

## Temple Run

### *Kathmandu Valley Tour Package (2 nights, 3 days)*

#### Introduction

Lying in a valley surrounded by hills reaching 2,760m, Kathmandu has the appearance of a large bowl. And walking Kathmandu's streets is indeed like landing in a bowl of whirling scenes. It's hard to look where you're going when almost every corner has something to make you stop and gaze—a hypnosis broken rudely by honking motorbikes. But traffic loses out to that lovely medieval face of Kathmandu, that appears and disappears, leaving you agreeing with Rudyard Kipling's famous line, 'The strangest dreams of Kew are the facts of Kathmandu.' Walk into the Kumari Temple in Kathmandu, and the dream of seeing a living goddess comes true.

#### Day 1: Arrival in Kathmandu

*Assistance at the airport upon arrival and transfer to hotel. Half-day sight-seeing of Kathmandu city and Swayambhunath.*

#### *Kathmandu City*

The name 'Kathmandu' comes from the Kasthamandap Temple—a fitting source for a city that has an estimated 3,000 temples. But how can a visitor possibly enjoy this abundance of religious buildings? The answer is the Basantapur Durbar Square. In this one square are the wonders, eccentricities, and diversity of Nepali temples. You are moving along centuries-old temples when you look up and see the biggest reason for blushes, grins and giggles in the square: the erotic carvings on the temples.

Although the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar (Palace) became the center of power and royal residence under the Malla Dynasty (1200–1769 A.D.), its origin goes back further, to the Licchavi Period (450 – 740 A.D.). A must-see in the square is the horizontally laid slab of stone on the western wall of the Hanuman Dhoka Palace. On it are etched a jumble of alphabets and numerals in 15 languages. King Pratap Malla, who ruled over Kathmandu from 1641 to 1674 A.D., installed the tablet on the wall to prove his mastery over those languages. Investing in foreign language courses seems wise when you consider that concealed somewhere in that gibberish is a clue to finding a treasure cache hidden somewhere in the palace.

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## **Swayambhunath**

Swayambhunath offers a beautiful view of the Kathmandu Valley. It is a view of the present, but, looking out on to the Valley floor, it isn't hard to visualize the story of Swayambhunath's origin. For it was here, according to mythology, that a lotus flower sprang up on the surface of the primeval lake that was once the Valley. Swayambhu, or the Self-Born, is the oldest religious structure in Kathmandu. Calmness can transfer from the Buddha's all-seeing eyes to yours if you look at them. But not for too long if you have something to eat or drink in your hands, unless you want to see a monkey open a Coke bottle and gulp it down.

The premises of Swayambhunath also contain an example of the unique religious blend that has sprouted and flourishes in the Valley. Tucked behind the stupa, in the western corner, is a temple of Hariti (Ajima), the Hindu goddess of smallpox. Although a Hindu temple, it is worshipped and revered equally by Buddhists, in the same way as Hindus venerate the Swayambhunath stupa.

### ***Dinner at hotel***

## **Day 2: Visits to Pashupatinath, Boudhanath, Bhaktapur City and Patan City**

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

### **Pashupatinath**

The Pashupatinath Temple complex resembles a life-size collage of life: faith, generosity, poverty, life, death mingle here in an unceasing flow. Set on the banks of the Bagmati River, at the foot of a sizeable forest, and recounted in numerous Hindu scriptures, this temple sits like a beacon of spirituality. Pashupatinath, which is named after Lord Shiva's form as 'Master of the Beasts,' is one of those temples of Kathmandu that have their origins in mythology. Although the present pagoda-style structure was built in 1696 A.D., the temple is much older.

On the western bank of the Bagmati, between the Pashupatinath Temple and the older temple complex called Panch Deval (Five Temples), is the small Bachhareshwari Temple. Legends tell of human sacrifices at this temple. Today animals are sacrificed here. Across the Bagmati, on the eastern side, is perhaps the best place in the area for photography: the dozen or so temples lined symmetrically, each with a small Shiva linga in the center; the top of the terraces that offers a great view of the main temple; and the Ram Temple with its crowd of ash-smeared *sadhus* and wall paintings.

## Boudhanath

There are places you see and there are places you *feel*. Believed to be built in 600 A.D. by the Tibetan king, Songtsen Gampo, wrecked by a Mughal army of iconoclasts in the 14th century, and subsequently rebuilt, the Boudhanath stupa is a place you feel. The Boudhanath stupa, like so many prayer wheels spinning in and around it, itself feels like a giant wheel in motion. There is a wheel of people going around Asia's largest stupa on a *kora*. Boudhanath is a blend of monks and nuns in their robes, the smell of butter lamps, the blur of spinning Tibetan alphabets on huge prayer wheels, the faint tinkle of bells and the murmurs of chants. Go there and let your senses take control.

Sometimes, though, this kaleidoscope can be a little overwhelming on the senses. The numerous *gompas*, or monasteries, located in the vicinity offer quieter and original settings in which to witness Tibetan Buddhism. The 13 levels of the stupa's spires symbolize the equal number of levels a human being needs to pass through to attain Nirvana. On evenings when the clamor of the surroundings businesses has dimmed, or on special nights when butter lamps are lighted in their thousands, Boudhanath certainly does take people to another level.

## Bhaktapur

Bhaktapur, which means 'City of Devotees,' is devoted to living up to its name. The city's foundations were laid out in the 11th century, during the reign of King Ananda Malla. To its architectural marvels, however, Bhaktapur owes most to Yaksha Malla (1428-82 A.D.). The city underwent another intense phase of temple-building during the rule of Bhupatindra Malla in the 18th century, turning the then kingdom into a mosaic of 172 temples and monasteries. Bhaktapur's charm is that several of those structures remain today.

In Bhaktapur, use the pagoda style rooftops and the rows of clay pots drying in the sun as landmarks. Following the tallest rooftop in Bhaktapur will get you to the five-storied Nyatapola Temple in Taumadhi Tole. Walk west from there and you will arrive in the great outdoor museum-like Bhaktapur Durbar Square. Look up at the masterful 55 windows on a single wing of the palace. A few meters from it is the Golden Gate, arguably the best example of repousse metalwork in the world.

## Patan

If Bhaktapur is the city of devotees, Patan is the city of artists. Its narrow alleys are filled with the music of the hammer meeting anvil. You walk flanked by gilded statues of serene Buddhas and wrathful deities. Often, you will pass by a low doorway framing a *chaitya*, a small stupa-like structure. These are the famous *bahals*, or courtyards, of Patan. Nothing is more onerous than poring over maps in Patan; nothing is more rewarding that chucking it aside and loitering.

The vihars, or monasteries, of Patan are small treasures troves, often containing in them sculptures whose beauty warrants several visits. Like Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, Patan's major attraction is the Durbar Square. The imposing 17th-century Bhimsen Temple marks the northern entry to the square. Opposite it is the sunken water spout of Manga Hiti, the major source of water in the neighborhood and, formerly, a social hub. Almost synonymous with Patan is the Krishna Mandir located in the square's center. King Siddhinarsingh Malla built the temple in 1637, opting for a structure of stone rather than the conventional brick and wood structures. At the Mahabouddha Temple and the Golden Temple you can witness ageless rituals, in the latter performed by a boy of seven or eight.

### *Overnight at hotel*

### **Day 3: Departure from Kathmandu**

*Breakfast at the hotel and transfer to Kathmandu airport for departure.*

#### **Package Includes:**

Transport, pick-up, and drop  
Sight-seeing  
Hotel accommodation (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).

#### **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.

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### **Visa**

The minimum duration of a tourist visa to Nepal is fifteen days and costs \$25.

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

Most places that forbid entry to foreigners carry signboards stating this, so look for them. Although religious buildings are sites of historical and artistic appeal, they are above all places of worship. 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.

### **Hospitals**

There are ample hospitals in Kathmandu. Some of the most modern ones are Norvic, Grande, and B & B.

### **Transportation**

Taxi rides can be expensive. Compare and bargain to avoid being ripped off.