

## Mountains for Breakfast

### *Kathmandu Valley Tour Package (3 nights, 4 days)*

#### Introduction

The sight of the Kathmandu Valley from your plane is likely to make you skeptical. What could there be to see in this concrete sprawl? Though congested, there is amazingly always space, small and big, for gods in Kathmandu. A walk anywhere in the city brings to mind Colonel William Kirkpatrick's remark upon visiting Nepal in 1793: 'There are nearly as many temples as houses, and as many idols as inhabitants [in the Kathmandu Valley].' There are no longer as many temples as houses, but Kathmandu has enough temples and idols to dispel any doubt about its cultural heritage and religious fervor.

Building temples and palaces were the continuance of war through artistic means in ancient Kathmandu. When the Kathmandu Valley was divided into three kingdoms – Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Patan – the rulers vied to outdo each other by commissioning temples that were inimitable and unsurpassable in beauty and grandeur. A few men's piety and vanity has left the Valley with nearly 3000 temples.

#### Day 1: Arrival in Kathmandu

*Assistance at the airport upon arrival and transfer to hotel. Dinner at hotel.*

#### Day 2: Visits to Kathmandu City, Swayambhunath, Pashupatinath, Boudhanath and Patan City

*Breakfast at hotel. Full day sight-seeing of Kathmandu City, Swayambhunath, Pashupatinath, Boudhanath and Patan City.*

#### **Kathmandu City**

The Hanuman Dhoka Durbar (Palace), once the center of Kathmandu and royal residence, derives its name from the idol of Hanuman, the Hindu monkey-god, standing near the palace's main entrance. It has been there since 1672 A.D. Kathmandu's main square is also called Basantapur Durbar Square, a name derived from the nine-story building built by Prithivi Narayan Shah in A.D. 1770. In fact every structure in the square is grand, old, and historical enough to lend its name to the square.

History is in residence at the Hanuman Dhoka Palace Museum. The museum tour goes in reverse, from the most recent dynasty to the medieval rulers, from rooms where kings were born to sunken water spouts where they bathed. Standing on the Nasal Chok, the palace's biggest courtyard, surrounded by history, art, idols of gods, you realize why this was the place where the kings of Nepal were crowned.

### ***Swayambhunath***

Swayambhunath can be an uplifting experience, both physically and spiritually. From its hilltop perch it offers a sweeping view of the Valley. On some autumn and winter evenings roseate mountain tips are visible to the north. It's also a mystical place, full of mythological tales and lore. One story tells of the entry passage into the subterranean world of nagas (serpents) lying below the stupa. The eye-seeing eyes of the Buddha give away nothing on that story. If being on this primeval site did not fulfill your wishes, take the western stairs to the small pool with a small statue in the middle. It is believed if you can land a coin on the statue's palm, your wish comes true.

### ***Pashupatinath***

Pashupatinath, which is named after Lord Shiva's form as 'Master of the Beasts,' is one of the holiest sites in the world for Hindus. The main temple that houses a black Shiva linga sits surrounded by temples and shrines. Just outside the temple's walls life encapsulated in scenes: animals being sacrificed; bodies being cremated; sadhus posing for photos and demanding money in return; wailing and singing. A little further and above these is the deer park, where blackbucks and chital saunter. According to Hindu mythology, Shiva once frolicked here in the form of a stag. The Vishwarupa Temple houses Shiva in his supreme and all-encompassing form, an image so powerful that a cloth is wrapped around it to prevent exposure.

### ***Boudhanath***

Boudhanath is a novel experience, one where the Buddha's all-seeing eyes gaze at restaurants and curio shops, as devotees go around the stupa. Buddhism finds itself in the middle of consumerism here. But it is not limited by its location. On the contrary it transcends boundaries: backpackers in T-shirts walking abreast with grey-haired Tibetan women, doing the *kora* around Asia's largest stupa. Streets lead off in every direction from the stupa, like canals designed to carry the spiritual energy generated here by the countless prayer wheels and the ceaseless humming of Om Mani Padme Hum.

### ***Patan***

It would be easier if there was a map of Patan that shows all the places that are not of religious or cultural significance. Even its tile-roofed Newari-style houses are architectural

gems. There are over 150 *vihars*, or monasteries, in Patan, many of which are not endowed with wonderful sculptures. Sculpting metal is Patan's traditional craft, the levels of brilliance of which can be judged from the statue of King Yoganarendra Malla that stands at the apex of the stone pillar in the Patan Durbar Square. Even centuries after being exposed to the elements, the king's face shines brilliantly when sunlight falls on it.

### *Nepali cultural show and dinner at a local restaurant*

## **Day 3: Visit to Bhaktapur and Nagarkot**

***Breakfast at hotel. Full day sight-seeing of Bhaktapur and Nagarkot.***

### ***Bhaktapur***

Bhaktapur dates back to the 11th century, and in many places that is where it still exists. Walk its brick-paved streets and you see scenes that have almost disappeared elsewhere in the Valley: grains spread out on the ground to dry, spinning potter's wheels, carpenters chiseling ancient window designs, and elderly men chatting and playing dice games. With three major squares filled with temples, several medieval ponds, and 172 pilgrim shelters, Bhaktapur lives up to its name of 'City of Devotees.'

The biggest source of wonder regarding the Bhaktapur Durbar Square is that it once had more temples than it does today. The 1934 earthquake destroyed many buildings adorning Nepal's most photographed square. Masterpieces from the past like the iconic 55 Windows and the Golden Gate survive, just two of the countless excuses to deliberately miss the bus back to Kathmandu and stay in Bhaktapur.

### ***Nagarkot***

When George Mallory, the inveterate British alpinist, was asked why he wanted to climb Everest, he replied dryly, "Because it's there." If you plan to visit Nepal but not to trek, people may ask you why. "Because there is Nagarkot," you can reply. Why trek when the mountains appear on the horizon as you sip a cup of Nepalese organic coffee? Down jackets and trekking boots are not needed; dress for doing nothing. Part the curtains in the morning, and in front of you, like a giant postcard, is the panoramic view of the Himalayas. Snap photos of Mt. Dhaulagiri (8,167m), Ganesh Himal (7406m), Langtang Lirung (7246m), Shisha Pangma (8012m) and Mt. Gauri Shanker (7146m) changing hues as the sun rises. Put them on your Facebook page with the caption 'Why I didn't go trekking.'

Comfort levels go much higher than the 2,175 meters at which this "village" of resorts is situated. A former summer retreat of Nepalese royalty and aristocrats, Nagarkot still excels at putting pleasure on a platter for visitors. Be warned, however: Indolence is a bigger risk in

Nagarkot than altitude sickness is on high-altitude treks. Early symptoms include reluctance to leave the balcony and ignoring time.

Nagarkot is not all mountains. Equally spectacular (and more appreciable on days when the peaks are obscured by clouds) is the sight of mist slowly filling the valleys between the endless rows of undulating hills. You can also walk to the nearby Tamang and Gurung villages. The russet of their mud houses and the green and yellow of their terraced fields provide a much-needed change from the white-dominated mountain hypnosis.

### *Overnight stay at hotel in Nagarkot*

#### **Day 4: Sunrise from Nagarkot**

*Watching sunrise from vantage point. Breakfast at hotel. Transfer to Kathmandu airport for departure.*

#### **Package Includes:**

Transport, pick-up, and drop  
Sight-seeing  
Hotel accommodation in Kathmandu and Nagarkot (Hotel with B&B Basis)  
Entrance fee for: Kathmandu, Swayambhunath, Pashupatinath, Boudhanath, Bhaktapur and Patan

#### **Package Excludes:**

Visa fee at the International Airport  
Laundry  
Personal expenses

#### **FAQs:**

#### **The best time to visit?**

March – May and then September to early November are the best times to visit, weather wise. For major festivals, the best times are the monsoon months (June-August).

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### **Attire**

Kathmandu is hot from March to May. September is cool with chances of rain, so carrying umbrellas is wise. Avoid dresses that reveal too much of your body. Nagarkot can get really cold, so bring warm clothes.

### **What to do when inside temples and monasteries?**

When you are inside temples and monasteries, do not act in any way – excessive photography, talking loudly, wearing shoes into prayer rooms – that impinges on the activities of the priests or devotees.

### **Documents and IDs**

Forms for most things – cell phone SIM cards, visa extensions, hotel forms – in Nepal require passport-size photos, so bring a dozen or more. Your passport is your ID while in Nepal. Carry it everywhere.

### **What does Nagarkot have beside the mountain views?**

You can go on walks or, if you have more time, go cycling. Rock climbing is another activity. Another interesting place to visit is the small cheese factory.