerse themselves in the tank while members of the Brahmin and Chhetri castes replace the sacred thread they wear looped over their left shoulder. *Jhankris* (faith healers) beating drums and wearing colourful head-dresses and skirts dance around the temple to complete the dramatic scene.

five-storey temples. The temple dominates the surrounding streets and is said to date from 1392, making it the oldest temple in Patan. The temple is noted for its graceful proportions and fine woodcarvings and is dedicated to Shiva, as indicated by the large Nandi, or bull, facing the temple.

The temple platform has two ponds whose water is said to come straight from the holy lake at Gosainkund, a long trek north of the valley (see p344 for more information). An annual ritual bath in the Kumbeshwar Temple's tank is claimed to be as meritorious as making the arduous walk to Gosainkund.

On the southeastern edge of the courtyard, behind a black lacquered grill, is an important **Bhairab Temple**, with a life-size wooden image of the god. Next door is the more active single-storey **Baglamukhi (Parvati) Temple**. On the western side of the Kumbeshwar Temple courtyard is the large **Konti Hiti**, a popular gathering place for local women. On the northern side is the Kumbeshwar Technical School (p194).

#### UMA MAHESHWAR TEMPLE

En route from Kumbeshwar Temple to Durbar Sq, the small and inconspicuous double-roofed **Uma Maheshwar Temple** (Map p184) is set back from the road on its eastern side. Peer inside the temple (a light will help) to see a very beautiful black-stone relief of Shiva and Parvati in the pose known as Uma Maheshwar – the god sitting cross-legged with his *shakti* (consort) leaning against him rather seductively. A similarly named temple near the Golden Temple has a similar statue.

### South Of Durbar Square

The following sights are south of Durbar Sq in the backstreets of the bustling Haugal district.

#### BISHWAKARMA TEMPLE

Walk south from Durbar Sq, past several brassware shops and workshops. There is a small *bahal* almost immediately on your right (west) and then a laneway also leading west. A short distance down this lane is the brick **Bishwakarma Temple** (Map p184), with its entire façade covered in sheets of embossed copper. The temple is dedicated to carpenters and craftspeople and, as if in proof, you can often hear the steady clump and clang of metalworkers' hammers from nearby workshops.

#### MINANATH TEMPLE

Further south is a two-storey **temple** (Map p184) dedicated to the Buddhist Bodhisattva who is considered to be the little brother of Rato Machhendranath. The Minanath image is towed around town during the Rato Machhendranath festival, but in a much smaller chariot (look out for the epic chariot runners). The quiet temple dates from the Licchavi period (3rd to 9th centuries), but has undergone several recent restorations and has roof struts carved with figures of

multi-armed goddesses, all brightly painted. There's a large *hiti* (water tank) in front.

#### RATO MACHHENDRANATH TEMPLE

South of Durbar Sq, on the western side of the road, is the **Rato (Red) Machhendranath Temple** (Map p184). Rato Machhendranath, the god of rain and plenty, comes in a variety of incarnations. To Buddhists he is the Tantric edition of Avalokiteshvara, while to Hindus he is a version of Shiva.

Standing in a large courtyard, the three-storey temple dates from 1673, although an earlier temple may have existed on the site since 1408. The temple's four carved doorways are each guarded by lion figures and at ground level on the four corners of the temple plinth are reliefs of a curious yeti-like demon known as a *kyah*. A diverse collection of animals (including peacocks, horses, bulls, lions, elephants and a snake) tops the freestanding pillars facing the northern side of the temple. The roof is supported by struts, each showing Avalokiteshvara standing above figures being tortured in hell.

#### MAHABOUDHA TEMPLE

Despite its height, the Mahabouddha Temple (Temple of a Thousand Buddhas; Map p184) is totally hidden in a courtyard dwarfed by other buildings. The *shikhara* temple takes

#### RATO MACHHENDRANATH FESTIVAL

The image in the Rato Machhendranath Temple may just look like a crudely carved piece of red-painted wood, but each year during the **Rato Machhendranath Festival** celebrations it's paraded around the town on a temple chariot during the valley's most spectacular festival. Machhendranath is considered to have great powers over rain and, since the monsoon is approaching at this time, this festival is an essential plea for good rain.

As in Kathmandu, the Rato Machhendranath festival consists of a day-by-day chariot procession through the streets of the old town, but here it takes a full month to move the chariot from the Phulchowki area – where the image is installed in the chariot – to Jawlakhel, where the chariot is dismantled.

The main chariot is accompanied for most of its journey by a smaller chariot, which contains the image of Rato Machhendranath's companion, which normally resides in the nearby Minanath Temple.

The highlight of the festival is the Bhoto Jatra, or showing of the sacred vest. Machhendranath was entrusted with the jewelled vest after there was a dispute over its ownership. The vest is displayed three times in order to give the owner the chance to claim it – although this does not actually happen. The King of Nepal attends this ceremony, which is also a national holiday.

From Jawlakhel, Rato Machhendranath does not return to his Patan temple, but rather is conveyed on a *khat* (palanquin) to his second home in the village of Bungamati, 6km to the south, where he spends the next six months of the year. The main chariot is so large and the route is so long that the Nepali army is often called in to help transport it.

its name from the terracotta tiles that cover it, each bearing an image of the Buddha. It's modelled on the Mahabouddha Temple at Bodhgaya in India, where the Buddha gained enlightenment.

The building probably dates from 1585, but suffered severe damage in the 1934 earthquake and was totally rebuilt. Unfortunately, without plans to work from, the builders ended up with a different-looking temple and there were enough bricks left over to construct a *shikhara*-style shrine to Maya Devi, the Buddha's mother, which stands to the southwest!

The Mahabouddha Temple is about 10 minutes' walk southeast of Durbar Sq. A signpost points down a lane full of shops selling Buddhist statuary to the temple. The roof terrace of the shops at the back of the courtyard has a good view of the temple; follow the signs as there's no pressure to shop here.

#### UKU BAHAL (RUDRA VARNA MAHAVIHAR)

This Buddhist **monastery** (Map p184) near the Mahabouddha Temple is one of the best known in Patan. The main courtyard is absolutely packed with interesting bits and pieces – *dorjes*, bells, peacocks, elephants, Garudas, rampant goats, kneeling devotees and a regal-looking statue of a Rana general. The lions are curious, seated on pillars with one paw raised in salute, look as if they should be guarding a statue of Queen Victoria in her 'not-amused' incarnation rather than a colourful Nepali monastery.

As you enter the main courtyard from the north look for the finely carved wooden struts above, on the northern side of the

courtyard. They are said to be among the oldest of this type in the valley and prior to restoration they were actually behind the monastery, but were moved to this safer location inside the courtyard. The monastery in its present form probably dates from the 19th century, but certain features and the actual site are much older.

Behind the monastery is a small Swayambhunath-style stupa.

#### West of Durbar Square

##### HAKA BAHAL

Take the road west from the southern end of Durbar Sq, past Café de Patan, and you soon come to the **Haka Bahal** (Map p184), a rectangular building with an internal courtyard. Traditionally, Patan's Kumari (living goddess) is a daughter of one of the priests of this monastery.

##### Zoo

Nepal's only **zoo** (Map p184; ☎ 5528323; admission foreigner/SAARC Rs 100/40, children Rs 50/30, camera/video Rs 10/50, paddle boats Rs 40; 🕒 9am–5pm Tue–Sun) is in the southwestern part of Patan, just north of Jawlakhel. It includes an exotic collection of Nepali wildlife, including rhinos, Bengal tigers, cloud leopards, red pandas, gharial, and something called a spotted lingsang, which we couldn't spot. While in places it's yet another depressing animal prison, steps are being made to improve the animals' environment. Huge hippos and lazy sloth bears open their mouths on cue whenever tourists walk by, ignoring the signs that say 'Don't feed the animals'. Stoners routinely get freaked out by the 60cm-long squirrels.

#### ASHOKA STUPAS

Legend claims that the four stupas marking the boundaries of Patan were built when the great Buddhist emperor Ashoka visited the valley 2500 years ago. Though there's little chance that Ashoka actually made it to the valley, the stupas do rank as the Kathmandu Valley's oldest Buddhist monuments. Although remains of all four can still be seen today, they probably bear little similarity to the original stupas.

The Northern Stupa is just beyond the Kumbeshwar Temple, on the way to the Sankhamul ghats. It's well preserved and whitewashed. The other three are all grassed over, which lends them a timeless air. The Southern, or Lagankhel, Stupa is just south of the Lagankhel bus stop and is the largest of the four. The smaller Western, or Phulchowk Stupa is beside the main road from Kathmandu that runs through to Jawlakhel. Finally, the small Eastern, or Teta, Stupa is well to the east of centre, across Kathmandu's Ring Rd and just beyond a small river.

Buddhist and Tibetan pilgrims walk around all four stupas in a single day during the auspicious full moon of August.

Keen naturalists, students of the grotesque and young kids will enjoy a visit.

#### FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Patan's most dramatic festival is the **Rato Machhendranath Festival** (p191) in April or May, followed by the **Janai Purnima Festival** (p190) at Kumbeshwar Temple in August.

#### SLEEPING

There's a small but decent spread of accommodation for all budgets in Patan, and a few tourists base themselves here.

#### Budget

**Café de Patan** (Map p187; ☎ 5537599; pcaf@ntc.net.np; s/d without bathroom Rs 300/400, s/d with bathroom Rs 500/600) The pleasant downstairs café (right), a great location near Durbar Sq and easy transport are the big draws here. The good-value rooms are bright, clean and of a good size, though for any kind of view you'll have to head up to the rooftop. Only two rooms come with private bathrooms.

**Mahabouddha Guest House** (Map p184; ☎ 5540575; mhg@mos.com.np; s/d Rs 300/400) Near the Mahabouddha Temple, southeast of Durbar Sq, this simple place has an atmospheric location away from the traffic. Rooms come with a bathroom but can be dark so aim for a room higher up, near the pleasant rooftop. Singles are much smaller than doubles. Prices for laundry and breakfast are good value.

**Peace Guest House** (Map p184; ☎ 5551189; peace@wlink.com.np; s/d without bathroom Rs 200/300, with bathroom Rs 450/550) Another quiet and well-run guesthouse right next to the Mahabouddha Temple, with a range of rooms. The bathrooms are a bit hit-and-miss but the views on the west side are great and a couple of rooms have balconies.

**Mountain View Guest House** (Map p184; ☎ 5538168; s/d without bathroom Rs 200/250, with bathroom Rs 300/400) Between Jawlakhel and Durbar Sq, down a sidestreet off the main road, this isn't great, with small rooms, sullen adolescent staff and noise from the neighbouring motorbike repair workshop, but it's cheap. Rooms at the back are best.

#### Midrange & Top End

All of these places accept credit cards.

**Aloha Inn** (Map p184; ☎ 5522796; www.alohainn.com; s/d US\$30/40, deluxe s/d US\$35/45, discounts of 30%; 🚗 🚶) Sadly, there's nothing remotely trop-

ical about this old-fashioned but friendly place. It's clean, quiet, a little plain and a little overpriced. Deluxe rooms come with a desk and fridge and are worth the extra US\$5. Located in the Jawlakhel area, a bit far to walk from the old city.

**Hotel Clarion** (Map p184; ☎ 5524512; www.hotelclarion.com; s/d US\$50/60, discounts of 40%) More popular with aid consultants than tourists, the Clarion has nine comfortable, well-kept rooms and a pleasant garden but is still close to the noisy road, so ask for a room at the back. The restaurant is good and you can dine with a cocktail in the pleasant garden. It's near the Aloha Inn on the main drag. Credit cards accepted.

**Summit Hotel** (Map p116; ☎ 5521810; www.summit-nepal.com; Kopundol; s US\$25–100, d US\$30–110, discounts of 20–35%; 🚗 🚶 🚶) For those in the know, this stylish Dutch-run resort is a firm favourite and a great alternative to staying in Kathmandu. Carved woods and terracotta tiles frame lovely lush gardens, creating a relaxing, romantic mood. The swimming pool is a plus in summer; open fires keep things cosy in winter. The original garden-view rooms are smaller but all have modern bathrooms and lovely sitting areas and offer the best value. Guests have been known to fight over the coveted corner Himalayan view rooms, with sweeping views across the river to Kathmandu. The budget rooms are worth avoiding.

**Hotel Greenwich Village** (Map pp110–11; ☎ 5521780; www.godavariresort.com.np; s/d US\$60/70, deluxe r US\$80, discounts of 66%; 🚗 🚶) Also topping the Kopundol hill near the Summit Hotel, this is another peaceful but more downmarket (and cheaper) resort. Rooms are a little old-fashioned but then you'll probably spend most of your time at the lovely poolside terrace and café. Foreign exchange and a free airport pickup are useful perks.

**Shrestha House** (Map p184) is due to open soon as a boutique guesthouse after years of restoration under the support of Unesco.

#### EATING

Most of Patan's restaurants overlook Durbar Sq and are aimed at day-tripping tour groups. Prices are inflated but not outrageously so, and the views are superb.

**Café de Patan** (Map p187; ☎ 5537599; dishes Rs 120–250) Just a few steps from the southwestern corner of Durbar Sq, this is a small,

long-running favourite, with a pleasant open-air courtyard and a rooftop garden (with one table right at the very top of the building!). It turns out a superb lassi, plus pizza and Newari dishes.

**Taleju Restaurant & Bar** (Map p187; ☎ 5538358; mains Rs 115-165) Head for the 5th-floor terrace of this place at the southern end of the square, as the views from here are outstanding, especially on a clear day when you have the snow-capped Ganesh Himal as a backdrop. The prices are the most reasonable in the square and the food is acceptable, making this the best budget bet with a view. The '100% drinkable' organic Ukrainian wine is hard to turn down.

**Museum Café** (Map p187; light meals Rs 110-240, coffee Rs 60, plus 13% tax) In the rear courtyard of the Patan Museum, this is a stylish open-air place operated by the Summit Hotel. Prices are a little higher than elsewhere, but the gorgeous garden setting more than compensates. The organic salads are grown on site. You don't need to buy a museum ticket to eat at the café.

**Café de Temple** (Map p187; ☎ 5527127; mains Rs 170-300, set meal Rs 350-400) On the northern edge of the square, the excellent rooftop views are even more expansive than the menu, which offers both snacks and main meals. Try a cup of Tibetan herbal Yarchagumpa tea (Rs 50).

Prices are a little lower at the similar **Old House Café** (Map p187; ☎ 5555027), set in an old Newari house in the northeastern corner of the square, and **Third World Restaurant** (Map p187; ☎ 5522187), on the quiet western side of the square, with good rooftop views of the Krishna Mandir.

**Bakery Café** (Map p184; ☎ 5522949; mains Rs 80-160; www.nanglos.com; 📺) Near the zoo roundabout at Jawlakhel, the Bakery is an excellent place to drop in for a reviving café Americano (espresso with hot water), a *badam* (pistachio) milkshake or a light snack. The staff here are all deaf and the service is excellent.

**Dhokaima Café** (Map p184; ☎ 5522113; mains Rs 100-200; Sunday brunch Rs 300) A pleasant café 'next to the gate' (Patan Dhoka), with a nice garden and bar set under a sprawling walnut tree. It's a good place for a light snack after an exploration of Patan's backstreets, or come for the excellent Sunday brunch (10am to 3pm). The café is part of the Yala Maya Kendra, a Rana-era storehouse that is used for occasional cultural events.

**La Soon** (Map p184; ☎ 5537166; mains Rs 200-385; 📺 10.30am-10pm Mon-Sat) Down a side alley (feel the stress melt away as you leave the main street), this relaxing garden restaurant and wine bar is filled at lunchtimes with local NGO staff. The food is international with good pasta, feta wraps and peanut soup.

**New York Pizza** (☎ 5520294; Kopundol) Boasts the (allegedly) largest commercial pizza in the world at 25 inches. A 12-inch pizza with a couple of toppings costs around Rs 340 and delivery is free anywhere in Patan.

For something special, Friday-night barbecues (Rs 500) at the Summit Hotel (see sleeping) are a treat. The hotel also hosts an organic produce market on Sundays, from 10am to 1.30pm.

## DRINKING

**Moksh Bar** (Map p184; ☎ 5526212; beer Rs 150; 📺 Tue-Sun) Across from La Soon, Moksh has some of the best live rock, funk and folk music in town (not just the normal Thamel cover bands) on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday.

**Banana Cat Café** (Map p184; ☎ 5522708; teas Rs 70; snacks Rs 200-300; 📺 11.30am-6pm Thu-Tue) An artsy Japanese-run teahouse that serves herbal, Ayurvedic and Japanese teas, plus afternoon cream teas and Japanese snacks. The garden space and attached bead shop are a favourite hangout for local expat women.

## SHOPPING

Patan has many small handicraft shops and is the best place in the valley for statuary and fair-trade products. The Jawlakhel area in Patan's southwest is great for Tibetan crafts and carpets.

**Patan Industrial Estate** (Map p184; 📺 10am-6pm), in the south of Patan, doesn't sound like a very promising place to shop for crafts but it does boast a number of factory-cum-showrooms of carpets, wood- and metalwork. While they are definitely aimed at the group tourist, there is nothing to stop individuals having a wander around. Generally there's no pressure to buy and you can often see craftspeople at work.

**Namaste Supermarket** (Map p184; 📺 9am-8pm), in the old Hotel Naryani building, is one of the best in the city and an expat favourite.

## Fair Trade Shops

Those interested in crafts should definitely visit the string of interesting shops at Ko-

pundol, just south and uphill from the main Patan bridge. A number are run as nonprofit development organisations, so the prices are fair, and the money actually goes to the craftspeople, and some goes into training and product development.

One of the best of these 'crafts with a conscience' is **Mahaguthi** (☎ 5521607; www.mahaguthi.com; 📺 10am-6.30pm), which was established with the help of Oxfam. It has three shops and sells a wide range of crafts produced by thousands of people across Nepal. It's a one-stop shop for beautiful hand-woven *dhaka* weavings, paper, pottery, block prints, woven bamboo, pashminas, woodcrafts, jewellery, knitwear, embroidery and Mithila paintings (see the boxed text, p315). The main showroom is in Kopundol but there are also branches in Patan's Durbar Sq (Map p187; 📺 10am-5.30pm Sun-Fri), and in Kathmandu's Lazimpat district (see p154).

Other shops worth looking at nearby include **Dhukuti** (☎ 5535107; 📺 9am-7pm; www.acp.org.np) for a wide range of cloth, batiks, bags and even Christmas decorations, produced by over 1200 low-income women; **Sana Hastakala** (☎ 5522628) for paper and batiks; and **Dhankuta Sisters** (📺 10am-6pm Sun-Fri) for tablecloths, cushion covers and the like, made of woven *dhaka* cloth from eastern Nepal. The other craft shops in this area are commercially run and mostly stock larger home-design items aimed at local expats.

Near to the Kumbeshwar Temple, the **Kumbeshwar Technical School** (Map p184; ☎ 5537484; http://kumbeshwar.com) provides Patan's lowest castes with skills; they produce locally made carpets, jumpers and woodwork direct to the consumer. The small showroom is on the ground floor of the school, down a short alley to the right of the school entrance.

## Metalwork & Woodwork

Patan is the centre for bronze casting and other metalwork. The statues you see on sale in Kathmandu were probably made in Patan and there are a number of excellent metalwork shops just to the north of Durbar Sq. Good-quality gold-plated and painted bronze figures will cost Rs 2000 to 5000 for smaller ones, and up to more than Rs 10,000 for large images.

**Woodcarving Studio** (☎ 5538827; www.leebirch.com; Jawlakhel; 📺 10am-5pm Sun-Fri) Artist Lee Birch's studio displays some of the best carv-

ings in the valley, made on site by Newar woodcarvers. Prices are generally high, but so is the quality. It's best to call ahead.

## Carpets

Anyone who likes Tibetan carpets should visit Jawlakhel, the former Tibetan refugee camp, where Nepal's enormous carpet industry was born. Tibetan carpet shops line the approach road south of the zoo.

The **Jawlakhel Handicraft Centre** (☎ 5521305; 📺 9am-5pm Sun-Fri), established in 1960, is a large cooperative workshop where you can watch the carpet-making process, as well as check out the centre's showrooms (with marked prices). It's opposite a Tibetan monastery.

The carpets at the **Kumbeshwar Technical School** (opposite) are fairly priced, and this is possibly the only place where you can buy carpets made from 100% pure Tibetan wool. Carpets cost around US\$100 for a 1m by 1.5m size or US\$150 for 1.75m by 1.2m. For more on Tibetan carpets see p57.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

You can get to Patan from Kathmandu by bicycle, taxi, bus or tempo. It's an uphill and choking 5km bike ride from Thamel to Patan's Durbar Sq. The trip costs around Rs 130 by taxi.

*Safa* (electric) tempos (Rs 7, route 14A) leave from Kantipath, near the Kathmandu main post office in Sundhara district, as soon as they are full. Double-check the destination when getting in, as some run to Mangal Bazar/Durbar Sq, others to Lagankhel bus station. When returning, a few tempos branch right to Koteshwar instead of continuing to Kathmandu centre.

Local buses run frequently between Kathmandu's City (Ratna Park) bus station and Patan Dhoka (Rs 7).

Buses and faster minibuses to the southern valley towns leave when full from Patan's chaotic Lagankhel bus stand, including to Godavari, Bungamati and Chapagaon.

An interesting route back to Kathmandu is to continue northeast from the Northern Stupa down to the interesting ghats of Sankhamul, across the footbridge over the Bagmati River and then up to the Arniko Hwy near the big convention centre, from where you can take a taxi or cycle back to Thamel.



## BHAKTAPUR

☎ 01 / pop 65,000

Bhaktapur, also known as Bhadgaon (pronounced *bud-gown* and meaning ‘City of Rice’) in Nepali, or Khwopa (City of Devo-tees) in Newari, is the third major town of the valley. Traffic free, the traditionally intact town is also in many ways the most timeless. The cobblestone streets link a string of temples, courtyards and monumental squares, and the sidestreets are peppered with shrines, wells and water tanks.

The lack of traffic makes walking through Bhaktapur a pleasure and certainly more enjoyable than walking in Kathmandu. The town’s cultural life is also vibrant, with centuries-old traditions of craftsmanship and strong communities of potters, woodcarvers and weavers. Look for rice laid out to dry in the sun, people collecting water or washing under the communal taps, dyed yarns hung out to dry, children’s games, fascinating shops and women pounding grain – there’s plenty to see.

Perhaps most entrancing of all is Bhaktapur’s effortless blending of the modern and medieval, thanks largely to the German-funded Bhaktapur Development Project, which restored buildings, paved dirt streets and established sewerage and wastewater management facilities in the 1970s.

### HISTORY

Bhaktapur’s historical roots lie in its position on the early trade route to Tibet, though the credit for the formal founding of the city goes to King Ananda Malla in the 12th century. The oldest part of the town is around Tachupal Tole, to the east.

From the 14th to the 16th century, as Bhaktapur became the most powerful of the valley’s three Malla kingdoms, the focus of the town shifted west to the Durbar Sq area. Much of the town’s great architecture dates from the rule of King Yaksha Malla (1428–82), who built the Pashupatinath and Dattatreya temples, but also from the end of the 17th century, during King Bhupatindra Malla’s reign. At its peak the city boasted 172 temples and monasteries, 77 water tanks, 172 pilgrim shelters and 152 wells.

The 15th-century royal palace in Durbar Sq remained the seat of power until

the city’s defeat by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1768 relegated the former capital to a market town. The 1934 earthquake caused major damage to the city.

### ORIENTATION

Bhaktapur rises up on the northern bank of the Hanumante River. Public buses, minibuses and taxis from Kathmandu stop at Navpokhu Pokhari on the western edge of town. Tour buses unload at the tourist-bus and taxi park on the northern edge of town. Both are a short walk from the city centre.

For the visitor, Bhaktapur is really a town of one curving road – the old trade route to Tibet – that links several squares. From the bus stop at Navpokhu Pokhari you come first to Durbar Sq, then Taumadhi Tole with its famous five-storey Nyatapola Temple, then to Tachupal Tole.

### INFORMATION

Visiting foreigners are charged a hefty fee of Rs 750 (US\$10). This is collected and checked zealously at over a dozen entrances to the city. If you are staying here for up to a week, you need only pay the entrance fee once, but you must state this at the time of buying the ticket and write your passport number on the back of the ticket.

For longer stays (up to one year), a Bhaktapur Visitor Pass is available within a week of purchasing your entry ticket. Passes are issued by the **Bhaktapur Municipality office** (Map p187; ☎ 6610310; ⌚ 6am–7pm) at the ticket booth on the western end of Durbar Sq and require two photos and a photocopy of your visa and passport details. SAARC nationalities pay Rs 50. Children under 10 are free.

There are moneychangers in Taumadhi and Tachupal Tole and a couple of Internet cafés, including **Surfer’s Edge** (Map pp204–5; per hr Rs 20; ⌚ 9am–10pm) just north of Potters’ Sq.

### SIGHTS

The following sights will lead you on a walk from west to east through the old town. To dive into the backstreets follow the walking tour (p203), which is marked on the Bhaktapur map (Map pp204–5).

#### The Western Gates to Taumadhi Tole

The main road heading through Bhaktapur from the west forks at Siddha Pokhari. The northern road leads to Durbar Sq but the

main southern road is the more interesting of the two.

To get onto this west–east road from Navpokhu Pokhari turn south from the corner of the *pokhari* (large water tank) and then left on the road, passing a ticket office by the town’s Lion Gate. Unless otherwise indicated all of the following sights are on the Bhaktapur map pp204–5.

#### LION’S GATE TO POTTERS’ SQUARE

Heading east from Lion’s Gate you pass a small tank on your right and then the much larger **Teka Pokhari** (Map pp204–5). Just 10m before the next major junction, to your left, is the constricted, tunnel-like entrance to the tiny **Ni Bahal** (signposted as ‘Jet Barna Maha Bihar’), dedicated to Maitreya Buddha, the Buddha yet to come. The entrance is easy to miss, just before the carved pillars of a pilgrim resthouse.

Cross the junction, where the road runs downhill to the Mangal Tirtha Ghat, and you will see on your left the red-brick **Jaya Varahi Temple**. There are elaborately carved wooden *toranas* over the central door and the window above it. At the eastern end of the temple is the entrance to the upper floor, flanked by stone lions and banners. The two ornate windows, on either side of the upper *torana*, have recently been repainted their original gold.

A few more steps bring you to a small **Ganesh shrine**, jutting out into the street and covered in bathroom tiles. Continue to **Nasamana Square**, which is somewhat decrepit but has a Garuda statue without a temple. Almost immediately after this is a second square with the **Jyotirlingeshwar**, a *shikhara*-style temple that houses an important lingam. Behind the shrine is an attractive *hiti*, one of Bhaktapur’s many sunken water conduits. Continue straight and you will arrive at the turn-off right to Potters’ Sq. Walk a little further on and you will come to Taumadhi Tole.

#### POTTERS’ SQUARE

Potters’ Sq (Bolachha Tol) can be approached from Durbar Sq, Taumadhi Tole or along the western road into town from Lion’s Gate.

On the northern side of the square a small hillock is topped by a **Ganesh shrine** and a shady pipal tree. There are fine views over the river to the hills south of Bhaktapur. The square itself has two small temples:

a solid-brick central **Vishnu Temple** and the double-roofed **Jeth Ganesh Temple**. The latter is an indicator of how long the activity all around the square has been going on – a wealthy potter donated the temple in 1646 and to this day its priest is chosen from the potter caste.

Pottery is very clearly what this square is all about; the southern side of the square is lined with clay stores and potters’ wheels, and the square (and other parts of town) is often filled with hundreds of pots drying in the sun. After the harvest in October, which is when most tourists visit, the pots have largely been exchanged for piles of drying rice. An alleyway to the south reveals a traditional mud-and-straw-covered kiln.

#### Taumadhi Tole

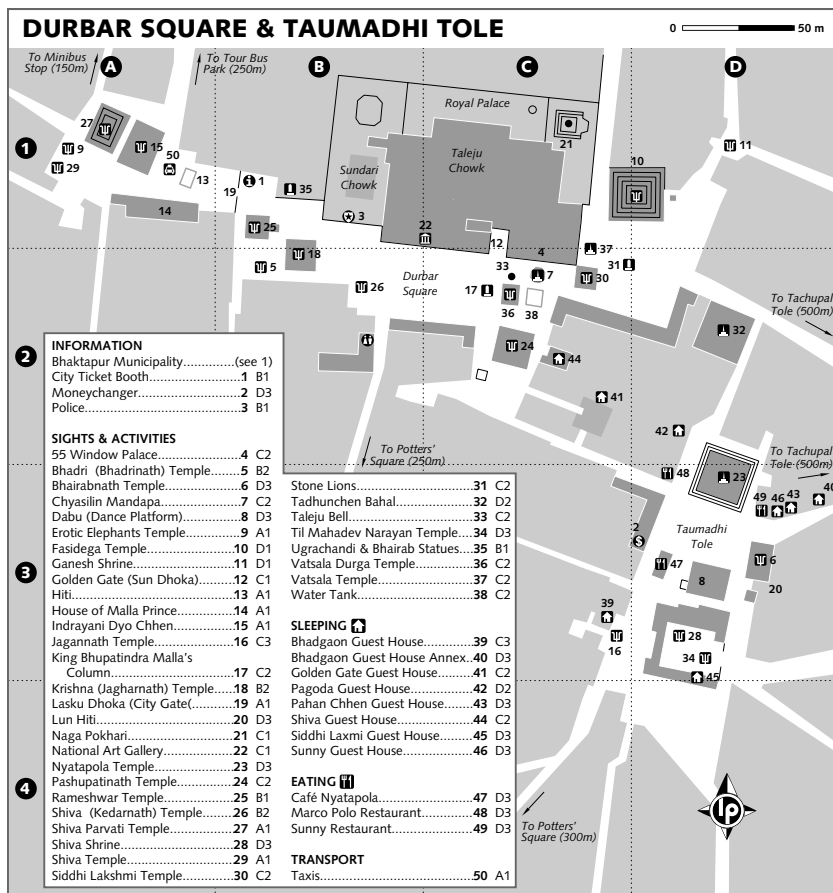
A short walk from Potters’ Sq or Durbar Sq reveals the second great square of Bhaktapur, the Taumadhi Tole (Map p198). Here you’ll find Nyatapola Temple, the highest temple in the valley and also the Café Nyatapola (p207), where the balconies provide a great view over the square. The latter was renovated for its new purpose in 1977 and it has some finely carved roof struts.

#### NYATAPOLA TEMPLE

The five-storey, 30m-high Nyatapola Temple (Map p198) is not only the highest temple in Nepal, but also one of the best examples of traditional Newari temple architecture. From the Arniko Hwy or Suriya Binayak Temple (see p209), the temple appears to soar above Bhaktapur’s rooftops, with the snow-capped Himalaya as a dramatic backdrop.

The elegant temple was built during the reign of King Bhupatindra Malla in 1702, and its design and construction were so solid that the 1934 earthquake caused only minor damage. The stairway leading up to the temple is flanked by guardian figures at each plinth level. The bottom plinth has the legendary Rajput wrestlers Jayamel and Phattu, said to have the strength of 10 men. On the plinths above are two elephants, then two lions, then two griffins and finally two goddesses – Baghini and Singhini. Each figure is said to be 10 times as strong as the figure on the level below. Presiding over all of them, but hidden away inside, is the mysterious Tantric goddess Siddhi Lakshmi, to whom the temple is dedicated.





Only the temple's priests are allowed to see the image of the goddess, but the temple's 108 carved and painted roof struts depict her in her various forms. Various legends and tales relate to the temple and its enigmatic inhabitant. One is that she maintains a balance with the powers of the terrifying Bhairab, comfortably ensconced in his own temple just across the square.

#### BHAIRABNATH TEMPLE

The well-restored, triple-roofed Bhairabnath Temple (also known as the Kasi Vishwanath or Akash Bhairab; Map p198) has an unusual rectangular plan and a somewhat chequered history. It was originally built as a one-storey temple in the early

17th century, but was rebuilt with two storeys by King Bhupatindra Malla in 1717. The 1934 earthquake caused great damage to the temple and it was completely rebuilt and a third floor added.

Casually stacked by the north wall of the temple are the enormous wheels and temple chariot runner on which the image of Bhairab (a fearsome form of Shiva) is conveyed around town during the Bisket festival in mid-April – see the boxed text, p203. There are more chariot runners on the north side of the Nyatapola Temple.

Curiously, despite Bhairab's fearsome powers and his massive temple, his bodiless image is only about 15cm high! A small hole in the central door (below a row of

carved boar snouts) is used to push offerings into the temple's interior, but the actual entrance to the Bhairabnath Temple is through the small Betal Temple, on the south side of the main temple.

The temple's façade is guarded by two brass lions and includes an image of Bhairab painted on rattan with real dried intestines draped across it! Head here at dusk to catch nightly devotional music.

#### TIL MAHADEV NARAYAN TEMPLE

It's easy to miss the square's third interesting temple (Map p198), as it is hidden away behind the buildings on the southern side of the square. You can enter the temple's courtyard through a narrow entrance through those buildings, or through an arched entrance facing west, just to the south of the square.

This double-roofed Vishnu temple has a Garuda kneeling on a high pillar in front, flanked by pillars bearing Vishnu's *sankha* and *chakra* symbols. Some of the temple's struts also depict Garudas. A lingam in a yoni (female equivalent of the phallic symbol) stands inside a grilled structure in front and to one side of the temple. A plaque to the lower right of the door depicts the goddess Vajrayogini in characteristic pose with her left leg high in the air.

Despite the temple's neglected setting it is actually an important place of pilgrimage as well as one of the oldest temple sites in the town: an inscription indicates that the site has been in use since 1080. Another inscription states that the image of Til Mahadev installed inside the temple dates from 1170.

#### Durbar Square

Bhaktapur's Durbar Sq (Map p198) is larger than Kathmandu's, much less crowded with temples than Patan's and less vibrant than either. However it wasn't planned that way: Victorian-era illustrations show the square packed with temples and buildings, but the disastrous earthquake of 1934 destroyed many of them, and today empty plinths mark where temples once stood.

Durbar Sq is the one place where you'll be approached by a string of tiresome guides and *thangka* painting school touts.

#### EROTIC ELEPHANTS TEMPLE

Just before you enter the square, coming from the minibus and bus stop, pause for a

little bit of Newari humour. On your right, perhaps 70m before the main Durbar Sq entrance gate, is a tiny double-roofed **Shiva Parvati temple** (Map p198) with some erotic carvings on its temple struts. Among the series of copulating animals are elephants in the missionary position with their trunks entwined in pleasure! It's a *hathi* (elephant) Kamasutra.

#### UGRACHANDI & BHAIRAB STATUES

When you enter Durbar Sq from the west you'll pass by an entry gate (to a school) with two large stone lions built by King Bhupatindra Malla. On the northern wall to the left are statues of the terrible Bhairab (right) and the equally terrible Ugrachandi, or Durga (left), the fearsome manifestation of Shiva's consort Parvati. The statues date from 1701 and it's said that the unfortunate sculptor had his hands cut off afterwards, to prevent him from duplicating his masterpieces.

Ugrachandi has 18 arms holding various Tantric weapons and symbols (symbolising the multiple aspects of her character) and she is in the act of casually killing a demon with a trident (symbolising the victory of wisdom over ignorance). Bhairab has to make do with just 12 arms. Both god and goddess are garlanded with necklaces of human heads. The gates and courtyard that these powerful figures guard are no longer of any particular importance.

#### CHAR DHAM

A number of less significant temples crowd the western end of Durbar Sq. They include the lopsided **Rameshwar Temple** (Map p198) dedicated to Shiva and the **Bhadri Temple** dedicated to Vishnu as Narayan. In front of them is an impressive, larger **Krishna Temple** and just beyond that is a brick *shikhara*-style **Shiva Temple** erected by King Jitamitra Malla in 1674.

Together the four temples are called the Char Dham, after the four Hindu pilgrimage sites of the same name, to provide a place of worship for those unable to make the pilgrimage to the real sites.

#### KING BHUPATINDRA MALLA'S COLUMN

King Bhupatindra Malla was the best known of the Malla kings of Bhaktapur and had a great influence on the art and architecture of the town. Like the similar column in Pa-

tan's Durbar Sq, this one (built in 1699) was based on the original in Kathmandu but remains the most beautiful of the three. The king sits with folded arms, studying the magnificent golden gate to his palace.

#### VATSALA DURGA TEMPLE & TALEJU BELL

Beside the king's statue and directly in front of the Royal Palace is the stone Vatsala Durga Temple (Map p198), which was built by King Jagat Prakash Malla in 1672 (some sources say 1727). The *shikhara*-style temple has some similarities to the Krishna Mandir in Patan. In front of the temple is the large **Taleju Bell**, which was erected by King Jaya Ranjit Malla in 1737 to mark morning and evening prayers at the Taleju Temple.

A second, smaller bell stands on the temple's plinth and is popularly known as 'the barking bell'. It was erected by King Bhupatindra Malla in 1721, supposedly to counteract a vision he had in a dream, and to this day dogs are said to bark and whine if the bell is rung.

#### ROYAL PALACE

Bhaktapur's Royal Palace (Map p198) was founded by Yaksha Malla (r 1428–82) and was added to by successive kings, particularly Bhupatindra Malla. As with the old palaces of Kathmandu and Patan, visitors are restricted to certain areas. The palace suffered great damage in the terrible 1934 earthquake and only half a dozen of the original 99 courtyards survived.

#### NATIONAL ART GALLERY

The western end of the palace has been made into an **art gallery** (Map p198; admission Rs 20; ☎ 10am–5pm Wed–Mon). The entrance to the gallery is flanked by figures of Hanuman the monkey god and Vishnu as Narsingha, his man-lion incarnation. These guardian figures date from 1698 and Hanuman appears in Tantric form as the four-armed Hanuman-Bhairab. This part of the palace was once known as the Malati Chowk.

The gallery has a fine collection of Hindu and Buddhist paintings, palm-leaf manuscripts, *paubha* (thangka like paintings on cloth) and metal, stone and woodcrafts; it's the best of the town's three museums.

Once paid, your entry ticket is valid for both the Woodcarving and Brass & Bronze Museums in Tachupal Tole (see opposite).

#### GOLDEN GATE & 55 WINDOW PALACE

Adjacent to the gallery, the magnificent Golden Gate, or Sun Dhoka, is the entrance to the 55 Window Palace (Map p198). The Golden Gate is generally agreed to be the most important piece of art in the whole valley. The gate and palace were built by King Bhupatindra Malla, but were not completed until 1754 during the reign of Jaya Ranjit Malla, the last of the Bhaktapur Malla kings.

A Garuda, the vehicle of Vishnu, tops the *torana* and is shown here disposing of a number of serpents, which are the Garuda's sworn enemies. The four-headed and 10-armed figure of the goddess Taleju Bhawani is featured directly over the door. Taleju Bhawani is the family deity of the Malla dynasty and there are temples to her in the royal palaces in Kathmandu and Patan as well as Bhaktapur.

The Golden Gate opens to the inner courtyards of the palace, but you cannot proceed further than the ornate entrance to colourful Taleju Chowk (1553). Non-Hindus can check out the nearby **Naga Pokhari**, a 17th-century royal water tank encircled by a writhing stone cobra (*naga*). The *nagas* rise up on scaled pillars and water pours from a goat's head that protrudes from the mouth of a *makara* (crocodile demon). The tank was traditionally used for the daily ritual bath of the goddess Taleju.

At the time of research, the 55 Window Palace was under major renovation, slated to continue until 2007.

#### CHYASILIN MANDAP

Beside Vatsala Durga Temple is an attractive **water tank** and in front of that is the Chyasilin Mandap (Map p198). This octagonal temple was one of the finest in the square until it was destroyed by the 1934 earthquake. Using some of the temple's original components, it was totally rebuilt in 1990; note the metal construction inside this outwardly authentic building.

#### PASHUPATINATH TEMPLE

Behind the Vatsala Durga Temple, this temple (Map p198) is dedicated to Shiva as Pashupati and is a replica of the main shrine at Pashupatinath. Originally built by King Yaksha Malla in 1475 (or 1482), it is the oldest temple in the square and is sometimes called the Yaksheswor Mahadev Temple.

For adults only, the roof struts depict some of the rudest erotic art in the valley. Unexpected humour is provided by one bored-looking woman who multitasks by washing her hair while pleasuring her husband at the same time. Don't even ask what the dwarf with the bowl is doing...

#### SIDDHI LAKSHMI TEMPLE

By the southeastern corner of the palace stands the stone Siddhi Lakshmi Temple (Map p198), also known as the Lohan Dega, or Stone Temple. The steps up to the temple are flanked by male and female attendants, each leading a rather reluctant child and a rather eager-looking dog. On successive levels the stairs are flanked by horses, rhinos, man-lions and camels.

The 17th-century temple marks the dividing line between the main and secondary parts of Durbar Sq. Behind the temple is another **Vatsala Temple**, while to one side of it are two rather lost-looking curly-haired **stone lions**, standing by themselves out in the middle of the square.

#### FASIDEGA TEMPLE

The large and ugly Fasidega Temple (Map p198) is dedicated to Shiva and stands in the centre of the second part of Durbar Sq. There are viewpoints all around the valley – the Changu Narayan Temple is one of them – from where you can study Bhaktapur at a distance. The white bulk of the Fasidega is always an easy landmark to pick out. The temple sits on a six-level plinth with elephant guardians at the bottom of the steps, and with lions and cows above them.

#### TADHUNCHEH BAHAL

The southern and eastern side of the second part of the square is made up of a double-storey *dharamsala* (rest house for pilgrims), now used as a school. As you enter the street leading east from the square, the restored monastery of the Tadhunchen Bahal (Map p198), or Chatur Varna Mahavihara, is on the southern side. It dates from 1491 and is where the cult of the Kumari, Nepal's living goddesses, originally started. Bhaktapur actually has three Kumaris but they lack the political importance of Kathmandu's (see the boxed text, p119).

In the inner courtyard the roof struts on the eastern side have highly unusual carv-

ings showing the tortures of the damned. In one a snake is wrapped around a man, another shows two rams butting an unfortunate's head, while a third strut shows a nasty tooth extraction being performed with a large pair of pliers! You may see copper chasing going on in the courtyard.

#### Taumadhi Tole to Tachupal Tole

The curving main road through Bhaktapur runs from beside the Bhairabnath Temple in Taumadhi Tole to Tachupal Tole, the old centre of town. The first stretch of the street is a busy shopping thoroughfare selling everything from porters' tumplines (the leather or cloth strips across the forehead or chest used to support a load carried on the back) to Hindi movie DVDs.

At the first bend there are two interesting old buildings on the right-hand (southern) side. The **Sukul Dhoka** (Map pp204–5) is a *math* (Hindu priest's house), with superb woodcarving on its façade. Next door is the **Lun Bahal**, originally a 16th-century Buddhist monastery that was converted into a Hindu shrine with the addition of a stone statue of Bhimsen. If you look into the sanctum, in the inner courtyard, you can see the statue, dating from 1592, complete with a ferocious-looking brass mask.

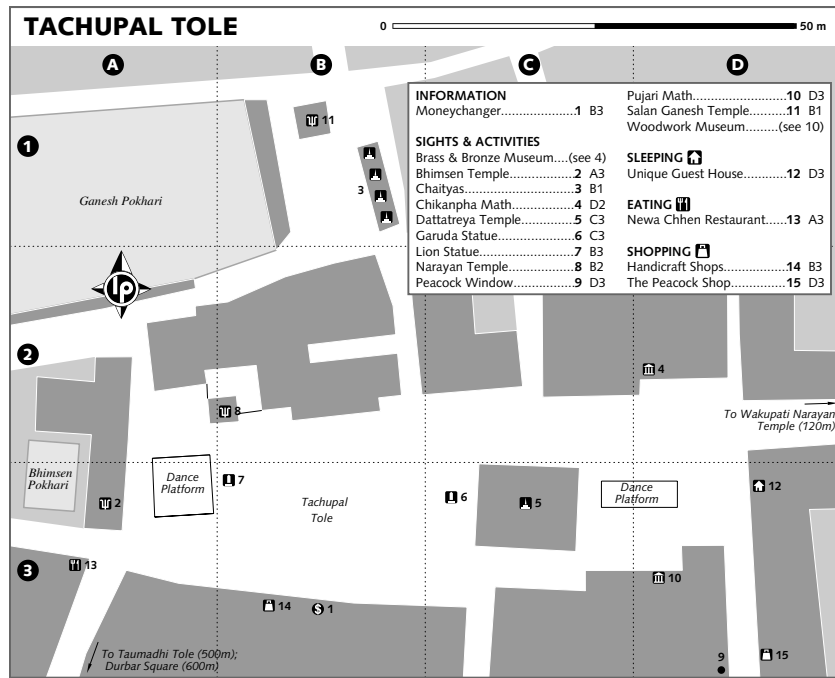
A little further along, the road joins **Golmadhi Square** (Map pp204–5) with a deep *hiti*, the small, triple-roofed **Golmadhi Ganesh Temple** and adjacent to it a **white chaitya**. Just down on the left is the well-restored façade of the **Jhaurbahi Dipankar Bihar**.

A further 100m brings you to another small open area with a *path* (pilgrim shelter) on your right. Behind it is a tank and, set behind a gateway, is the **Inacho Bahal** (Map pp204–5; see p203). A few more steps bring you to Tachupal Tole.

#### Tachupal Tole

Tachupal Tole was probably the original central square of Bhaktapur and the seat of Bhaktapur royalty until the late 16th century, so this is most likely the oldest part of the town. South from this square a maze of narrow laneways, passageways and courtyards runs down to riverside ghats.

The tall, square **Dattatreya Temple** (Map p202) was originally built in 1427, but alterations were made in 1458. Like some other important structures in the valley it is said



to have been built using the timber from a single tree. The temple is dedicated to Dattatreya, a blending of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, although the Garuda-topped pillar and the traditional weapons of Vishnu (conch and a disc) on their pillars indicate the strong influence of Vishnu. The temple is important to Shaivites, Vaishnavites and Buddhists.

The three-storey temple is raised well above the ground on its base, the sides of which are carved with some erotic scenes. The front section, which was a later addition to the temple, stands almost separate and the temple entrance is guarded by the same two Malla wrestlers who watch over the first plinth of the Nyatapola Temple.

At the other end of the square is the two-storey **Bhimsen Temple** (Map p202), variously dated to 1605, 1645, 1655 or 1657! The temple is squat, rectangular and open on the ground floor. It's fronted by a platform with a small double-roofed Vishnu/Narayan Temple and a pillar topped by a brass lion with his right paw raised. Steps lead down behind it to the deeply sunken Bhimsen Pokhari.

There are 10 buildings around the square that were originally used as *maths* (Hindu monasteries). The best known was the **Pujari Math**. It was originally constructed in the 15th century during the reign of King Yaksha Malla, but was rebuilt in 1763. German experts renovated the building in 1979 as a wedding gift for the then King Birendra. Until the 20th century, an annual caravan brought tributes to the monastery from Tibet.

The Pujari Math is principally famed for the superb 15th-century **peacock window**, 30m down a small alley on the right-hand side. It is reputed to be the finest carved window in the valley and is the subject of countless postcards and photographs. The shop opposite allows photos from its upper-floor window.

The building now houses a **Woodcarving Museum** (Map p202; admission Rs 20; ☎ 9am-4pm Wed-Mon), which has some fine examples of the woodcarving for which Bhaktapur has long been famous. It costs an extra Rs 20 to take photos; but there's not really enough light to make that worthwhile; bring a torch (flashlight). The ticket also covers entry to

the Brass & Bronze Museum and the National Art Gallery (p200).

Across the square from the Pujari Math is the **Brass & Bronze Museum** (Map p202; admission Rs 20; ☎ 9am-4pm Wed-Mon), with poorly lit examples of metalwork and ceremonial vessels from around the valley.

On the north side of Tachupal Tole is another open area, with the small **Salan Ganesh Temple** (Map p202), dating from 1654. The open temple is ornately decorated, but the image is just a rock with only the vaguest elephant-head shape. To one side of the temple is the Ganesh Pokhari, a large tank.

## WALKING TOUR

See Map pp204-5 for the route of this circular walking tour. The letter following the sights corresponds to the map position.

### Part I – North of Durbar Square

Starting from the northeastern corner of Durbar Sq, walk to the east of the high Fasidega Temple, continue north past a multicoloured Ganesh shrine to a little alleyway on the right, next to a thangka painting school. Follow the alleyway into a longer tunnel and out onto the main path. Continue past a shrine to a traditional building with **sun and moon plaques (A)** on the west side. Swing north (look for the strange leather face hanging on the north wall) and

then take a right turn, quickly swinging to the left just past a momo restaurant.

Three quarters of the way up the alleyway, look for the **terracotta Ganesh window (B)** on your right. At the junction take a right, past some lovely carved windows, and then swing left. Head north past a Mahakali Temple, a water pool and a city ticket office until you hit the main road on the north edge of the town.

Turn right (east) on the road towards Nagarkot and you soon come to the modern **Mahakali Temple (C)**, where a lovely shrine tops a small hill reached by a steep flight of steps.

Just beyond this temple, turn right back into town, walk uphill and then turn left just before a small pool. Continue walking until you reach the tiny, open, yellow-roofed **Mahalakshmi Temple (D)**. Turn right (south) here and continue down to another large tank, the Naga Pokhari. Here the typically green water contrasts nicely with the dyed yarns hung out to dry alongside the tank. On the western side of the tank, two **temples (E)** flank a central white **shikhara temple (F)**, while a cobra rears up from the centre of the tank.

Pass along the north side of the tank, swing north and then, 10m before a roofed **Ganesh shrine (G)**, pop into a low doorway on the right (marked by three steps) into a tiny

### BISKET JATRA AT KHALNA TOLE

Bisket Jatra heralds the start of the Nepali New Year and is one of the most exciting annual events in the valley. In preparation, Bhairab's huge triple-roofed chariot is assembled from the parts scattered beside the Bhairabnath Temple and behind the Nyatapola Temple in Taumadhi Tole. The huge and ponderous chariot is hauled by dozens of villagers to Khalna Tole with Betal, Bhairab's sidekick from the tiny temple behind the Bhairabnath Temple, riding out front like a ship's figurehead, while Bhadrakali, his consort, accompanies them in her own chariot.

The creaking and swaying chariots lumber around the town, pausing for a huge tug of war between the eastern and western sides of town. The winning side is charged with looking after the images of the gods during their week-long riverside sojourn in Khalna Tole's octagonal *path* (pilgrim shelter). After the battle the chariots slither down the steep road leading to Khalna Tole, where a huge 25m-high lingam (phallic symbol) is erected in the stone *yoni* (female genital symbol) base.

In the evening of the following day (New Year's day), the pole is pulled down, again in an often-violent tug of war. As the pole crashes to the ground, the new year officially commences. Bhairab and Betal return to Taumadhi Tole, while Bhadrakali goes back to her shrine by the river.

Other events take place around Bhaktapur for a week preceding New Year and then for days after, with locals often dressed in the town's traditional red, white and black striped cloth, known as *haku patasi*. Members of the potters' caste will put up and haul down their own lingam, and processions also carry images of Ganesh, Lakshmi and Mahakali around town.

courtyard with lovely woodcarvings and a central *chaitya*. Continue out the far end, follow the alley past another courtyard and then on the left you'll see the white-pillared entrance of the **Prashan Nashil Maha Bihar (H)**. This Buddhist temple has some nice stone carvings, some prayer flags and occasional devotional music.

Continue east to the road junction, marked by a lotus-roofed shrine, and take

a left to the large pool known as the Kwathandau Pokhari. Head right along the tank to its southeast corner and the **Nava Durga Temple (I)**, a Tantric temple. The golden door is surmounted by a golden window and is guarded by metal lions. It all contrasts nicely with the red-painted brick frontage.

Continue southeast past some wonderfully carved balconies (look up to see garlic and corn drying) to the main east-west road, which runs through Tachupal Tole and Taumadhi Tole. Around this area there are more potters at work. Turn right and immediately on your left is the elaborate entrance to the **Wakupati Narayan Temple (J)**, built in 1667. The ornate, golden temple is double-roofed and is fronted by a line-up of

no less than five Garudas supported on the backs of turtles. You can often find woodcarvers or spinners in this courtyard. Continue from here to **Tachupal Tole (K)**; p201).

## Part II – South of Tachupal Tole

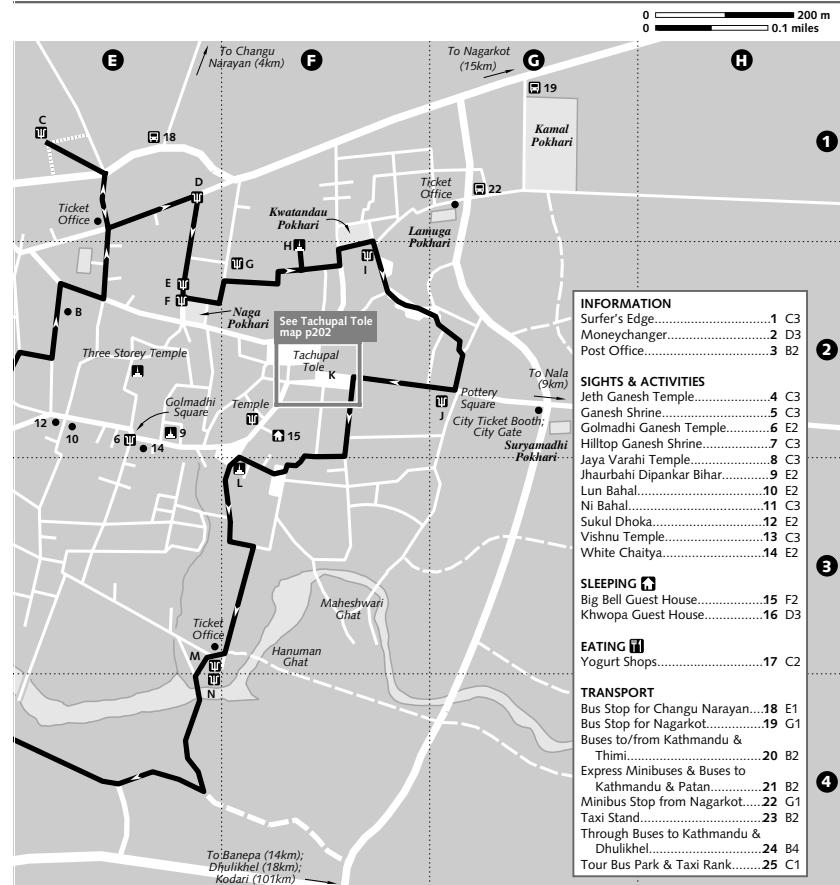
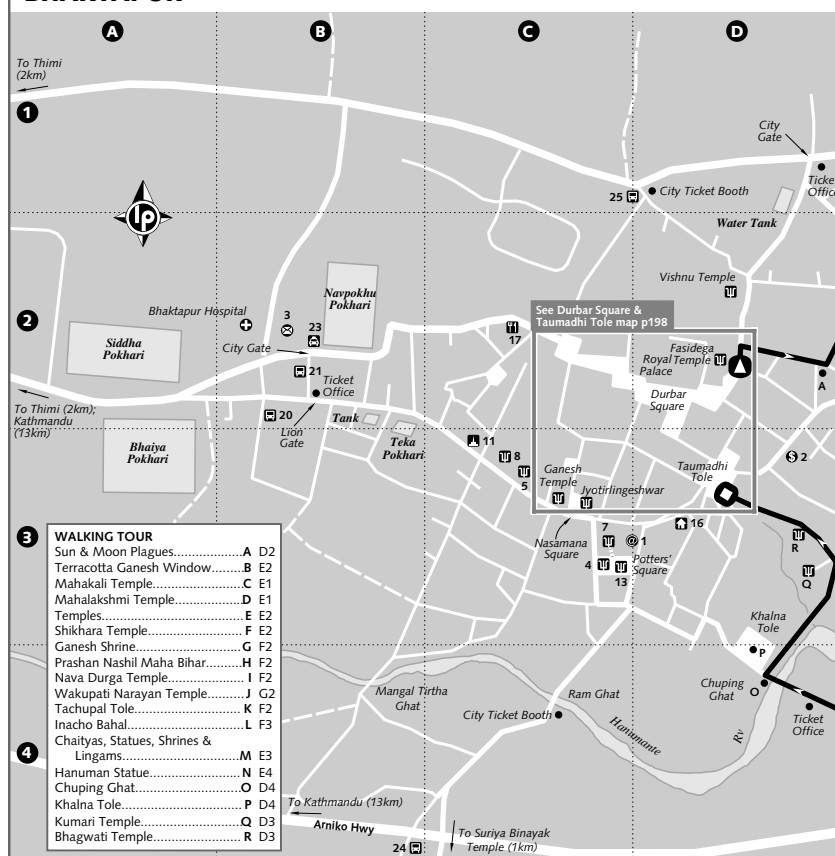
From Tachupal Tole turn left down the side of the Pujari Math; directions to its famous peacock window are well signposted. At a square jog right (by a small deity), left, right at a second small square and left again at the main square. Then immediately on your left is the unassuming gateway to the ornate little **Inacho Bahal (L)** – signposted the 'Sri Indravarta Mahavihar' – with prayer wheels, figures of the Buddha and a lopsided miniature pagoda roof rising up above the courtyard.

From here the road drops down to the Hanumante River, and enters rural surroundings. At the bottom of the hill is a Ram Temple and a curious collection of **chaityas, statues, shrines and lingams (M)**, including a bas-relief of a nude Shiva (obviously pleased to see you) next to what are said to be the largest Shiva lingam in Nepal. Head down to the sacred river confluence for a collection of shrines and statues including one of **Hanuman (N)**, the faithful ally of Rama and Sita. On the nearby building are four paintings, partly obscured by a photogenic tree, including one on the far right showing Hanuman returning to Rama from his Himalayan medicinal herb foray, clutching a whole mountain in his hand.

### WALK FACTS

**Duration** Two hours  
**Start** Durbar Sq  
**Finish** Taumadhi Tole

## BHAKTAPUR





Cross the bridge and then take a hair-pin turn back from the road onto a small footpath. This rural stroll ends by another temple complex, where you cross the river by the **Chuping Ghat (O)**, where there are areas for ritual bathing and cremations.

Above the river is **Khalna Tole (P)**, the centre for the spectacular activities during the Bisket Jatra festival (see the boxed text, p203). On the south side of the square look for the huge wooden poles (known as *yo sin*) that are erected in the central plinth during the festival. Just south is a pretty temple complex that now serves as Tribhuvan University's Department of Ethnomusicology.

The circular walk ends with a gentle climb back into the town, past the modern **Kumari Temple (Q)** and **Bhagwati Temple (R)**, emerging at a small livestock market on the southern side of Taumadhi Tole.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Bhaktapur celebrates **Bisket Jatra** (Nepali new year's day) on April 14th with a stupendous chariot festival (see the boxed text, p203). The nearby town of Thimi celebrates the dramatic **Balkumari Jatra** at the same time (see the boxed text, p209).

Bhaktapur is also the best place to witness the antics of **Gai Jatra** (see p364), where cows and boys dressed as cows are paraded through the streets. It's not the running of the bulls but it is a lot of fun.

## SLEEPING

A growing number of visitors to Bhaktapur are staying overnight. There's plenty to see, no screaming motorbikes or air pollution,

and once dusk falls all the Kathmandu day-trippers melt away, not to return until after breakfast the next day.

Most guesthouses have only a handful of (generally small) rooms so you may have to hunt around the first night. In general you are paying more for the location and views than the quality of your room, and your rupees won't go quite as far in Bhaktapur as they do in Kathmandu. Single rooms are in short supply.

## Budget

**Pagoda Guest House** (Map p198; ☎ 6613248; www.pagodaguesthouse.com.np; r without bathroom US\$5-10, with bathroom US\$15-25) This friendly and family-run place is just off the northwestern edge of Taumadhi Tole. There are only six rooms, all different and neat as a button, though perhaps a little bit overpriced these days. The cheaper rooms come with towels and a heater; the pricier upstairs rooms have a clean bathroom and TV. There's also a decent rooftop restaurant but the views are limited.

**Shiva Guest House** (Map p198; ☎ 6613912; www.shivaguesthouse.com; s/d/tr without bathroom US\$6/8/12, s/d with bathroom US\$15/20, discounts of 20% Dec-Aug) Bang on Durbar Sq, this well-maintained place has corner rooms with fantastic views over Durbar Sq, but the other rooms are overpriced. There's a cosy restaurant on the ground floor (mains Rs 150 to 300).

**Golden Gate Guest House** (Map p198; ☎ 6610534; www.goldengateguesthouse.com; s/d without bathroom Rs 200/300, with bathroom Rs 400/700, deluxe Rs 1300/1500) A friendly place entered through a passageway from Durbar Sq or from the laneway between Durbar Sq and Taumadhi Tole.

Rooms lack much style but are generally clean and some have balconies. The top-floor deluxe rooms are best. There are fine rooftop views and there's also a good restaurant downstairs, featuring a stunning 400-year-old carved window.

**Big Bell Guest House** (Map pp204-5; ☎ 6611675; r without bathroom Rs 300-400) A modern friendly family-run cheapie, a stone's throw from Tachupal Tole. There are no creaking floorboards here to give it charm but the common bathrooms are clean and the best rooms overlook the small garden restaurant.

**Khwopa Guest House** (Map pp204-5; ☎ 6614661; khwopa12@hotmail.com; s Rs 350, d Rs 450-500) Low ceilings and a lack of views give this well-run place a hobbit-like vibe, but it's a decent budget choice just off Taumadhi Tole. The upstairs rooms are quieter.

**Siddhi Laxmi Guest House** (Map p198; ☎ 6612500; siddhilaxmi.guesthouse@gmail.com; r Rs 250-600, ste Rs 1050; Til Mahadev Naryan Temple Complex) The best thing about this tiny five-roomed guesthouse is the hidden location in one of Bhaktapur's nicest courtyards. The huge top-floor suite is great but it's all downhill as you head downstairs. The mid-floor rooms are good value and one comes with a shared balcony. The ground-floor rooms have thin mattresses and tiny bathrooms.

## Midrange

**Bhadgaon Guest House** (Map p198; ☎ 6610488; www.bhadgaon.com.np; Taumadhi Tole; s/d US\$15/20) From the lovely foyer seating to the great rooftop views over Taumadhi Tole and the Langtang Himalaya beyond, this place is a good choice. Rooms are clean and comfortable but vary in size; everyone wants the top-floor double with its private balcony. The rooftop restaurant is popular and reasonably priced. The new nine-roomed annex (☎ 2133124) across the square is just as good, with views on the east side through carved wooden windows, but no restaurant.

**Pahan Chhen Guest House** (Map p198; ☎ 6612887; srp@mos.com.np; s Rs 500-700, d Rs 800-1000) On the northeastern corner of Taumadhi Tole, with comfortable cosy rooms with clean bathrooms, although they are a bit small (especially the singles). Black-and-white photos lend a dash of style and the views from the roof are as good as you'll get.

**Sunny Guest House** (Map p198; ☎ 6616094; sunnyres@hotmail.com; r Rs 700-1200, ste Rs 2000) Next

door to the Pahan Chhen, this is a similar deal, with only six rooms. The front-facing rooms offer some of the best views of Taumadhi Tole, and rooms are quite chic, with nice lighting and carved window lattices but small bathrooms. The suite has a gorgeous carved window seat. There's a relaxing balcony restaurant (below).

**Unique Guest House** (Map p202; ☎ 6611575; unique@col.com.np; s/d US\$10/15) A tiny, vertical place with four rooms on four floors in a low-ceilinged, creaky and slightly claustrophobic old building on Tachupal Tole. It's the only hotel in this part of the town, which helps create a powerful atmosphere once the crowds disappear. It's probably no good if you are much over six feet tall, though.

## EATING

Bhaktapur is certainly no competition for Kathmandu when it comes to restaurants, but don't worry, you won't starve. Don't forget to try Bhaktapur's famous speciality: *juju dhau*, 'the king of curds' (yogurt) while you are here. You can find it in tourist restaurants, but there are also several holes-in-the-wall between Durbar Sq and Navpokhu Pokhari (look for the pictures of curd outside), where you can get a small cup for Rs 7 or a giant family-sized bowl for Rs 60.

**Café Nyatapola** (Map p198; ☎ 6610346; snacks Rs 150, set meals Rs 450-550, pot of tea Rs 55; ☎ 8am-7pm) Right in Taumadhi Tole, this is in a building that was once a traditional pagoda temple – it even has erotic carvings on some of the roof struts. It's a cramped tourist-zone but the location is irresistible. Prices are comparatively high but part of the profits go to a local hospital.

**Marco Polo Restaurant** (Map p198; mains Rs 70-120) On the corner of the square and beside the Nyatapola Temple, this is a cheaper bet if you want a substantial meal, and it's open in the evenings when many of the other tourist places are shut. There's a small balcony with limited views over Taumadhi Tole.

**Sunny Restaurant** (Map p198; mains Rs 140-200) Consists of two places; one atop the guesthouse of the same name and the other next door. Both offer a terrace and great views over the square, though the hotel restaurant is 10% more expensive. Local specials include the Newari set meal and king curd.

The best-value food in town is in the courtyard of the Big Bell Guest House

## NAGA PANCHAMI

During the festival of Naga Panchami people across Nepal leave offerings to the *nagas* (serpent spirits). Among the offerings is a bowl of rice, offered because of an incident at the Siddha Pokhari pond on the western outskirts of Bhaktapur which, legend has it, was once inhabited by an evil *naga*. A holy man determined to kill the *naga* himself by taking the form of a snake, and told his companion to be ready with a bowl of magic rice. If, after he entered the pond, the water turned white then the *naga* had won and it was all over. If, on the other hand, the water turned red, then he had defeated the *naga* and although he would emerge from the pond in the form of a snake, the magical rice could restore his original form. Sure enough the water turned red, but when the holy man in the form of a hideous serpent emerged from the water, his horrified companion simply turned tail and ran, taking the rice with him. The holy man tried to catch him, but failed, and eventually decided to return to the pond and remain there.

To this day the inhabitants of Bhaktapur keep well clear of the Siddha Pokhari pond, and on the day of Naga Panchami a bowl of rice is put out – just in case the holy man/snake turns up.

### KITE FLYING IN THE KATHMANDU VALLEY

No visitor to the Kathmandu Valley in autumn, around the time of Dasain, can fail to notice the local penchant for kite flying – kids can be seen flying kites on rooftops, on streets, in open spaces and in parks.

To the uninitiated, this looks like, well, kids flying kites, but there is a lot more to it than meets the eye. First and foremost is the fact that kites are flown to fight other kites – downing your opponent is the objective, and this is done by cutting their line.

The way to protect yourself from the ignominy of becoming a dreaded *hi-chait* (kite with a cut line) and to make your own kite as lethal as possible is to armour the line of the kite. In the past, people used to make their own *maajhaa* (line armour) and everyone had their own secret recipe, often involving a combination of crushed light bulbs, boiled slugs and gum. The trick was to make it sharp enough to cut an opponent's line, but not so sharp that it would cut itself when wound on to the *lattai* (wooden reel). These days people use ready-made threads, which cost anything from Rs 40 for 1000m up to Rs 25 per metre for pre-armed line from India.

The other hazard that may catch the unwary is the *mandali*, a stone on a string launched by a pirate on low-fliers – the idea being that they cross your string, bring down your kite and then make off with said kite!

The paper kites themselves look very basic but are surprisingly manoeuvrable, the so-called Lucknow kites being the most sought after. Prices for kites start as low as Rs 5 and go to a modest Rs 50 or so. Popular places to buy kites are Asan Tole and Bhotahiti in Kathmandu's old city.

(p207), near Tachupal Tole, where you can get standards like sweet-and-sour vegetables with rice for Rs 50.

**Newa Chhen Restaurant** (Map p202; Tachupal Tole; snacks Rs 30-70) Serves up local snacks in a creaky old building but wouldn't be noteworthy if it weren't for the single corner table which has killer views of Tachupal Tole. Grab it early and don't let go.

If you are on a tight budget, there are several basic momo restaurants around town. The food is fairly low grade but the momos are tasty and you can fill up for pennies.

### SHOPPING

Bhaktapur is famed for its pottery and woodcarving. Shops and stalls catering to visitors are concentrated around Tachupal Tole.

### Woodcarving & Puppets

Bhaktapur is renowned for its woodcarving and you'll see good examples in stalls around Tachupal Tole and the alley beside the Pujari Math, right under the peacock window in fact. Popular pieces include copies of the peacock window or masks depicting the god Bhairab.

Some of the best puppets, which are on sale in their thousands in all the valley towns, come from Bhaktapur and nearby Thimi.

### Paper

Hand-made paper, cards, albums and other paper products are available throughout town. One good place to check out is **The Peacock Shop** (Map p202; ☎ 6610820; ☎ 9am-6pm, factory closed Sat), near the Peacock Window down the side of Pujari Math. You can visit the workshop out back and observe the pressing, drying, smoothing, cutting and printing processes involved in making the paper. You can also see the raw *lokta* (daphne bush) plant material from which the paper is made.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Bicycle

The main Arniko Hwy to Bhaktapur carries a lot of bellowing, belching buses and trucks so it's better to follow the parallel road to Bhaktapur via the northern end of Thimi. See p84 for a description of the route. Avoid peak hours.

#### Bus, Minibus & Taxi

Minibuses from Kathmandu (Rs 12, 40 minutes) drop off/depart from a stand just southwest of Bhaktapur's Navpokhu Pokhari, a short walk from Durbar Sq. The last minibus back to Kathmandu leaves at about 6.45pm. Express buses are the best bet, as local buses stop in Thimi en route.

Taxis from Kathmandu cost around Rs 350 one way.

Buses for Nagarkot (Rs 15, one hour) leave regularly from the northeastern corner of the city.

Buses to Changu Narayan (Rs 8, 30 minutes) leave every 30 minutes or so from the northern junction with the Changu Narayan road.

For Dhulikhel you'll have to walk 10 minutes down to the Arniko Hwy (via Potters' Sq and Ram Ghat) and catch a (probably packed) through bus from Kathmandu.

## AROUND BHAKTAPUR

### SURIYA BINAYAK TEMPLE

About 1km south of town, this 17th-century Ganesh Temple is said to be a good place to visit if you're worried about your children being late developers! It's also popular with marriage parties. To get there take the road down past Potters' Sq to Ram Ghat (where there are areas for ritual bathing and cremations), cross the river and continue to the main road. The road continues on the other side and has fine views back over the rice paddies to Bhaktapur. It's about a 45-minute walk from central Bhaktapur.

Where the road turns sharp right, a steep stairway climbs up to the temple on a forested hilltop. As you step inside the temple enclosure, the very realistic-looking rat, on top of a tall pillar, indicates that this temple belongs to Ganesh. The image of the god sits in an enclosure, awash in red paste,

marigolds, rice offerings and melted candles. Statues of kneeling devotees in a range of traditional headdresses face the image and the *shikhara* is flanked by large bells.

There are twice-weekly puja ceremonies on Tuesday and Saturday mornings; get here early and grab a tea-and-omelette breakfast at the pilgrim stalls. If you are feeling energetic, steps lead up the hillside to the right of the temple for the best valley views.

### THIMI

Thimi (known historically as Madhyapur) is the fourth-largest town in the valley, outranked only by Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur. It's a typical Newari town and its 'capable people' (the name of the town is derived from this Newari expression) operate thriving cottage industries producing pottery and papier-mâché masks. You'll pass a string of mask shops if you head west from Thimi along the northern road to Bhaktapur. Thimi isn't spectacular but the lack of traffic or tourists make it a pleasant stop-off en route to Bhaktapur.

The town's main road runs north-south between the old and new (Arniko Hwy) Bhaktapur roads, which form the northern and southern boundaries of the town.

### Sights

From the southern gate on the main highway there's a short, stiff walk up to the main southern square and the 16th-century **Balkumari Temple**. Balkumari is one of Bhairab's

### BALKUMARI JATRA

The small town of Thimi welcomes the new year with an exciting festival instituted by King Jagat Jyoti Malla in the early 1600s in which Balkumari, one of Bhairab's consorts, is honoured. All through the first day of the new year devotees crowd around the Balkumari Temple in Thimi and as dusk falls hundreds of *chirags* (ceremonial oil lamps) are lit. Some devotees lie motionless around the temple all night with burning oil lamps balanced on their legs, arms, chests and foreheads.

The next morning men come from the various *toles* or quarters of Thimi and from surrounding villages, each team carrying a *khat* (palanquin) with images of different gods. As the 32 *khat*s whirl around the temple, red powder is hurled at them and the ceremony reaches fever pitch as the *khat* bearing Ganesh arrives from the village of Nagadesh. The crowds parade up and down the main street until late in the morning when Ganesh, borne by hundreds of men, makes a break for home, pursued by the other *khat*s. Sacrifices are then made to Balkumari.

In the nearby village of Bode another *khat* festival, with just seven *khat*s rather than 32, takes place at the Mahalakshmi Temple. Here a volunteer spends the whole day with an iron spike piercing his tongue. Successful completion of this painful rite brings merit to the whole village as well as the devotee.

*shaktis* and the temple's entrance is plastered in feathers from previous sacrifices. A statue of Balkumari's vehicle, a peacock, stands in front of the temple. Further north, past a Lokeshwar temple (safe behind four sets of locked doors!), a school flanked by painted images and a *shikhara*-style temple, is a 16th-century **Narayan Temple** and a **Bhairab Temple**, with erotic carvings on the struts and a small brass plaque of Bhairab's face, his mouth stuffed with rice offerings. North of here are silversmiths, flour grinders and basket makers, and a stupa complex where men gather to play cards.

At the north end of Thimi is the crossroads with the old road to Bhaktapur; turn left, and head downhill past a small shrine and water tank. Take a detour right off the main road for a couple of minutes to see the village of **Nagadesh** and the impressive Ganesh Dyochen (a *dyochen* is a Tantric temple). Through the gateway and to the right is the triple-roofed **Ganesh Temple**, where the façade is often smeared with sacrificial blood.

Back at the northern crossroads, a 15-minute walk north will bring you to the vil-

lage of **Bode**. From a crossroads marked by a couple of corner stores take a left for five minutes into the brick alleys of the village. Take a right at the first pool to the Nil Barahi Temple and the interesting belt-driven contraption that's used to roast corn. Head left (west) one block, and then take a right to the 17th-century **Mahalakshmi Temple** with an image of a reclining Vishnu behind it.

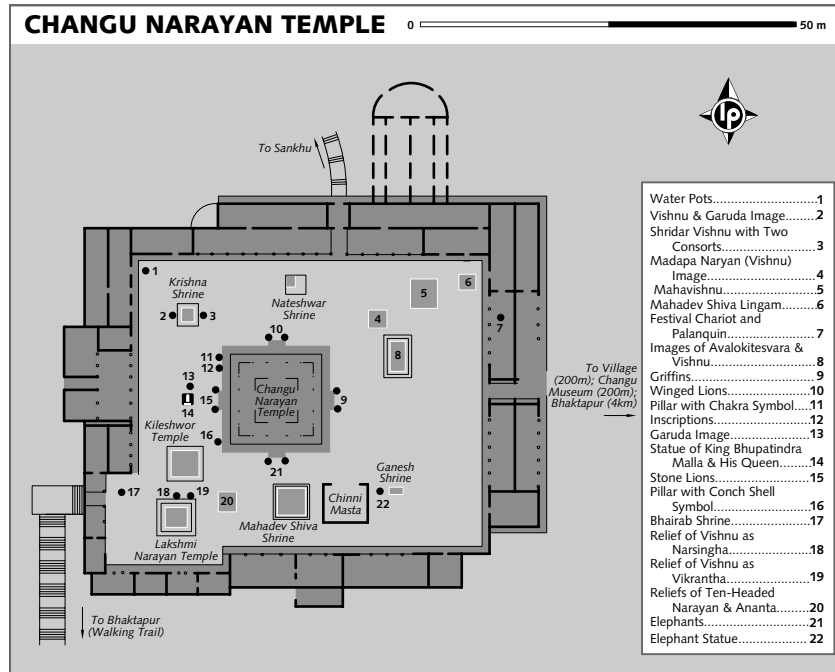
### Getting There & Away

Any Bhaktapur-bound minibus from Kathmandu will be able to drop you at Thimi, probably at the southern entrance but possibly the northern entrance, and you catch another minibus on to Bhaktapur from either junction. A taxi from Kathmandu to the southern entrance costs around Rs 200.

If you are continuing by bike to Bhaktapur, the northern (old) road offers a far more pleasant ride.

### CHANGU NARAYAN TEMPLE

The beautiful and historic temple of **Changu Narayan** (admission Rs 60; ☞ dawn-dusk) stands on a hilltop at the eastern end of the valley,



### HIKING THE SHORTCUT BETWEEN CHANGU NARAYAN & SANKHU

From Changu Naryan you can avoid having to backtrack by hiking an hour or so north to the main Bodhnath-Sankhu road and then continuing east to Sankhu or west to Bodhnath.

From the northern entrance of the Changu Narayan Temple a short and steep path descends to the Manohara River, which is crossed easily by wading or by a temporary bridge during the dry season (impossible in the monsoon). This brings you out to the Sankhu road at Bramhakhel, which is about 3.5km southeast of Gokarna. Frequent minibuses head east and west from here.

Coming from the other direction, you'll see a small sign for Changu Narayan on a building wall on the south side at the entry to Bramhakhel. It's a five-minute walk across the fields to the river and the temporary bridge. It's quite a steep and difficult scramble up the hill that will take at least 45 minutes (especially if you're carrying a bicycle). There's quite a labyrinth of paths up the hill and it's not a bad idea to have a guide (and bicycle carrier). You will probably find boys offering their carrying services – establish a price in advance. You can recognise the temple by its golden roof atop the final bump of a lengthy spur running down from the eastern edge of the valley.

about 6km north of Bhaktapur and 22km from Kathmandu. It dates from 1702, when it was rebuilt after a fire, however its origins go back to the 4th century and many of the stone sculptures date from the Licchavi period (4th to 9th centuries). The temple is a Unesco World Heritage site.

Despite the temple's beauty, its easy access from Bhaktapur and the proximity of some fine walks nearby, it attracts relatively few visitors.

The one street of Changu Village leads up from the car park past a central *path* (pilgrim shelter), water tank and Ganesh shrine, before ascending past thangka and wooden mask shops to the temple entrance.

The double-roofed temple is dedicated to Vishnu in his incarnation as Narayan and is exceptionally beautiful, with quite amazingly intricate roof struts depicting multi-armed Tantric deities. It is fronted on the west side by a kneeling figure of Garuda said to date from the 5th century. The man-bird mount of Vishnu has a snake around his neck and kneels with hands in the *namaste* position facing the temple. Stone lions guard the wonderfully gilded door, which is flanked by equally detailed gilded windows. Two pillars at the front corners carry a conch and disc, the traditional symbols of Vishnu. Non-Hindus are not allowed inside the temple itself, which is normally shut anyway.

The temple's true gems are the wonderful, much older sculptures dotted around the courtyard. In the southwest corner are several notable images, including one of Vishnu as Narsingha, his man-lion incar-

nation, disembowelling a demon. Another, to the left, shows him as Vikrantha/Vamana, the six-armed dwarf who transformed into a giant capable of crossing the universe in three steps during his defeat of King Bali. He is in a characteristic 'action pose', with his leg raised high. To the side of these images is a small black slab showing a 10-headed and 10-armed Vishnu, with Ananta reclining on a serpent below. The scenes are divided into three sections – the underworld, the world of man and the heavens. The beautifully carved image is around 1500 years old.

In the northwestern corner there is a 7th-century image of Vishnu astride the Garuda, which is illustrated on the Rs 10 banknote. In front of the Garuda figure that faces the front of the temple is the oldest stone inscription in the valley, dating from 464 AD. The inscription is in Sanskrit and tells how the king persuaded his mother not to commit *sati* (ritual suicide) after his father's death.

Also interesting are the statues of King Bhupatindra Malla and his queen, kneeling in a gilded cage in front of the temple. In the centre of the courtyard, triangular bricks are used, while out towards the edge there are older, rounded-corner bricks.

Just outside the temple complex is the Bhimsen Pati, with its stone guardians; the remains of the Balamphu royal residence on the north side; and a small open-air collection of sculptures to the south, behind the Changu Peaceful Cottage.

Back in Changu is the **Changu Museum** (admission Rs 140; ☞ 7am-6pm), which gives a funky introduction to traditional valley life,



exhibited in a 160-year-old house. Look for the rhino-skin shield, the 2nd-century leather coins, Tantric astrology books and 225-year-old rice! It's worth a visit, though the recent 300% ticket hike is a bit cheeky.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Changu Guest House** (☎ 6616652; saritabhata@hotmail.com; s/d lower fl Rs 300/400, s/d upper fl Rs 350/500) Just before the temple, the four simple but clean rooms here offer a peaceful and off-beat place to spend the night. The upper-floor rooms are worth the extra money as they come with a balcony and views over Bhaktapur. The owners can arrange visits to local Tamang villages and distilleries.

**Changu Naryan Hill Resort** (☎ 6617691; r Rs 300) 600m east of the village, along the track to Nagarkot, this secluded guesthouse could be really nice, with great views and a homely atmosphere, but the basic concrete rooms and cold-water bathrooms spoil it a little.

The **New Hill Restaurant**, by the car park at the entrance to Changu, and the slightly pricier **Changu Peaceful Cottage**, near the temple, both offer a decent place for lunch.

### Getting There & Away

Regular public buses run the 6km between Changu Narayan and Bhaktapur (Rs 8, 30 minutes), with the last bus around dusk. A taxi from Kathmandu costs around Rs 800 return, or Rs 250 from Bhaktapur.

By bike it's a downhill run to Bhaktapur (30 minutes), but a steep climb on the way there. Perhaps the best option is to take a bus or taxi to Changu Naryan and then walk back via the village of Jhaukel (1½ hours). A network of walking trails lead back to Bhaktapur; just keep asking the way.

If you're headed to Nagarkot you can take the footpath east to Tharkot and catch a bus for the final uphill stretch – see p224 for details of the hike.

## THE NORTHEASTERN VALLEY

This quiet corner of the Kathmandu valley is probably the least visited but it offers visitors a couple of charming temples, a lovely mountain-bike itinerary and access to the start of the Helambu trek (p339).

## GOKARNA MAHADEV TEMPLE

Only 2km northeast of Bodhnath, past the ugly suburb of Jorpati, the road to Sundarjal branches north off the Sankhu road and, after 3.5km of twists and turns, takes you to the old Newari village of Gokarna, 10km from Kathmandu. The village is notable for its fine riverside Shiva temple.

Built in 1582, the triple-roofed Mahadev (Great God) or **Gokarneshwar (Lord of Gokarna) Temple** (admission free) stands on the banks of the Bagmati River; its inner sanctum enshrines a particularly revered Shiva lingam. Over the temple entrance is a golden *torana*, with Shiva and Parvati making an appearance in the centre in the Uma Maheshwar position (where Parvati sits on Shiva's thigh and leans against him) and a figure of the Garuda above them.

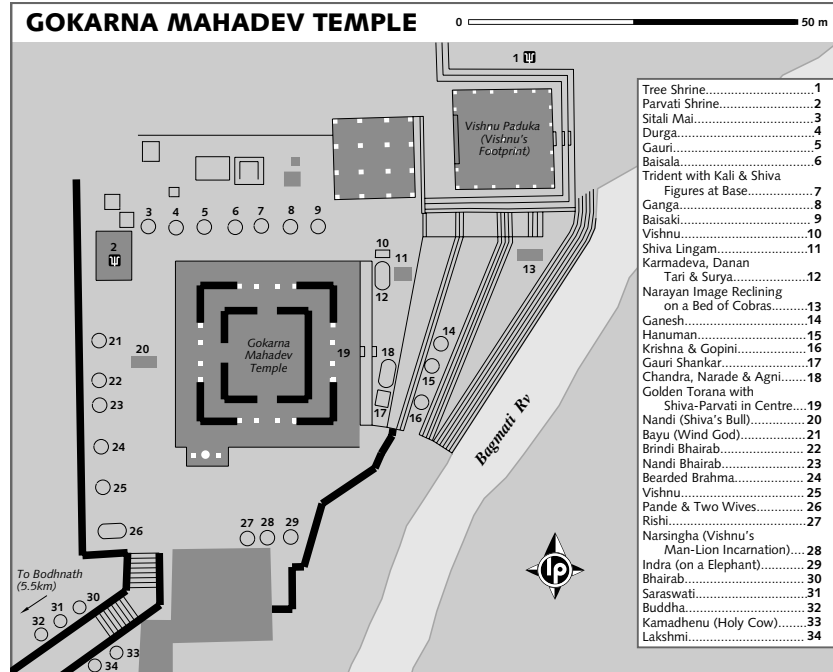
The temple's great interest is the surprisingly varied collection of sculptures and reliefs all around the site, some dating back more than a thousand years. They even line the pathway down from the road to the temple courtyard.

The sculptures illustrate an A to Z of Hindu mythology, including early Vedic gods such as Aditya (Sun God), Chandra (Moon God), Indra (on an elephant) and Ganga (with four arms and a pot on her head from which pours the Ganges). Shiva

### NARSINGHA

The image of Vishnu as Narsingha (or Nar-simha) is a common one throughout the valley. In his man-lion incarnation the god is traditionally seen with a demon stretched across his legs, in the act of killing the creature by disembowelling it. You can find Narsingha at work at Changu Narayan, in front of the palace in Patan, just inside the Hanuman Dhoka entrance in Kathmandu and at the Gokarna Mahadev Temple.

The demon was supposedly undefeatable as it could not be killed by man or beast, by day or night or by any weapon. Vishnu's appearance as Narsingha neatly overcame the first obstacle, for a man-lion is neither a man nor a beast. He then waited until dusk to attack the demon, for dusk is neither day nor night. And instead of a weapon Narsingha used his own nails to tear the demon apart.



appears in several forms, including as Kamadeva, the God of Love, and Vishnu appears as Narsingha, making a particularly thorough job of disembowelling a nasty demon (see the boxed text, opposite). The god Gauri Shankar is interesting since it contains elements of both Shiva and Parvati. The Brahma figure in the southwest corner appears to have only three heads (he should have four) until you peer around the back and discover the hidden head.

The finest of the Gokarna statuary is in the small shrine house, which is in the northwestern corner of the courtyard. This 8th-century sculpture of the beautiful goddess Parvati shows her at her radiant best.

To one side of the main temple, just above the river, is the small, open, single-storey **Vishnu Paduka**. This relatively recent addition shelters a metal plate bearing Vishnu's footprint. Outside, set into the steps above the river, is an image of Naryan reclining on a bed of cobras, just like the images at Budhanilkantha and Balaju. To the north, behind the pavilion, is a remarkable shrine that has been almost entirely taken over by

a tree that must have started as a seed on its roof. There's a spiritual message in there somewhere, we're sure...

Those who have recently lost a father often visit the temple, particularly during Gokarna Aunsi, the Nepali equivalent of Father's Day, which falls in September.

### Getting There & Away

You can walk, cycle, take a minibus (easiest from Bodhnath) or hire a taxi to Gokarna. For the latter, expect to pay a Rs 500 return fare from Kathmandu or Rs 150 one way from Bodhnath.

For a great day out on a mountain bike you can combine a visit to the temple with a trip to Sankhu (p214); it's more enjoyable if you avoid the heavy traffic and set off from Jorpati.

## GOKARNA FOREST

At Gokarna, 4km east of Bodhnath, the 18-hole **Gokarna Forest Golf Resort** (☎ 4451212; www.gokarna.com) is one of the finest in South Asia. The Gleneagles-designed course has a beautiful setting in a 470-acre former royal hunting

**GOKARNA-KOPAN-BODHNATH WALK**

There's a pleasant walking or biking route between Gokarna and Bodhnath via the monastery at Kopan. The obvious trail starts from just opposite the Gokarna Mahadev temple, to the right of a roadside statue, and quickly branches left at the Sahayogi Higher Secondary School. After five minutes, branch right onto a dirt road as it follows the side of a pine-clad hill. You can see the yellow walls of Kopan Monastery ahead atop a hill and the Bodhnath stupa down below in the valley.

After another five to 10 minutes, branch left when you meet a junction with a paved road. The track soon becomes a footpath (OK for mountain bikes). After another five minutes, branch left, passing below a new monastery and follow the hillside to a saddle on the ridge. A couple of minutes later take a path heading uphill to the right – this takes you up the side of another monastery to the entrance of Kopan (45 minutes).

From Kopan, just follow the main road south for 40 minutes to Bodhnath, or jump on one of the frequent minibuses. Before you hit the built-up area of Bodhnath you want to branch left into the village, otherwise you'll end up west of Bodhnath, close to the Hyatt Regency Hotel.

reserve – one of the valley's few remaining forested areas. An 18 hole round costs about US\$40/50 for weekdays/weekend, plus club hire (US\$10), shoes (US\$5) and a caddy (US\$3).

The resort's **Harmony Spa** (☎ 7am-8pm) at Le Meridian (see sleeping) offers a range of top-end massages, Ayurvedic treatments and wraps from staff trained in Thailand (try an hour's tamarind and oatmeal polish for US\$25). US\$20 gets you a day pass for the gym, pool, sauna and Jacuzzi; on Saturdays you get a barbeque lunch thrown in for free. Half-day spa packages start at Rs 3000.

In front of the Harmony Spa entrance is a 200-year old pipal tree, where the Buddha (played by Keanu Reeves, of all people) in Bertolucci's film *Little Buddha* was tempted by the demon Mara and called the earth to witness his victory. Not a lot of people know that...

Le Meridian also arranges forest walks (Rs 250 for a guide) within the reserve to the Bandevi (Forest Goddess) Temple and elephant steps, or to the Gokarna Mahadev Temple (one hour; see p212).

**Sleeping**

**Le Meridian** (☎ 4451212; [www.gokarna.com/html/the\\_hotel.html](http://www.gokarna.com/html/the_hotel.html), [www.lemeridien.com](http://www.lemeridien.com); s/d US\$160/180, discounts of 50-60%) Top-of-the-line resort accommodation is provided in this superbly peaceful modern-day palace. Wicker furniture and dark woods add a colonial feel inside, as do the forests of deer and monkeys outside. The old block rooms are housed in a former Rana hunting lodge. It's perfect if

you need some pampering after a trek or a spell in Kathmandu. The clubhouse restaurant is surprisingly good value.

**Transport**

You need your own transport to get to the resort, or take a taxi from Kathmandu for around Rs 300 one way. Alternatively, take the bus to Sankhu, get off at the hotel gates and then walk 1km (but try not to let anyone see you...).

**SANKHU**

Sankhu was once an important post on the trading route between Kathmandu and Lhasa (Tibet), and although the town's flower has faded, you can still see many signs of its former prosperity. Although many traditional aspects of Newari life continue here, the most persuasive reason to visit is the beautiful Vajrayogini Temple complex, an easy 45-minute (2km) walk or bicycle ride northeast of town.

As well as visiting the temple, it's worth devoting an hour or so to meandering around Sankhu village. At Dhalna Tole make a left (east) to Salkha Tole, then a diversion north to the Salkha Mahadev Temple, then south back to the bus station.

**Vajrayogini Temple**

Perched high above the valley, in a grove of huge, ancient trees, this complex of temples is well worth a visit. The main temple was built in 1655 by Pratap Malla of Kathmandu, but it seems likely the site has been used for much longer than that. It's a

sublimely peaceful site, the silence broken only by the chatter of wild monkeys drinking from the many water spouts.

At Sankhu, turn left at the bus stop and walk north through the village, past some lovely old Newari architecture (a map at the bus stop highlights the nicest buildings). The road jogs right and left at Dhalna Tole and continues north out of the village, under an ugly concrete archway. There are some fine stone carvings of Vishnu and Ganesh after the arch. The road then forks. The left fork is the traditional approach for pedestrians and descends down to the small river; the right fork is drivable (though rough) to the base of the hill. Park at the teashop.

The climb up the stone steps to the temples is steep and hot. About halfway up there is a shelter and some carvings of a withered-looking Kali and orange Ganesh. A natural stone here represents Bhairab, and sacrifices are made at its foot.

There are two temples in the main courtyard and the one nearest to the entrance is the **Vajrayogini Temple**, a pagoda with a three-tiered roof of sheet copper. There is some beautiful repoussé work on the southern façade, though the actual image of the goddess can only be seen when the priest opens the door for puja (religious ritual).

The two-tiered temple furthest from the entrance enshrines a *chaitya* and commemorates Ugra Tara, a Hindu-ised version of Vajrayogini. The woodcarving around the doors is particularly fine. The rock between the two temples represents the *naga* god, as indicated by the encircling stone snake. In the far left corner of the courtyard as you enter are some caves once used for Tantric practices. Behind the temples and up some stairs are buildings that were once used as pilgrim resthouses and priests' houses.

**Getting There & Away**

Buses and minibuses to Sankhu leave from Kathmandu's City (Ratna Park) bus station (Rs 15 to Rs 20, one hour) and pass a major checkpoint. The last bus back to Kathmandu leaves Sankhu around 6pm.

It's easy to reach Sankhu by bicycle from Kathmandu (20km). The road is sealed and flat (with a few minor exceptions), and it's an attractive and interesting ride, once you get past Jorpati. Figure on a 1½-hour ride (11.5km) from Bodhnath.

For a loop trip it's possible (in the dry season at least) to cross the Manohara River near Bramhakhel and climb to the fascinating Changu Narayan Temple (see the boxed text, p211). For a longer loop you could cycle or bus to Nagarkot and then cycle or walk down from there (see p224 for details).

**SOUTHERN VALLEY**

The destinations in this section lie on four radial routes that branch off the southern Kathmandu Ring Rd like spokes from a wheel, making it hard to combine more than a couple of sites in one out-and-back trip. A couple of useful connector routes link some of these radial routes to make a useful loop itinerary.

The Chapagaon and Godavari routes can be combined on a bike, motorbike or foot trip. Kirtipur, Chobar and Bungamati can be combined on another bike or motorbike trip by crossing the Bagmati River at Chobar Gorge. Kirtipur, Chobar, Pharping and Dakshinkali can also be visited in one trip.

Most of these destinations make for excellent day trips on a mountain bike. Many involve steep uphill stretches as you approach the valley walls – which is all the better for the return trip. Of these, the best mountain-bike runs are probably the roads to Bungamati and to the Lele Valley via Chapagaon.

**KIRTIPIUR**

Strung out along a ridge 5km southwest of Kathmandu, the small town of Kirtipur retains an unhurried, timeless air despite its proximity to the capital. Its impressive but little-visited temples point to a golden age that has long passed.

During the 1768/9 conquest of the valley by Prithvi Narayan Shah it was clear that Kirtipur, with its superbly defensible hilltop position, would be the key to defeating the Malla kingdoms, so it was here the Gorkha king struck first and hardest. Kirtipur's resistance was strong, but eventually, after a bitter siege, the town was taken and the inhabitants paid a terrible price for their courageous resistance. The king, incensed by the long struggle his forces had endured, ordered that the nose and lips be cut off every male inhabitant in the town.

Fortunately for a small minority, he was practical as well as cruel, and those who could play wind instruments were spared.

At one time there were 12 gates into the city; traces of the old city wall can still be seen. As you wander through Kirtipur, you can see dyed yarn hanging from upstairs windows and hear the background clatter of the town's handlooms. Many of the town's 9000 inhabitants are weavers or farmers; the lower-caste people generally live outside the old city wall, lower down the hill. Kirtipur's hilltop position offers fine views over Kathmandu, with the Himalaya rising behind.

The campus of Nepal's Tribhuvan University stands at the base of Kirtipur's hill and has the best library facilities to be found in Nepal.

### Sights

Kirtipur stretches across two hills, with a lower saddle between them. The **Chilanchu Vihara** (built 1515) tops the southeastern hill and consists of a central stupa surrounded

by four smaller stupas, numerous statues and some dilapidated Buddhist monastery buildings. The entrance to the courtyard is marked by a tree that has completely encased a small shrine.

From the rear of the stupa go right, down to the 16th-century stone *shikhara*-style **Lohan Dehar**. Continue beyond the temple, then take a left to the 12th-century **Bagh Bhairab Temple**, at the bottom of the saddle where the town's two hills meet. The upper wall of this famous triple-roofed temple is decorated with the swords, machetes and shields of the Newari troops defeated by King Prithvi Narayan Shah. The temple sides are decorated with buffalo horns. The temple's principal image is of a terrible Bhairab in his tiger form and is sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists. Look for the temple's *torana* to the left of the entrance door with a green image of Vishnu astride the Garuda and, below him, blue Bhairab between Ganesh and Kumar. To the far right of the courtyard is a fertility shrine under a tin umbrella. Animal sacrifices are

made early on Tuesday and Saturday mornings. The square and pond in front of the temple once formed part of a royal residence and as a consequence feature some fine woodcarvings.

From the temple exit, take a right, heading west through the village to a Ganesh shrine and then a stone stairway that leads to the triple-roofed **Uma Maheshwar Temple**. The temple is flanked by two stone elephants that wear spiked saddles to keep children from riding them! Unusually, the main image of Shiva and Parvati is a standing one, not in the standard Uma Maheshwar pose. To the left of the central image of the god and his consort is a smaller image in the standard pose. The temple was originally built in 1673 (some sources say 1655) with four roofs until it was badly damaged by the earthquake of 1934. Kirtipur's residents made their last stand here during the 1768 siege. The bell to the right was cast in 1895 by 'Gillett & Johnston Founders, Croydon'.

### Getting There & Away BUS, MINIBUS & TAXI

Numerous buses (No 21) depart from Kathmandu's City (Ratna Park) bus station (Rs 7, 30 minutes) for Kirtipur. Alternatively, it's a short trip by taxi (around Rs 250).

From the east entrance to town you'll notice a modern Thai-designed Buddhist temple to the left of Kirtipur's Naya Bazaar (New Bazaar) at the foot of the Kirtipur hill. From the beginning of Naya Bazaar, climb the stairway straight ahead and at the top take a right and then a left to get to the Chilanchu Vihara.

It takes around one hour to Kirtipur by mountain bike from Kathmandu; the turn-off to the right is 1.3km south of the Kathmandu Ring Rd.

### CHOBAR

The picturesque little village of Chobar, 6km from Kathmandu, tops a hill overlooking the Bagmati River where it flows through the Chobar Gorge.

### Sights

The town's main attraction is the **Adinath Lokeshwar Temple**, originally built in the 15th century and reconstructed in 1640. The temple is dedicated to red-faced Rato

### LEGEND OF THE CHOBAR GORGE

Geologists and theologians rarely find much common ground but in Kathmandu they both agree that eons ago the Kathmandu Valley was a lake and the hill of Swayambhunath was an island. Gradually the lake dried up to leave the fertile valley floor we see today.

Local legends relate that the change from lake to valley was a much more dramatic one, for the Buddhist deity Manjushri is said to have taken his mighty sword and with one blow cut open the valley edge to release the pent-up waters. The place where his sword struck rock was Chobar on the southern edge of the valley and the result was the Chobar Gorge.

Countless *nagas*, or snake spirits, were washed out of the valley with the departing waters, but many, including Kartotak, 'king of the snakes', made it to the nearby Taudaha pond, next to the road to Pharping. The pond is a popular breeding area for migratory birds.

Machhendranath and is sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists. Six figures of the Buddha are lined up beneath the temple's golden *torana*, but the most interesting feature is the astounding array of metal pots, pans and water containers that are fixed to boards hanging all around the temple roofs next to photos of the recently deceased. These kitchen utensils are donated to the temple by newlyweds in order to ensure a happy married life.

The small Chobar Gorge is 1km southeast of Chobar village, where the Bagmati River cuts through the edge of the Chobar hill. Down by the river, just south of the gorge and the now defunct cement factory, is the important **Jal Binayak Temple** (1602), one of the valley's most important Ganesh shrines. The temple's Ganesh image is simply a huge rock in a brass case. The temple's roof struts depict eight Bhairabs and the eight Ashta Matrikas (Mother Goddesses) with whom Ganesh often appears.

A neat little suspension bridge spans the river just by the gorge; a plaque states the bridge was made in Aberdeen in 1903. There are fine views of the gorge on one side and the Jal Binayak Temple on the other.

### KIRTIPUR TO CHOBAR WALK

Instead of simply returning from Kirtipur to Kathmandu the same way, you can continue by foot or bike from Kirtipur to Chobar and the Chobar Gorge. The route is rideable, but is also an interesting walk.

From the Chilanchu Vihara at the southeastern end of Kirtipur, head south downhill past a brick base (built as the foundations of a stupa) to the main road around the base of the village. Take a left and then a right after 100m and then, after another 100m, take the dirt road that branches off to the left.

Head southeast to the hilltop village of **Panga**, which has a number of temples. You'll probably arrive in the northwest corner of the town so head south through the village to a three-storey temple and pool complex and then swing back to the northeast corner of the village where you'll find the road to Chobar, up on the hill.

There are two parallel roads to Chobar village; both join at the **Vishnu Devi Mandir**, marked by a large trident. The temple has a tiny Garuda on a pillar and a small image of a reclining Vishnu surrounded by *naga* serpents. If you get lost at any point just ask for the road to Vishnu Devi Mandir.

Continue past the temple for around 60m, join a cart path to the right (south) and after a couple of minutes branch left up a cobbled path by a red brick house and then left again up a steep footpath past clumps of bamboo. At the next junction take a right up another path up to the first square of the interesting small village of Chobar, right on the top of the hill. Curve to the left around the southern end of the town and you'll arrive at the **Adinath Lokeshwar Temple** (see opposite/). If in doubt, just ask directions.

After you've visited the temple head out the east entrance to the Chobar Le Village Resort and then follow the path down past the monastery, east and then southeast, past a small quarry to the main Pharping road. A path shortcuts down from the other side of the road to the Jal Binayak Temple and the bridge across the Chobar Gorge. It's possible to catch a bus from here back to Kathmandu or south to Pharping.



## Sleeping & Eating

**Chobar Le Village Resort** (☎ 4333555; www.nepalvilageresort.com; r US\$30-50; mains Rs 75-140) This gorgeous 200-year old house nestled between the Adinath Temple and a Tibetan gumpa has been converted into a tiny two-room guesthouse, garden restaurant and sculpture garden. It's a pleasant place to stop for lunch (the *shish taouk*, or chicken kebabs, are great) but the admittedly charming rooms are overpriced. The resort can help arrange meditation classes at the next-door monastery.

## Getting There & Away

Buses to Pharping and Dakshinkali pass by the turn-off to Chobar, from where it's a short but steep walk uphill, and also Chobar Gorge, a couple of kilometres later. The nicest way to get to both sites is on foot from Kirtipur – see the boxed text, p216.

From the Chobar Gorge you can cross the suspension bridge and follow a trail on the left uphill to a small village junction. A left here will take you the Kathmandu Ring Rd, entering Patan at Jawlakhel. A right turn will take you on a convoluted bike path that eventually links up with the Bungamati road.

## PHARPING

Pharping is a thriving, traditional Newari town, 19km south of Kathmandu and surprisingly untouched by the swarms of tourists that visit Dakshinkali. The town is famous for its pilgrimage sites, the Hindu origins of which have been largely absorbed by the now predominant Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. The town is popular with both Tibetan and Hindu pilgrims.

## The Pilgrimage Route

The best way to visit the sights of Pharping is to join the other pilgrims on a clockwise pilgrim circuit (a *parikrama* in Nepali, or *kora* in Tibetan).

As you enter the town from the main road, take the first right by the football pitch and head uphill, past the large Tibetan-style Dzongsar *chörten* (pop inside to turn its prayer wheels), a couple of restaurants, and the Sakyapa school **Tharig Gumpa** with its huge *chörten*. Beyond here, at the bend in the road, is a Tibetan monastery signposted 'Pharping Ganesh and Saraswati Temple'. The chapel to the left is actually

a Tibetan-style **Drölma Lhakhang** (Drölma is the Tibetan name for Tara, who is identified here with Saraswati), with images of Ganesh and the 21 manifestations of Tara.

To the right of this chapel is the **Rigzu Phodrang Gumpa**, which is identified with the Indian sage Padmasambhava (known to Tibetans as Guru Rinpoche), who is credited with introducing Buddhism to Tibet. He is clearly recognisable by his curly moustache and *katvanga* (staff of skulls).

Ascend the flight of stairs between the two temples, past prayer flags and a rock fissure, where cracks are stuffed with little bags of wishes and human hair. Eventually you'll come to the **Guru Rinpoche Cave** (also known as the Gorakhnath Cave), surrounded by monastery buildings. With its butter lamps and soot-blackened walls it feels like an ancient Tibetan shrine, were it not for the Liza Minnelli-style row of coloured light bulbs. Take off your shoes to enter.

Continue out of the cave enclosure, down a flight of stairs lined with prayer flags to the 17th-century Newari-style **Vajra Yogini Temple**. The Tantric Buddhist goddess Vajrayogini (known to Hindus as Ugra Tara) is featured in the temple's *toranas*. Check out the lovely Rana-style courtyard to the side.

From here, pilgrims continue east up a pathway to the Nyingmapa school **Do Ngak Chöling Gumpa**, where the main chapel features a central statue of Sakyamuni flanked by Padmasambhava and Vajrasattva. It's often locked so try to slide in with a band of pilgrims. From the monastery head down to the junction and branch downhill to the main road and the Tashi Delek Happy Restaurant for a post-pilgrimage cup of tea.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Dakchhinkali Village Inn** (☎ 4710053; dik\_vinn@wlink.com.np; s/d US\$12/18) On a bluff right by the main gate which marks the start of the descent to Dakshinkali, this spot is quiet and relaxing (except on Saturdays when it's busy with pilgrim traffic), with 10 rustic but cosy rooms. There's also a very pleasant garden restaurant (mains Rs 150-250).

**Family Guest House** (☎ 4710412; r Rs 500-800) A new, modern place in Pharping town, with clean but somewhat overpriced rooms and a good rooftop restaurant.

The nearby **Snowland Restaurant** is a good little Tibetan restaurant, but all food is

made to order so it doesn't pay to be in a hurry. **Tashi Delek Happy Restaurant** is another good place for a cheap Chinese lunch, or try the nearby **Bajrayoginee Restaurant**.

**Hattiban Resort** (☎ 4710122; city office 4371397; www.intrekasia.com; s/d US\$52/62; mains Rs 300) is perched on a ridge high above the Kathmandu Valley. With stunning views, this small resort has 24 good-quality rooms, most with a balcony. The terrace is a superb place to soak up the views. From the resort it's an excellent two-hour hike up to the peak of Champa Devi (2249m), 200 vertical metres above the resort. A very rough, steep and winding 2km track branches off the main road, 2.5km before Pharping. A taxi from Kathmandu costs around Rs 1000, though the price may go up when the driver sees the state of the road.

## Getting There & Away

Buses leave throughout the day for Pharping from Kathmandu's City (Ratna Park) bus station (Rs 20, two hours), or catch the less frequent No 22 bus from Kathmandu's Shahid Gate. The last bus back to Kathmandu leaves around 5.30pm.

## AROUND PHARPING

### Dakshinkali

At the southern edge of the valley, in a dark, somewhat spooky location in the cleft between two hills and at the confluence of two rivers, stands the blood-soaked temple of **Dakshinkali**. The temple is dedicated to the goddess Kali, Shiva's consort in her most bloodthirsty incarnation, and twice a week faithful Nepalis journey here to satisfy her bloodlust.

Sacrifices are always made to goddesses, and the creatures to be sacrificed must be uncastrated male animals. Saturday is the major sacrificial day of the week, when a steady parade of chickens, ducks, goats, sheep, pigs and even the occasional buffalo come here to have their throats cut or their heads lopped off by professional local butchers. Tuesday is also a sacrificial day, but the blood does not flow quite as freely. During the annual celebrations of Dasain in October the temple is literally awash with blood and the image of Kali is bathed in it.

After their rapid dispatch the animals are butchered in the stream beside the temple and their carcasses are either brought home

for a feast or boiled up on the spot for a picnic in the grounds. You'll see families arriving with pots, bags of vegetables and armfuls of firewood for the big day out.

Non-Hindus are not allowed into the actual compound where Kali's image resides (there is often an incredibly long queue for Hindus to get in), but it is OK to take photos from outside. Many tourists behave poorly here, perching vulturelike from every available vantage point in order to get the goriest possible photos. However extraordinary the sights might seem, this is a religious ceremony, and the participants should be treated with respect, not turned into a sideshow.

The path down to the temple is lined with tea stalls, sadhus, souvenir sellers and hawkers selling offerings of marigolds, fruit and coconuts, as well as *khuar*, a sweet treat somewhere between cottage cheese and fudge (Rs 20 per 100g). The snack stalls at the bus park serve up reviving tea and pappadums for Rs 5 each.

Despite the carnival spirit, witnessing the sacrifices is a strange and, for some, confronting experience. The slaughter is surprisingly matter-of-fact (and you won't get to see much of it), but it creates a powerful atmosphere.

A pathway leads off from behind the main temple uphill to the Mata Temple, which offers good views.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Bus

Buses operate from Kathmandu's Shahid Gate (Martyrs' Memorial) and City (Ratna Park) bus station (Rs 20) daily. There are extra buses on Tuesday and Saturday – the most important days for sacrifice – but they are still very crowded. From Pharping it's an easy 1km downhill walk or ride.

### Cycling

It is an enjoyable but exhausting two-hour (20km) bicycle ride from Kathmandu. The views are exhilarating, but it is basically uphill all the way – so mountain bikes are the way to go. Tuesday is probably the better day to pick as the traffic fumes are not too thick. Make sure you get an early start, as the shrine is busiest early in the morning. There's a small charge to park your bike in the car park. Be warned – the climb from Dakshinkali back up to Pharping is a killer.

## Walking

If you are travelling by public transport and have walked or got a lift to Dakshinkali, consider the short-cut hiking route back up to Pharping. A path on the southern side of the sacrificial compound brings you to an open picnic area. From the cooking area at the back of this area there's a steep scramble up a goat track that follows a ridge on the northwestern side of the gorge. At the top you come out on a plateau – you'll immediately see the white monastery surrounded by prayer flags on a nearby hill. Make your way through the paddy fields, on the narrow paths between the rice. It takes about 40 minutes to get to Pharping.

## Sekh Narayan Temple

The Sekh (or Shesh) Narayan Temple is the centrepiece of an interesting collection of temples, crystal-clear pools and sculpture. The main temple is above the pools, under a multi-hued, overhanging cliff and next to a Tibetan monastery.

The main temple, one of the most important Vishnu temples in the valley, was built in the 17th century, but it is believed that the cave to the right (now dedicated to Padmasambhava, or Guru Rinpoche) has been a place of pilgrimage for much longer. To the right of the temple is a bas-relief of Vishnu Vikrantha, also known as the dwarf Vamana, which probably dates from the Licchavi period (5th or 6th centuries).

Half-submerged in the lowest, semi-circular pond is a 12th- or 13th-century sculpture of Aditya, the sun god, framed by a stone arch and with a lotus flower at each shoulder. If you are lucky you might catch devotional religious music being played in the pavilion by the pools.

Sekh Narayan is less than 1km from Pharping and is easily reached by foot. You can hail a returning bus from here on to Kathmandu.

## BUNGAMATI

Bungamati is a classic Newari village dating from the 16th century. It is perched on a spur of land overlooking the Bagmati River, 10km from Kathmandu, and is shaded by large trees and stands of bamboo. Fortunately, the village streets are too small and hazardous for cars. There are quite a few woodcarving shops in the village and a cou-

ple of carpet looms but visitors have yet to arrive en masse, so tread gently.

## Sights

Bungamati is the birthplace of Rato Machhendranath, the patron god of the valley, who resides in the large *shikhara*-style **Rato Machhendranath Temple** in the centre of the village square for six months of the year (he spends the rest of his time in Patan). The process of moving him around Patan and backwards and forwards to Bungamati is central to one of the most important annual festivals in the valley – see the boxed text, p191 for details.

To get to the temple from the bus stop at the edge of the town, follow the signs for the **Newari Cultural Museum**, worth a quick visit for its displays of local traditional life-style, and take a right at the Ganesh shrine. There's a useful map of the village near the bus stand.

The *chowk* around the temple is one of the most beautiful in the valley – here one can see the still-beating heart of a functioning Newari town. There are many *chaityas* and a huge prayer wheel, clearly pointing to the capacity of Newari religion to weld together elements from different religious traditions.

Head out of the square's northern gate and follow the cobblestone road as it curves to the right, past the Padmapur Mahadev Temple and a Ganesh shrine to the big water tank of the **Dey Pukha** (Central Pond). Continue to the village gates; from here it's right back to the bus stand, or left to the Karya Binayak Temple.

Between Bungamati and Khokna, the **Karya Binayak Temple** is dedicated to Ganesh. It's not particularly interesting and Ganesh is simply represented by a stone, but the view is impressive and the locals often stage a Saturday *bhoj* (feast) and *bhajan* (devotional music) – the Newari version of a barbeque and karaoke. When the path from Bungamati meets a larger track, take a left for the temple.

If you take a right at this crossroads, you'll join a tarmac road and after five minutes you'll arrive at the village of **Khokna**. The town is not as appealing as Bungamati, as it was seriously damaged in the 1934 earthquake, but it has retained many traditional aspects of Newari life, and is famous for its

mustard-oil presses. There is no central square, unlike in Bungamati, but there's plenty of action in the main street, including women spinning wool. The impressive main temple is a two-tiered construction dedicated to Shekela Mai, a mother goddess. From the central temple, return back along the tarmac road, turning left at the large pool to rejoin the main Patan–Bungamati road.

## Getting There & Away

Buses to Bungamati leave frequently from Patan's Lagankhel station (Rs 8, 30 minutes).

The road to Bungamati provides yet another ideal mountain-biking expedition (16km return from Patan). From Patan, continue over Kathmandu's Ring Rd from the main road through Jawlakhel. After you cross the Nakhu Khola, veer left; the right fork takes you to the Chobar Gorge – see p217. It's a pleasant ride along a gradually climbing ridge to get to Bungamati.

Approximately 6km from the Ring Rd are two restaurants and a viewpoint overlooking Bungamati with its white temple (to the left), the Karya Binayak temple (centre) and Khokna (to the right).

To get to Khokna directly from the main Kathmandu road take the road signposted to the 'Gyanadaya Residential School', 1.5km before the viewpoint.

## CHAPAGAON

Chapagaon is a prosperous village with a number of shops, temples and shrines. Near the entrance to the village is a small Ganesh shrine. There are temples dedicated to Narayan and Krishna, the latter with some erotic roof struts, and there's a Bhairab shrine at the top end of the village.

## Sights

The forested complex of the **Vajra Varahi Temple** (parking Rs 5), an important Tantric site, lies about 500m east of the main road. As you enter Chapagaon take the road on your left after the Narayan and Krishna temples. Note the disused irrigation system, with stone channels and bridges, behind the village.

The temple was built in 1665 and is popular with wedding parties, pilgrims and picnickers who descend en masse on Saturdays. The two-roofed temple is unusual as it lacks a central pinnacle. Visitors pour milk and offerings over the statue of a bull in front

of the temple, whose main image is often submerged in offerings of flowers, milk, coconuts, radishes, boiled eggs, coloured powder and animal blood. It's an interesting and atmospheric place that has probably been a centre for worship for millennia.

## Getting There & Away

Local minibuses leave from Lagankhel in Patan to Chapagaon (Rs 15, one hour). By mountain bike, Chapagaon is 13km and about an hour (yes, that's the same as the bus!) from Kathmandu's Ring Rd.

A useful connector road east of the Vajra Varahi Temple links up to the Godavari road just south of Bandegaon and allows you to combine the Chapagaon and Godavari roads into one route. The dirt road makes for a nice bike trip or you can walk it in an hour and then catch a minibus up to Godavari.

## AROUND CHAPAGAON Lele Valley

The peaceful, beautiful Lele Valley seems a million miles from the bustle of Kathmandu and is in many ways untouched by the 21st (or 20th) century. You won't find many other tourists here.

Apart from touring the lovely scenery, the main thing to head for is the **Tika Bhairab**, a large multicoloured painting at the confluence of two rivers, about 4km south of Chapagaon.

**Malla Alpine Resort** (☎ 01-4410320; s/d US\$61/72, discount 30%), signposted at Kalitar, 3km beyond the Tika Bhairab up a dirt road, is a forgotten place that offers eight bungalows in a wonderfully secluded location, but it's in need of a bit of upkeep these days. Make enquiries and reservations at the Malla Hotel in Kathmandu (p143). You really need your own transport to get here.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are a couple of route options to consider if you are making a bike trip to the valley. The main road south of Chapagaon splits and offers two ways of getting to the Lele Valley, or more importantly a loop option for a return trip of around 12km. The only downer is that the main (western) branch sees lots of truck traffic heading to a quarry behind the Tika Bhairab.

A more adventurous mountain-bike option would be to continue from the Tika

Bhairab to the far end of Lele village (4km) and then climb northeast along a dirt track to a forested pass above the lovely upper Lele Valley, then descend the slippery single track to Badhikhel (8km from Lele). Continue north from here and you'll quickly meet the Chapagaon–Godavari track (see p221); a left turn will take you back to Chapagaon for a total 16km loop. A right will take you on to Godavari.

## GODAVARI

Godavari is not an especially interesting village but there are a number of places to visit in the area, such as the Godavari Kunda, Phulchowki Mai Temple and enjoyable walks to the giant Shanti Ban Buddha or shrine of Bishankhu Narayan (opposite). It's not a must-see sight but it does make for a nice day trip from the capital on a motorbike or mountain bike.

The 10km sealed road from the Kathmandu Ring Rd south of Patan passes through the village of Godavari to an open space at the foot of the hills. Here a partially sealed road continues south to Phulchowki Mai Temple and on to Phulchowki Mountain; the main road veers left (northeast) 1km past an ashram to the gardens and Godavari Kunda.

The road from Kathmandu passes several large plant nurseries, highlighting the region's botanical importance and commercial viability.

## Sights

The verdant **Royal Botanic Gardens** (☎ 5560546; admission foreigner/SAARC/Nepali Rs 100/25/10, children under 10 50% discount; ☎ 10am–5pm, until 4pm mid–Nov to mid–Feb) is a quiet and peaceful spot for a walk or picnic (except on Friday and Saturday when the place is overrun with schoolkids and local couples). The visual highlight is the Coronation Pond with its 7m commemorative pillar. The visitor centre has some good exhibits on Nepal's flora.

A road continues past the turn-off to the botanical gardens and after 100m or so you come to the **Godavari Kunda** – a sacred spring – on your right. The hill behind the spring is covered in colourful prayer flags and there's a Tibetan monastery nearby. Every 12 years (next in late 2015) thousands of pilgrims come here to bathe and gain merit. Clear mountain water collects in a pool in

a closed inner courtyard, flows through carved stone spouts into a larger pool and then drains down to a photogenic line of five stupas that offer a perfect picnic spot.

If you return towards the main crossroads and take the partially sealed road to the south, the **Phulchowki Mai Temple** is 600m up the hill, near an ugly marble quarry. The a three-tiered pagoda is dedicated to a Tantric mother goddess and is flanked by a temple to Ganesh. The two large pools before the temple compound are fed by nine spouts (known as the Naudhara Kunda) that represent the nine streams that flow off Phulchowki.

You can see the **Shanti Ban Buddha**, a huge golden statue of the Buddha, on the hillside behind Godavari as you approach the village. To get a closer look (be warned – it looks better from a distance) and for fine views over the valley, take the signposted road to the right at the end of the village. From the turn-off it's a 15-minute walk past some lovely traditionally thatched houses.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Godavari Village Resort** (☎ 5560675; [www.godavariresort.com.np](http://www.godavariresort.com.np); s/d US\$150/165, discounts of 80%; 🍷) This comfortable resort consists of a number of attractive Mediterranean-style villas and Newari-style buildings spread over a hillside, with idyllic views over rice paddies and the Himalaya. It's perfect as a quiet base for local hiking or biking (staff recommend the nearby Santanisur Temple), and there's a pool (Rs 250 for nonguests), sauna, clay tennis courts and even bowling (all at extra cost), plus five shuttle buses a day to Kathmandu's New Rd. Bike hire is available (Rs 600 per day) and the weekend barbecues (Rs 599) are popular with out-of-towners. Request a balcony or mountain-view room when booking. The resort is signposted off the road, 3km before Godavari.

**Hotel View Bhrikuti** (☎ 5560542; [www.hotelviewbhrikuti.com.np](http://www.hotelviewbhrikuti.com.np); US\$60/70, discounts of 40%) A brand spanking new option, all modern and marbly, with a chintzy bar and bright and clean rooms, some with balcony. It's comfortable but a bit soulless, 1.5km south of the centre.

There are some cheap restaurants in front of the Godavari Kunda that are popular with local students and make for an excellent lunch break.

## Getting There & Away

Local minibuses (No 5) and buses (No 14) run between Lagankhel in Patan and Godavari (Rs 12, one hour). It would be quite feasible to get here on a mountain bike and return to Kathmandu via Chapagaon.

## AROUND GODAVARI Bishankhu Narayan

If you're looking for an excuse to get off the beaten track, the **shrine of Bishankhu Narayan** may do nicely. There's not much to see, despite the fact that it is one of the most important Vishnu shrines in the Kathmandu Valley, though the site has a timeless, almost animistic feel. A steep stairway leads up to the chain-mail-covered shrine and then down into a narrow fissure in the rock, where pilgrims test their sin levels (and need for an immediate crash diet) by trying to squeeze through the tiny gap.

There are two main ways to get to the shrine. By vehicle, the unsealed 2.5km road to Bishankhu Narayan takes off to the east from the village of Bandegaan, then veers southeast and crosses a small stream. After 1km you come to Godamchowr village. The road forks left at the village football ground; from here it's a steep uphill climb (if in doubt keep taking the steepest path) for around 1.5km to reach the shrine.

The best way to the shrine on foot is from Godavari village. You'll have to ask the way, as there are several trails that wind around the contoured terraces of the valley to the shrine.

On the way back, the Bishankhu Naryan Village Restaurant offers snacks and drinks, 700m from the shrine.

## Phulchowki Mountain

This 2760m-high mountain is the highest point around the valley and there are magnificent views from the summit. It's also home to over 570 species of flowering plants and one third of all the bird species in Nepal, as well as one of the last surviving 'cloud forests' in central Nepal. Government officials have been saying that it is to be declared a conservation area for years now. The mountain is famous for its springtime (March and April) flowers, in particular its magnificent red and white rhododendrons.

The unsealed road is very rough in places and you really need a 4WD or a trail motor-

bike (take care on the slippery gravel sections). You may need to register with the local army base if someone stops you.

You would need to be very keen to undertake the climb on a mountain bike, though it could certainly be done. On foot it would be a strenuous full day hike; start early in the morning, bring plenty of water and follow the footpaths from Phulchowki Mai Temple, not the main road which snakes around the mountain. Locals warn of robberies in the area so do not hike this remote route alone.

## THE VALLEY FRINGE

Beyond Bhaktapur the Kathmandu Valley walls start to rise, revealing views beyond the valley bowl. Dhulikhel and the destinations around it actually lie beyond the valley, but are easily visited from Kathmandu and from other destinations in the valley. You could combine them all for an excellent four-day itinerary on mountain bike, motorbike or on foot. See p83 for ideas on a bike ride through the eastern valley.

## NAGARKOT

☎ 01 / elevation 2175m

There are various places around the edge of the Kathmandu Valley that offer great mountain views, but the resort village of Nagarkot, 32km from Kathmandu, is generally held to be the best. Dedicated mountain watchers make their way up to the village, stay overnight in one of Nagarkot's lodges, then rise at dawn to see the sun appear over the Himalaya.

Between October and March a trip to Nagarkot will nearly always be rewarded with a view, but you will be very lucky to catch more than a glimpse through the monsoon clouds between June and September. During the summer, sweaty valley residents escape the heat for the resort's cool mountain air; in winter they rush up if there's even a chance of being able to throw a tiny snowball. It can get very cold at Nagarkot in autumn and winter, so if you're staying overnight come prepared with warm clothing.

The original army camp at Nagarkot never developed into a traditional village, so while the views can be stunning, the unplanned scatter of lodges is messy. Relations with



the local army base were severely strained during a religious festival in December 2005 when a deranged soldier massacred 12 locals during a drunken rampage.

Nagarkot is very much a one-night stand, and few visitors stay longer. The best way to leave Nagarkot is on foot, on downhill hikes west to Sundarrijal, Sankhu, or Changu

Narayan, north to Chisopani or south to Banepa.

### Orientation & Information

Nagarkot's accommodation is spread out along the dirt track that heads north from the bus stop at the town's only intersection. The main group of guesthouses crowd around a hill topped by a Mahakali shrine, a 15-minute walk from the bus stop.

**Tibet Net Cafe** (per hr Rs 150), across from the Hotel Dragon Resort, offers expensive Internet access and can burn photos onto a CD.

### Sights

The only thing to do is to soak up the outrageous views, from Dhaulagiri in the west to Mt Everest (little more than a dot on the horizon) and Kanchenjunga in the east, via Ganesh Himal (7406m), Langtang Lirung (7246m), Shisha Pangma (8012m), Dorje Lakpa (6975m) and Gauri Shankar (7146m).

An hour's uphill walk (4km) just south from the village will give an even better 360-degree view from a **lookout tower** on a ridge, passing a former Rana palace (now part of the army camp) en route. The main hotel area has a small hilltop Mahakali Temple.

### Activities

#### HIKING

There are a number of hiking routes to and from Nagarkot. If you only want to walk one way it's a good idea to take the bus to Nagarkot and walk back down. The following walks are all written heading downhill from Nagarkot.

Nepa Maps' 1:25,000 *Nagarkot – Short Trekking on the Kathmandu Valley Rim* is useful, though its 1:50,000 *Around the Kathmandu Valley* is probably good enough.

#### To Changu Narayan (1½ hours from Tharkot)

From Nagarkot it is very easy to see the long spur that extends into the Kathmandu Valley. At the very end of the spur the ridge-line gives one final hiccup and then drops down to the valley floor. The beautiful temple of Changu Narayan is on the top of this final bump on the ridgeline.

The walking trail from Nagarkot parallels the road to Bhaktapur along a ridge, branching off at the sharp hairpin bend at

**Tharkot** (marked on some maps as Deuralibhanjhang). Catching a bus to here from Nagarkot saves you the tedious first half of the walk.

From the bend, take the dirt road heading west and take the left branch (the right drops towards Sankhu). The track climbs uphill through a pine forest for about 20 minutes until it reaches the top of the ridge and then it simply follows the ridgeline, undulating gently down to Changu Narayan. The trail passes several Chhetri villages, with wonderful views over the valley to the Himalaya. See p210 for details of the temple and hikes on from here to Bhaktapur or the road to Bodhnath.

#### To Sankhu (2½ hours)

From Nagarkot a dirt road leads all the way to Sankhu, offering an easy and interesting way to return to Kathmandu on foot or bike.

From Nagarkot take the northwest road down to the Nagarkot Farmhouse Resort and follow the switchbacks down to the village of **Kattike**, which has a teahouse and shop. Take a left at the junction at the edge of town. You can continue all the way down this track, or for a more interesting walk take a minor road that turns off sharply to the right 15 minutes down this track. Follow this footpath for 20 minutes as it shrinks to a trail and then take a sharp left downhill past several houses to join the main track. From here it's an hour's slog to Sankhu and the town's east gate.

#### To Banepa (3½ hours)

The town of Banepa is outside the valley and is the major junction town on the way to Dhulikhel on the Arniko Hwy (the road to the Tibetan border). From Nagarkot, head south for an hour to the lookout tower, at the walk's highest point. From here, follow the dirt road west and then south. The dirt road follows the western ridge downhill all the way to Nala.

A more adventurous backcountry hiking route peels off to the left by the telecom tower and descends steeply. When you hit a dirt track head left and keep asking directions to the village of **Ghimiregaon**. Following a precise trail is difficult, but stick to the left side of the valley – all trails lead to **Nala**, 1¾ hours and 600m below the lookout tower. At Nala, visit the four-roofed Newari-style

Bhagwati Temple in the centre of town and then walk or catch a bus for the remaining 3km to Banepa.

From Banepa, you can take a bus back to Kathmandu or on to Dhulikhel or Panauti.

#### To Sundarrijal (1–2 days)

It takes two easy days or one very long one to reach Sundarrijal from Nagarkot on a trail that follows the valley rim. From Sundarrijal you can take the road to Gokarna, Bodhnath and Kathmandu or you can continue for another day along the rim to Shivapuri and Budhanilkantha. Some trekking agencies operate treks on this valley-rim walk, but it is also possible to find accommodation in village inns. There are many confusing trail junctions, so ask for directions frequently.

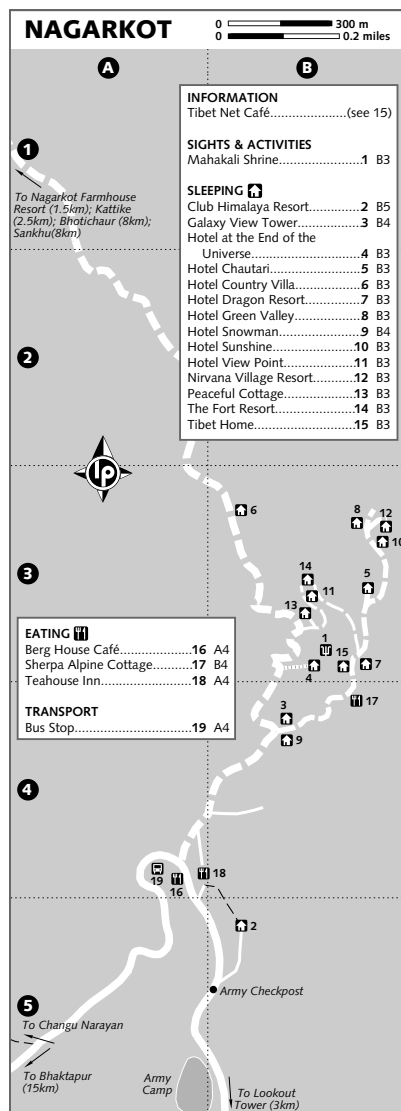
The trail follows the same route as to Sankhu as far as Kattike (about one hour) and then turns right (north) to Jorsim Pauwa. Walk further down through Bagdhara, with its village inns, to Chowki Bhanjyang (about one hour). From Chowki Bhanjyang, another hour's walk will take you through Nagle to **Bhotichaur**, a good place to stop overnight in a village inn.

The walk continues by returning towards Chowki Bhanjyang for a short distance and taking the fork by a *chautara* (porters' resting place) uphill, then continues more steeply uphill to cross a ridge line before dropping down on the middle of three trails to Chule (or Jhule). From here the trail enters the Shivapuri National Park (see p183) and contours around the edge of the valley, before dropping down to Mulkarkha (about 10km from Chule). Here the trail drops past small waterfalls and a reservoir and along the water pipeline to Sundarrijal. The last part of this trail to Sundarrijal is the first part of the popular Helambu trek (p339).

Another variant on this hike is to continue northwest from Bhotichaur to **Chisopani**, where there are several trekking lodges (Chisopani is an overnight stop on the Helambu trek), and then the next day to hike southwest back over the ridge through Shivapuri National Park to Sundarrijal.

### Sleeping

Nagarkot has a fair selection of guesthouses and hotels, most of them far from pretty. Most are relatively expensive for the facilities you get, but the views are priceless.



**BUDGET**

**Hotel Snowman** (☎ 6680146; r Rs 300-400) This is the first place you come to heading north from the intersection. The fairly uninspiring location leads to decent prices and the rooms vary from damp, dark doubles to nice rooms with good views. Published rates of up to US\$40 are pure fiction.

**Galaxy View Tower** (☎ 6680122; r US\$5-15) Just where the road splits, this has a wide range of good-value rooms spread across the hillside. Rooms are more comfortable than stylish but most have at least partial views. The best-value rooms are in the middle bracket. There's a cosy restaurant.

**Hotel at the End of the Universe** (☎ 6680011; www.endoftheuniverse.com.np; chalets Rs 200-700, cottage Rs 1000, ste Rs 2000-3000) A switched-on budget hotel close to the Mahakali shrine, this is a character-filled place, with a wide range of rooms types from basic bamboo cabins to gingerbread-style cottages and luxury suites; the latter are perfect for small groups or families.

**Peaceful Cottage** (☎ 6680077; peacefulcottage@hotmail.com; partitioned r without bathroom US\$8-10, s/d with bathroom US\$12/16, deluxe US\$16/24) Further down the road, the rooms here are comfortable enough, except for the overpriced cheapies which are little more than cells divided by plywood. The real draw is the terrace restaurant and the friendly management. Climb to the top of the octagonal tower for the best views in town.

**Hotel Dragon Resort** (☎ 6680179; r Rs 800, deluxe Rs 1200, ste Rs 1500, discounts of 50%) Has some rooms below its restaurant. The cheaper ones are clean, bright and good value with discounts, though they don't have views. Deluxe rooms come with a sunny terrace.

**Hotel Green Valley** (☎ 6680078; r Rs 250-500, deluxe Rs 800-1000) At the end of the dirt road, perched on the edge of a steep slope and a fair old walk from the bus station, the building here is a concrete lump, but the rooms are decent and modern, there's a good-value restaurant and the terrace has a fabulous view. New deluxe rooms are in the Newari-style upper floor.

There are lots of other choices, including the orange-and-yellow **Tibet Home** (☎ 6680015; r Rs 400-500), a cosy modern place across from the Hotel Dragon Resort, and the **Nirvana Village Resort** (☎ 6680126; r Rs 300), a cheaper, ramshackle place at the end of the line.

**MIDRANGE & TOP-END**

**The Fort Resort** (☎ 6680149; www.mountain-retreats.com; s/d US\$65/80, discounts of 30%) Next to the Hotel View Point, this is a stylish place built in a Newari style on the site of the original *kot* (fort). The secluded and peaceful cottages offer the best value, with private balcony, high ceilings and large bathrooms. There's a good restaurant and the four gardeners ensure the lovely garden terrace is always at its peak. A spa is planned, as are new tower rooms, with excellent corner suites.

**Hotel View Point** (☎ 6680123; www.hotelviewpoint.com; s/d US\$24/35, deluxe US\$55/65, discounts of 40%) The highest hotel in Nagarkot, this is something of a blot on the skyline. The rooms are on the small side, but the views are superb and there are lots of lovely terraces to relax on. The pine walls give the rooms the feel of a sauna, which is the closest thing you'll get to heating during the winter.

**Hotel Country Villa** (☎ 6680128; www.hotelcountryvilla.com; s US\$10-20, d US\$15-25) Down from the Peaceful Cottage, this is another good choice, with a great restaurant, terrace and bar. Rooms vary but most have a private balcony. Half-board rates start around US\$30/50.

**Nagarkot Farmhouse Resort** (☎ 6228087; nfh@mos.com.np; s/d without bathroom US\$25/40, with bathroom US\$32/50, deluxe US\$42/60, discounts of 20%, rates include 3 meals) Well away from the sprawl of Nagarkot, and with the feel of a rural retreat, this highly recommended Newari-inspired complex has just 15 rooms. It's run by Kathmandu's Hotel Vajra (p144) and is a great place to get away from it all or use as a hiking base. The resort is about 1.5km past the Hotel Country Villa down the dirt track to Sankhu.

**Club Himalaya Resort** (☎ 6680080; www.nepalsho.tel.com; s/d US\$60/75, discounts of 15%; 🚰) A large construction like this really does nothing for the rural ambience but it is a quality place. Each room is named after a Himalayan peak and has a private balcony with awesome views, and there are more views from the rooftop terrace. Ask for an upper-floor room. The stylish atrium-type foyer has a restaurant, library and indoor plunge pool. It's at the south end of the ridge, near the bus stop. A free hotel shuttle bus leaves the Ambassador Hotel in Kathmandu daily at 3pm, returning the next morning at 11am.

The **Teahouse Inn** annex (☎ 6680045; per person half board US\$14) has cheaper and smaller rooms (without views).

Other midrange options include the rambling old **Hotel Chautari** (☎ 6680075; keyman@wlink.com.np; s/d US\$45/60, discount 50%), which has the musty air of a British boarding school but offers great mountain views, or the modern **Hotel Sunshine** (☎ 6680105; r US\$10-30), where room rates correspond directly with how many window views you get.

**Eating**

There's limited choice in the food department and most people eat at their lodge.

**Teahouse Inn** (mains Rs 150-225, set meal Rs 350) A modern place attached to the Club Himalaya Resort, with a nice terrace and aimed at day-trippers. It's above the main intersection (look for the blue roof). The manager recommends the chicken momos.

**Hotel Dragon Resort** (mains Rs 300-350) The restaurant here has the most interesting menu in town and a modern open kitchen, a legacy of the times when Kilroy's of Kathmandu ran the show. The largely Continental menu ranges from fish and chips to apple crumble but it remains to be seen whether they can actually deliver the goods.

**Sherpa Cottage** (mains Rs 150-235) A Sherpa couple from Lukla run this relaxing little spot and the menu is trekking-inspired, with dishes like Swiss rosti (a potato dish) and Tibetan *phing* noodles dishes, plus good breakfasts.

**Berg House Café** (breakfasts Rs 50-90) Right by the bus stop, this is a cosy little place serving Western food and is handy if you are waiting for a bus. Any place that has 'hot chocolate cake' listed on the breakfast menu is good with us.

**Getting There & Away**

Direct buses from Kathmandu are elusive beasts. One tourist minibus runs daily from Kathmandu at 1.30pm from a stand on Lekhnath Marg, west of the Hotel Malla (Rs 150, two hours). Return buses depart from the Galaxy View Tower at 10am.

Buses from Kathmandu may not run out of season, in which case you'll probably have to get a bus to Bhaktapur and change, which is a pain, since you get dropped off at the west end of town and have to pick up the next bus in the east. Extremely crowded buses return from Nagarkot to Bhaktapur every half hour or so (Rs 15, 1½ hours).

A one-way taxi to Nagarkot costs around Rs 1400 from Kathmandu, or Rs 700 from Bhaktapur.

Walking to, or preferably from, Nagarkot is an interesting alternative. For route ideas see p224.

**BANEPA**

pop 16,000

Just outside the valley, the small town of Banepa is a busy crossroads, 29km from Kathmandu. It was an important stop on the trade route to Tibet and once even boasted diplomatic relations with China's Ming dynasty. Dhulikhel is 5km to the east, the temple town of Panauti is about 7km south and Nala is 3km to the northwest.

The pleasant squares and laneways in the older northwest section of Banepa are worth exploring. Right beside the turn-off to Chandeshwari is a pretty tank with bas-reliefs of gods at one end.

Only 1km or so northeast of Banepa is the **Chandeshwari Temple**. Legend has it that the people of this valley were once terrorised by a demon known as Chand. When Parvati, in her demon-slaying mode, got rid of the nuisance she took the name Chandeshwari, 'Slayer of Chand', and this temple was built in her honour.

The temple is entered through a doorway topped by a brilliantly coloured relief of Parvati disposing of the demon. The triple-roofed temple has roof struts showing the eight Ashta Matrikas and eight Bhairabs, but the temple's most notable feature is a huge and colourful fresco on the west wall of Bhairab at his destructive worst. The temple had been almost totally deconstructed in 2006 as part of its major renovation.

The ghats below the temple, beside the stream, are an auspicious place to die and people come here when their end is nigh.

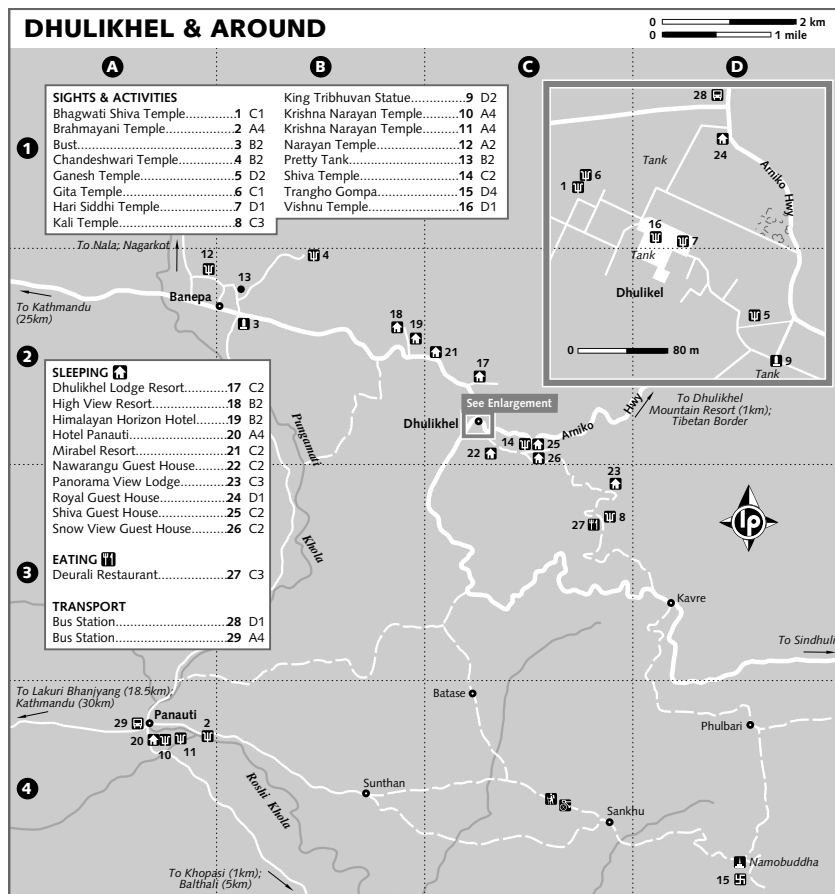
**Getting There & Away**

Regular buses leave from Kathmandu's City (Ratna Park) bus station (Rs 20, two hours) and continue on to Dhulikhel and beyond. Buses to Panauti turn off the Arniko Hwy at the main Banepa junction.

**DHULIKHEL**

☎ 011 / pop 9,800 / elevation 1550m

Only 3km southeast of Banepa (32km from Kathmandu) is the interesting small town of



Dhulikhel. It's popular as a Himalayan viewpoint, in part because the road to Dhulikhel is an easier route than the steep and winding road to Nagarkot, but also because Dhulikhel is a real Newari town, not just a tourist resort. It's also a good centre for short day treks – many visitors come here to stretch their legs before setting off on longer treks.

The peaks on view stretch from Langtang Lirung (7246m) in the east, through Dorje Lakpa (6966m) to the huge bulk of Gauri Shankar (7145m) and nearby Melungtse (7181m) and as far as Numbur (5945m) in the east.

A new highway from Dhulikhel to Sindhuli is being finalised with Japanese assistance and will considerably shorten the

travelling time between Kathmandu and the towns of the eastern Terai. What an increase in heavy vehicle traffic will do for the peaceful ambience of Dhulikhel – and the narrow and already inadequately engineered Arniko Hwy back to Kathmandu – is not yet clear. Construction was seriously delayed in 2002; every time the government workers laid some tarmac, Maoist rebels would creep up in the middle of the night and blow it up!

### Sights

The old part of the town, west of the bus stop, is an interesting area to wander around. The town's main square has a tank, the small triple-roofed **Hari Siddhi Temple** and a **Vishnu**

**Temple** fronted by two worshipful Garudas in quite different styles. One is a kneeling stone Garuda topping a low pillar, while the second Garuda is in bright metal, more like the bird-faced Garudas of Indonesia than the conventional Nepali Garudas.

Walking in the other direction you pass the Nawarangu Guest House and after 1.5km you reach the junction where the road turns right (west) towards the Kali Temple. Continue straight on from the junction and dip down to a picturesque little **Shiva Temple** at the bottom of a gorge. Water flows through the site, where the main sanctum features a four-faced lingam topped with a metal dome with four *nagas* arching down from the pinnacle. This temple has everything – Nandi, kneeling devotees, Ganesh, Hanuman, Saraswati, Shiva and Parvati, lingams, tridents and more.

Dhulikhel's final temple attraction is the **Kali Temple** high up the hill towards Namobuddha. Climb up the hill for the excellent mountain views, not for the shrine, which is occupied by the army. To get there, take the right branch of the junction mentioned earlier and follow the footpath shortcuts, not the winding 2km-long mud road. It's a 20- to 30-minute uphill walk. The peaceful Deurali Restaurant is just below the temple.

### Sleeping BUDGET

**Nawarangu Guest House** (☎ 661226; s/d without bathroom Rs 125/250, with bathroom Rs 200/350) If you ever wondered what Dhulikhel was like c 1974, check out this classic budget backpacker hangout that's been going for almost 40 years now. The pie oven is long gone and part of the old building collapsed during a recent monsoon, but there are still cheap (basic) rooms, a cosy restaurant decorated with local paintings (for sale) and good honey pancakes (Rs 50). The owner, Purna, remains a gracious host, despite some hard times, and can take you to a great lookout point just two minutes' walk from the hotel. The hotel is southeast of the main *chowk*, towards the Shiva Temple.

**Snow View Guest House** (☎ 661229; d with/without bathroom Rs 500/300) Another couple of minutes' walk towards the Shiva Temple, this is a friendly place set in a pleasant garden with bright clean rooms, a rooftop sitting

area and mountain views. Rooms are comfortable and good value; the more expensive doubles are carpeted.

**Shiva Guest House** (☎ 9841-254988; d without bathroom Rs 200-300, with bathroom Rs 500-700) A tiny family-run farmhouse with only five clean, fresh rooms and great views from the top-floor rooms and rooftop. Food comes fresh from the organic garden and you can pick mandarins right off the trees in October. It's very secluded and there's no road here; follow the signposted path one minute on foot from the Shiva Temple (a 15-minute-walk from the main road).

**Royal Guest House** (☎ 664010; s/d without bathroom Rs 200/300, with bathroom Rs 400/500) Another good budget place, back on the main junction. Rooms are good value (though the singles are small) and the common bathrooms are clean, plus there's a cosy lodge-style restaurant (mains Rs 110 to Rs 160) with BBC World on the TV.

**Panorama View Lodge** (☎ 663086; r lower/upper fl Rs 300/600) For those who really want to get away from it all, follow the dirt track that leads to the Kali Temple for 1.5km to this peaceful place (a 45-minute hike from the main road). The views are huge and the rooms are clean and quiet. In fact, you'll most likely be the only guest.

### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Dhulikhel Lodge Resort** (☎ 661114; www.dhulikhel.lodgeresort.com; s/d US\$70/80, discounts of 55%) Just off the main road, near the Dhulikhel bus stop, this large, modern but tastefully built place has comfortable rooms and superb views (try to get a room on the top floor). There's also a block of newer rooms, but some don't have the views. The great circular fireplace in the bar provides an après-ski atmosphere. The reception offers information on walks around Dhulikhel and can provide a birding checklist.

**Mirabel Resort** (☎ 661972; www.ournepal.com/mirabel; s/d US\$90/100, discounts of up to 70%) A rather out-of-place Mediterranean-style resort, but it is very well done and offers the top accommodation in Dhulikhel. The rooms have great views, a balcony, fridge and TV and the rooftop terrace is as good as it gets. It was offering amazing discounts during our last visit.

**Himalayan Horizon Hotel** (☎ 661296; www.himalayanhorizon.com; s/d US\$62/66, discounts of 20%) Also



known as the Hotel Sun-n-Snow, this hotel is a bit of a monster, but it does feature traditional woodcarving, has a pleasant restaurant and garden terrace area, and all the rooms face straight out on to the Himalayan peaks. The spacious split-level rooms come with private balcony views and are a good bet, although not if the other resorts are offering bigger discounts.

**High View Resort** (☎ 661966; www.highviewresort.com; s/d US\$30/40, deluxe US\$60/65, discounts of 35-50%) An excellent place, 700m further down the same side road as the Himalayan Horizon and then a stiff five-minute climb up some steps. Huge deluxe rooms come with a private balcony and the views are excellent, even from the shower! The cheaper rooms by the restaurant are smaller but still pleasant.

**Dhulikhel Mountain Resort** (☎ 661466; www.camando.com/dhulikhel-mt-resort; s/d US\$76/78, discounts of 20%) If you have transport, head 4km downhill from Dhulikhel towards the Tibetan border to this lovely resort. Accommodation is in luxurious thatched cottages surrounded by gorgeous gardens and staff can lead guests on walks to the local villages of Baralgaon, Tin-

pipal and Manegaon. Ring them in advance and they'll pick you up in Dhulikhel.

### Eating

The hotels offer the best places to eat. For a cheap lunch the Royal Guest House is a good bet. If you're headed to the Kali Temple you could grab breakfast or a snack at the nearby **Deurali Restaurant**.

### Getting There & Away

Frequent buses to Dhulikhel leave from Kathmandu's City (Ratna Park) bus station (Rs 25, two hours). The buses skirt Bhaktapur and then climb out of the valley over the Sanga Pass, passing a major military checkpoint en route. The last bus goes back to Kathmandu at around 6pm.

A taxi from Kathmandu costs about Rs 900, or about Rs 650 from Bhaktapur.

The walk to Dhulikhel from Nagarkot is an interesting alternative. After watching the sunrise at Nagarkot you can walk down through Nala to Banepa, from where you can take a bus the last 4km to Dhulikhel (see p224 for details).

### DHULIKHEL TO NAMOBUDDHA HIKE

The hike or mountain-bike trip from Dhulikhel to Namobuddha is a fine leg-stretcher. It takes about three hours each way, so it makes a good day walk. The walk can be made either as a return-trip loop from Dhulikhel or a one-way hike to the interesting village of Panauti, from where you can stay the night or return by bus to Dhulikhel via Banepa. Most of the hike follows a dirt road and route finding is easy.

From Dhulikhel the trail first climbs up to the Kali Temple lookout (p228) then drops down (take the left path after the Deurali Restaurant) for half an hour to the village of **Kavre**, by the new road to Sindhuli. Cross the road, take the road by some battered old prayer flags and pretty much follow this for the next hour until you round a ridge to the village of **Phulbari**, where you can get a cold drink or cup of tea. Soon you crest a hill and in the distance you'll see a Tibetan monastery atop a hill, with Namobuddha just below it. Just before Namobuddha the main track branches left; take the right branch to the stupa. There are several teahouses by the stupa where you can get a basic lunch.

There is very little known about the stupa at **Namobuddha**, but it is an important destination for Tibetan pilgrims. A legend relates that the Buddha came across a tigress close to death from starvation and unable to feed her cubs. The sorrowful Buddha allowed the hungry tigress to consume him. A marble tablet depicting the event in **Trangho Gompa** on the hill above the stupa marks the holy site where this event is supposed to have taken place. It's worth hiking the steep 10 minutes up to the huge monastery; take the path uphill to the left of the stupa.

From Namobuddha the trail to **Sankhu** descends to a track from the right side of the stupa, through forest to the temple and mini-ghats of Sankhu. About an hour from Namobuddha the path splits right uphill to Batase and Dhulikhel, or left along the road past terraced fields to **Sunthan** and **Panauti**, about two hours from Namobuddha. The tarmac picks up about 1.5km from Panauti. As you approach Panauti, cross the stream over a suspension bridge to the ghats and then follow the road as it curves round to the Indreshwar Mahadev Temple (see opposite).

### PANAUTI

In a valley about 7km south of Banepa (36km from Kathmandu), the small town of Panauti sits at the junction of the Roshi Khola and Pungamati Khola. Like Allahabad in India, a third 'invisible' river, the Padmabati, is said to join the other two at the confluence (see the boxed text, right). A popular tradition asserts that the entire town is built on a single piece of solid stone, making it immune to earthquakes.

Panauti once stood at the junction of important trading routes and had a royal palace in its main square. Today it's just a quiet backwater, but is all the more interesting for that. The village has retained and restored (with French help) much of its traditional architecture and has a number of interesting temples, one of which may be the oldest in Nepal.

### Sights

#### INDRESHWAR MAHADEV TEMPLE

The three-storey Indreshwar Mahadev Temple in the village centre is a Shiva temple, built in 1294 and rebuilt in the 15th century. In 1988 an earthquake caused serious damage. In its original form it may well have been the oldest temple in Nepal – Kathmandu's Kasthamandap may predate it, but Kasthamandap was originally built as a *dharamsala*, not as a temple.

The temple is certainly a fine one and the roof struts depicting the various incarnations of Shiva and some discreetly amorous couples are masterpieces of Newari woodcarving.

To the south of the main temple is the rectangular Unamanta Bhairab Temple, with three faces peering out of the upstairs windows, rather like the Shiva-Parvati Temple in Kathmandu's Durbar Sq. A small, double-roofed Shiva temple stands by the northwestern corner, while a Vishnu shrine with an interior 2m-high image of the god faces the temple from the west.

#### OTHER TEMPLES

On the east side of the village, at the junction of the Roshi Khola and Pungamati Khola, is the interesting **Krishna Narayan Temple** complex, with some woodcarvings of similar age to the Indreshwar Mahadev Temple (look for Krishna playing his flute on the roof struts). The riverbank stone sculptures are also of interest, but unfortu-

### TRICKERY & REPENTANCE AT PANAUTI

Legends relate that Ahilya, the beautiful wife of a Vedic sage, was seduced by the god Indra, who tricked her by assuming the shape of her husband. When the sage returned and discovered what had happened he took a bizarre revenge upon Indra by causing Indra's body to become covered in *yonis*, female sexual organs! Naturally, Indra was somewhat put out by this and for many years he and his wife Indrayani repented at the auspicious *sangam* (river confluence) at Panauti. Eventually, Parvati, Shiva's consort, took pity upon Indrayani and turned her into the invisible river, which joins the two visible ones in Panauti. More years passed and eventually Shiva decided to release Indra from his strange predicament. Shiva appeared in Panauti as a great lingam and when Indra bathed in the river his *yonis* disappeared. The Shiva lingam is the one that stands in the temple.

nately the late 1980s were cruel to Panauti: as well as an earthquake there were severe floods, which swept away the cremation ghats at the river junction.

Across the Pungamati Khola is the 17th-century **Brahmayani Temple**; a suspension bridge crosses the river at this point. Brahmayani is the chief goddess of the village and her image is drawn around the town each year in the town's chariot festival.

As you enter Panauti through the northwestern gate, near the bus station, look for a pilgrim resthouse 70m down on the left, next to the old runners of a temple chariot. By a lovely *hiti*, turn right to get to a collection of interesting buildings, including the wonderfully restored municipality office, a pilgrim resthouse and a temple with some lovely golden window frames. There are lots of other temples and shrines hidden in the backstreets around here.

### Festivals & Events

Panauti celebrates a **chariot festival** at the end of the monsoon each year around September, when images of the gods from the town's various temples are drawn around the streets in temple carts. The festival starts from the town's old Durbar Sq.

Every 12 years (next in 2010), the **Magh Sankranti festival** (in mid-January, or the Nepali lunar month of Magh) is celebrated with a great *mela* (religious fair) in Panauti that attracts large crowds of pilgrims, worshippers and sadhus.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Panauti** (☎ 011-661055; panauti@wlink.com.np; r with/without bathroom Rs 500/300) You aren't spoilt for choice in Panauti but luckily this is a good place, about a five-minute walk south from the main western gate by the bus stand. Rooms are simple but bright, clean and comfortable (though the hot water is only solar heated) and there's a decent rooftop terrace and restaurant.

### Getting There & Away

Buses run frequently between Panauti and Kathmandu's City (Ratna Park) bus station (Rs 19, two hours) via Banepa; the last bus leaves Panauti around 6pm. For Dhulikhel you'll have to change in Banepa.

See p230 for information on walking to Panauti from Dhulikhel.

If you are travelling by mountain or motorbike you could return to Kathmandu along the remote little-used dirt road via Lakuri Bhanjyang. See p85 for a description of the 30km route, a two-hour ride by motorbike.

### AROUND PANAUTI

The terraced fields, villages and lush hills southeast of Panauti offer great scope for hiking and village exploration. It's a far less visited area than Dhulikhel.

The only place to stay is the good **Balthali Resort** (☎ 01-4108210; www.balthalivillageresort.com; s/d US\$35/45, half board US\$47/69, discounts of 25%), perched on top of a hill above the village of the same name, with sweeping Himalayan views. The rooms lack much architectural charm, but are decent and clean. Staff there can lead you on hikes to Tamang villages like Dada Gaun, across the Roshi Khola to the Namobuddha stupa or deep into the Mahabharat range to the south.

To get to Balthali take a bus (Rs 5) or walk from Panauti to Kholpasi, past the sericulture (silk) cooperative, and then continue on foot over the Saladu Khosi for an hour or so to Balthali village.

## BEYOND THE VALLEY

While the following destinations are well beyond the confines of the Kathmandu Valley, they can be visited as part of an overland vehicle tour from Kathmandu in a relatively short period.

### ARNIKO HIGHWAY TO TIBET

The Arniko Hwy provides Nepal's overland link with Tibet and China. Past Barabise the link is particularly vulnerable to landslides and during the monsoon sections are likely to be closed temporarily between May and August. Even when the highway is passable it's of limited use in breaking India's commercial stranglehold on Nepal, as it's still cheaper to ship Chinese goods via Kolkata (Calcutta) than to truck them through Tibet.

After Dhulikhel the road descends into the beautiful **Panchkhal Valley**. A turnoff at Lami-danda, around 12km from Dhulikhel, leads for 9km on a tarmac road to Palanchowk, where there is a famously beautiful black stone image of the goddess Bhagwati (a form of Durga, itself a terrifying form of Parvati). About five minutes' drive beyond the town of Panchkhal a dirt road takes off to the left, giving road access to the Helambu region.

About 8km later you arrive at **Dolalghat**, a thriving town at the confluence of the Indrawati and Sun Kosi Rivers and the departure point for many rafting trips. The turn-off to Jiri is another 14km away, on the right. **Lamosangu** is a few kilometres after the Jiri turn-off, on the Arniko Hwy. North of Lamosangu is a hydroelectric plant with a tedious military checkpoint.

For a more detailed description of this route see p86.

### Barabise

Barabise is the region's main bazaar town and transport centre. There's little reason to stay here, but you might find yourself caught here at the end of the day, particularly if the night-time curfew continues to shut down transport options early.

**Bhotekhosi Guest House** (s/d Rs 125/150), by the bridge in the centre of town, is the best of a bad bunch. Other options include the very basic **Milan Guest House** (tr Rs 150), by the noisy southern bus stand for buses to Kathmandu, or the fairly miserable **Hotel Chan-**

**deshwori** (d Rs 250) in the north of town, with a patchy restaurant.

Buses run frequently from different ends of town to Kodari (Rs 55, three hours) and Kathmandu (Rs 86, last bus 4pm). A single express bus to Kathmandu leaves at 7am (Rs 110, 3½ hours).

### Borderlands Resort

Tucked away in a bend of the Bhote Kosi River, 97km from Kathmandu, the superb **Borderlands Resort** (www.borderlandresorts.com; tw per person US\$40) is a quiet and isolated riverside retreat. It consists of a central bar and dining area, and a number of luxury thatch-roofed safari tents dotted around a lush tropical garden. Activities offered include rafting, canyoning and trekking, but it's also a great place to just hang out for a day or two.

Accommodation includes meals and transport from Kathmandu. Packages that include activities offer the best value; drop in to the resort's **Kathmandu office** (Map p136; ☎ 01-4425836; next to the Northfield Café) for more details. As an idea of prices, two days of canyoning/rafting costs US\$110/70, including transport and accommodation.

### Last Resort

Another 4km towards Tibet, **Last Resort** (www.thnepal.com; US\$25-35 full board per person) sits in a beautiful spot on a ridge above the Bhote Kosi river, 12km from the Tibet border. Access is by suspension bridge across the river, and it's here that Nepal's only bungee jump is set up (see p77).

Accommodation at the resort is in comfortable standard (four-person) or deluxe (two-person) safari tents, with the focus being the soaring stone-and-slate dining hall and Instant Karma bar. There are gas-heated showers, a plunge pool and a sauna (Rs 300 per person), with massage and yoga to come. The cost of accommodation includes meals and transport to and from Kathmandu. Bring mosquito repellent and a torch (flashlight).

The resort also offers canyoning, rafting on the Bhote Kosi (US\$40, if already staying at the resort), trekking, mountain biking and rock climbing, plus kayak clinics at its less glamorous Riverside Resort (US\$40 per day per person). See p78 for details.

Like Borderlands, the Last Resort does a range of packages that combine any or all of the above activities, so it's not a bad idea to

### OFF THE BEATEN TREK

Both Borderlands and Last Resort offer trekking trips up to the Tibetan border. A four- or five-day trek takes in the ruins of Duganagadi Fort, built in 1854 to defend Nepal during the Nepal-Tibet war, the Tibetan monastery at Bagam, the nunnery at Gumba and the villages of Yemershing, Tasitham and Listikot.

A six- to seven-day option heads to Bhairab Kunda, a holy lake at 4080m with great views of the Langtang range. Thousands of pilgrims trek up to the lake during the full moon of August.

Prices hover around US\$40 per person per day for the fully supported camping trek and you are almost guaranteed to have these places to yourself.

call into its **Kathmandu office** (Map p136; ☎ 01-4439525; near Kathmandu Guest House) for more information and to book.

### Tatopani

The next point of interest is the **hot springs** (admission Rs 2) of Tatopani, 3.5km south of the Tibetan border at Kodari. Five minutes' walk north of the central bazaar, look for a turnstile and sign on the right-hand side. The springs come out as a set of showers (great after a hard bicycle ride from Dhulikhel).

There is a small gumpa on the southern edge of town and a large *mani lhakhang* (shrine with a prayer wheel) in the centre.

**Family Guest House** (☎ 091-633011; d Rs 250; daal bhaat Rs 60) is probably the best accommodation in town, with a decent restaurant and basic but clean rooms.

Other local lodges such as the Tibetan Lodge & Restaurant and Sonam Lodge are more basic.

### Kodari

Nepal's border town with Tibet (China), Kodari is little more than a collection of shabby wooden shanties and a snaking line of squealing Tata trucks, ferrying Chinese goods down into the subcontinent.

It is possible to walk past the Nepali checkpoint and stop in the middle of the **Friendship Bridge** to pose for photos on the red line drawn across the road. From here on is Tibet, which right here looks just like

Nepal. The Chinese border post is 8km uphill at Khasa (Zhangmu). A Chinese visa and Tibetan travel permit is needed to progress further than this.

#### INFORMATION

The **immigration office** (☎ 8.30am-4pm) gives arrivals a Nepali visa for US\$30 and also accepts Nepali rupees or Chinese yuan, but you must supply one photo.

You can change cash and travellers cheques at the **Nepal Bangladesh Bank** (☎ 10.15am-3.30pm Sun-Fri), 20m from immigration, for a Rs 100 commission or 1% of the transaction.

#### SLEEPING & EATING

There is a string of five or so similar guest-houses right by the border, the best of which is the **Kailash Tashi Delek Guest House** (d Rs 250; mains Rs 100-180), which has a nice river view restaurant. They are mostly used as lunch stops by groups headed to or from Tibet.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

There is one express bus a day at 2pm to Kathmandu (Rs 160, 4½ hours). Otherwise take a local bus to Barabise (Rs 55, three hours), and then another on to Kathmandu (Rs 86, last bus around 4pm). Buses are packed and most people ride on the roof.

After 2pm your only option to get to Kathmandu the same day is to take a taxi for around Rs 2000 (Rs 500 a seat). Taxis generally won't leave for Kathmandu after 5pm due to security concerns between Barabise and Panchkhal.

#### THE ROAD TO LANGTANG

A tarmac road heads northwest out of Kathmandu for 23km to Kakani, perched on the edge of the Kathmandu Valley with spectacular views of the Ganesh Himal, and continues to Trisuli Bazaar. Beyond here the road to Dhunche deteriorates to very rough gravel, and is travelled only by mountain bikers and trekkers headed for the Langtang region (see p341).

Just before Malekhu, on the Kathmandu-Pokhara (Prithvi) Hwy, there's a bridge over the Trisuli and the turn-off for the new road to Trisuli Bazaar. It makes an interesting circular bicycle ride a possibility, taking in Kakani, Trisuli Bazaar, Dhading and Malekhu. See Map pp238-9 for this route.

#### Kakani

Standing at 2073m on a ridge northwest of Kathmandu, Kakani is nowhere near as popular as Nagarkot, but it does offer magnificent views of the Ganesh Himal and the central and western Himalaya. The 24km road to Kakani also offers a great bike ride from the capital.

Apart from staring open-mouthed at the view (one could argue this is enough), there's not much to do. The century-old summer villa used by the British embassy, large police training college and army posts crowd out the views somewhat.

The peaceful Thai Memorial Park commemorates the 113 victims of a 1992 Thai Airlines crash. The Shiva shrine across the road offers wider Himalayan views. The government is constructing an International Mountaineer Memorial Park below the hillside.

The fairly basic Kakani Guest House and Waiba Guest House were both closed in 2005 but are expected to reopen soon. The former Tara Gaon Hotel is currently occupied by the army.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Kakani is an hour by car or motorcycle from Kathmandu, and is a long, though rewarding, bicycle trip. There are a number of restaurants along the route. The road is sealed almost all the way and it is a fairly gentle climb – downhill all the way home! See p83 for details of the route to Kakani and on through Shivapuri National Park.

Kakani is 3.5km off the main Dhunche road; turn right at the crest of the hill, before the Kaulithana police checkpoint.

For Kakani, catch a Trisuli Bazaar or Dhunche bus from counter 30 of the Kathmandu bus station, get off at Kaulithana (Rs 25) and walk the 3km uphill to Kakani.

#### Nuwakot

The small village of Nuwakot, a few kilometres southeast of Trisuli Bazaar, has the remains of a 16th-century **fortress** built by Prithvi Narayan Shah when he was planning his campaign to take the Kathmandu Valley in 1744, he later died in the fortress. The impressive main seven-storey Newari-style tower is the forerunner of Kathmandu's Basantapur Tower. The fort is an interesting spot and can be reached by a

#### TAMANG HERITAGE TRAIL

As part of its Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme (TRPAP), the Nepal Tourism Board has helped establish a new village tourism project in the Tibetan-influenced Rasuwa district bordering Langtang (see map pp342-3). The aim of the Initiative is to bring tourism money to communities off the main tourist routes. Profits from homestay accommodation, food sales, handicrafts and Tamang cultural performances are split between the individuals concerned and village social funds. It's a sometimes uneasy mix of community-based tourism and free-market economics but it's a worthy program that deserves support and provides an excellent add-on or alternative to the more commercialised Langtang area.

The highlights of the region include Gatlang, the largest Tamang village in the area, the Tatopani community-run hot springs at Tatopani, the lake of Parvati Kunda near Gutlang, Tibetan monasteries around Goljung, and Himalayan views from Nagthali Danda. The star of the show is the village of Briddim (2229m), where you can stay at one of 24 homes that take in tourists on a rota system (there are only 43 houses in the village!). It's also possible to trek along the old Tibetan trade route via Timure to Rasuwagadhi Fort on the border with Tibet's Kyirong Valley, though for this you need a travel agency to help arrange a border permit (US\$10) from the Department of Immigration in Kathmandu (p112).

A five- or six-day loop of the region is the best option, starting in Syabrubesi and taking in Syabrubesi, Gatlang, Tatopani, Thuman, Timure, Briddim and Syabrubesi, each of which are around four hours' hike apart. If nothing else, spend a night in Briddim to get a taste of the region.

Accommodation is available in a community lodge in Gatlang, the homestay programme in Briddim, or in private houses or lodges in Goljung, Tatopani, Timure and Thuman. Costs are around RS 150 per person per night, plus Rs 100 per meal. In general, the village homestays offer a more intimate experience than the large-scale lodges of Langtang.

You should be able to find a licensed guide in Syabrubesi for around RS 650 per day, which includes food and accommodation. There are plans to open an information office and small museum in Dhunche.

If you want to get off the beaten track and experience the Tibetan-influenced Tamang culture, then give it a try. For more details you can download brochures and maps at the website [www.welcomenepal.com/trpap](http://www.welcomenepal.com/trpap) or contact the Nepal Tourism Board's **Sustainable Tourism Unit** (☎ 01-4256909; info\_trpap@ntb.org.np) in Kathmandu.

step 1½ hours uphill climb from Bidur, or a 30-minute detour by car.

There are a couple of basic restaurants and lodges in Trisuli Bazaar if you get stuck here. Buses leave from the Kathmandu main bus station on the ring road every 15 minutes between 6.30am and about 2.30pm (Rs 53, four hours).

#### Dhunche & Syabrubesi

By the time you reach Dhunche, 119km from Kathmandu, you will have been inspected by countless redundant police and army checkpoints, plus paid Rs 1000 to enter the Langtang National Park. Irritation evaporates quickly, however, because there are spectacular views of the Langtang Valley, and although the modern section of Dhunche is pretty tacky, it's definitely a Tamang town, and the old section is virtually unchanged. Many people start trekking

from Dhunche, although there is a bus to Syabrubesi as well (see p341).

#### SLEEPING & EATING

There are a number of decent trekking-style hotel restaurants, including the **Langtang View** (r with/without bathroom Rs 300/200), Dhunche Guest House, Tibetan View Guest House, Annapurna Guest House and others.

Syabrubesi has the Buddha Hotel, Lhasa Hotel and half a dozen other smaller lodges.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

The road to Dhunche is bad, but it deteriorates further if you continue 15km to Syabrubesi. The views on both stretches are spectacular.

Minibuses leave Kathmandu at 6.30am, 7.30am and 8.30am for Dhunche (Rs 159, eight hours) and Syabrubesi (Rs 202, nine hours), returning at 6.30am and 7.30am.



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