



INSIGHT  GUIDES

NEPAL



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Inside front cover Nepal

Inside back cover Kathmandu

LEGEND

- 🔍 Insight on
- 📷 Photo Story

THE BEST OF NEPAL: TOP ATTRACTIONS



△ **Durbar Square, Kathmandu.** Slowly recovering from damage wrought by the 2015 earthquake, this crowded Malla-era cityscape is still a living, breathing place of worship and commerce. See page 163.

▽ **Swayambhunath.** Standing atop a monkey-infested hill, this great white stupa has been watching out over Kathmandu for millennia; its courtyard, bedecked with prayer flags and crowded with statuary, still offers the ultimate view of the city. See page 173.



△ **Boudhanath.** Set amidst the crowded spaces on the eastern edge of Kathmandu, this magnificent Buddhist monument is the hub of a thriving Tibetan community, with monks, monasteries and momos aplenty. See page 174.



△ **Bhaktapur.** Of all the medieval temple towns of the Kathmandu Valley, Bhaktapur feels furthest removed from the modern world. The beetling alleys are free from traffic, and around every other corner lies another temple-filled square. See page 185.



△ **The Kathmandu Valley.** Ringed with high hills and studded with spectacular temples, the Kathmandu Valley offers endless opportunities for exploration, from the alleys of Sankhu to the forests of Shivapuri and the epic mountain views from Nagarkot and Dhulikhel. See page 197.

▽ **Pokhara.** Pokhara's lakeside is the perfect place to relax after the rigours of a trek, or simply to take in the vision of the Annapurnas, reflected in the smooth waters of Phewa Tal. See page 220.



△ **The Annapurna region.** A sacred massif at the heart of Nepal, the long white ridge of the Annapurnas is a powerful presence, and its flanks are traversed by some of the best trekking routes in the country. See page 229.

▽ **Mount Everest.** Nepal's ultimate icon and the planet's paramount peak, Everest is an epic vision whether seen during an arduous trek to Base Camp, or viewed through the cabin window on a thrilling mountain flight. See pages 255 and 279.



▽ **Lumbini.** Out in the hot flatlands of the Terai, the birthplace of the Buddha is suffused with an air of slow-paced tranquillity amongst the pilgrims, mendicants and epic sunsets over dusty plains. See page 301.



△ **Bandipur.** On a high ridge in the Middle Hills, the streets of this tranquil little town are lined with beautiful 18th-century buildings and a growing number of boutique guesthouses. See page 216.



THE BEST OF NEPAL: EDITOR'S CHOICE



Lions outside Kumari Bahal in Durbar Square.

VIEWING WILDLIFE

Chitwan National Park.

Deep in the forests of southern Nepal, Chitwan is one of Asia's great national parks, home to tigers, rhinos, bears and crocodiles. See page 290.

Bardia National Park. In the remote western Terai, this park is home to tigers and wild elephants and all manner of exotic birdlife. See page 297.

Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve. In the eastern Terai, this beautiful riverine reserve is remarkably rich in birdlife, and forms

a major staging post for migrant species. See page 286.

Langtang National Park. Red pandas thrive in the dense bamboo groves of this beautiful mountain region, which is also home to elusive upland ungulates and a handful of snow leopards. See page 245.

Shey-Phoksundo National Park. This vast and fabled mountain park is home to blue sheep, wolves and the majestic and ghostly snow leopard. See page 306.

Elephant safari in the Terai.



BEST TEMPLES AND RELIGIOUS SITES

Pashupatinath. On the banks of the Bagmati River, the smoking funeral pyres and meditating sadhus instil this sacred spot with a profound atmosphere. See page 175.

Kala Bhairav. The ceaseless stream of devotees lighting candles and offering prayers before this terrifying deity underscores the role of Kathmandu's Durbar Square as a living place of worship. See page 163.

Changu Narayan. On a narrow ridge, this temple is lavishly endowed with Licchavi-era carvings

and is still a major place of pilgrimage. See page 201.

Dakshinkali. Set in the cool forests in the furthest southern reaches of the Kathmandu Valley, this tiny temple is the scene of spectacular blood sacrifices, demonstrating the depth of religious faith in Nepal. See page 207.

Janaki Mandir. Far from the beaten tourist track in the Terai town of Janakpur, this magnificent Mughal-style temple is dedicated to Sita, wife of the god Rama. See page 287.

Pashupatinath is the place to see sadhus.



TOP TREKS

Annapurna Circuit. Nepal's original teahouse trek, the route around the mighty Annapurna Massif still sets the standard for Himalayan journeys. See page 231.

Everest Base Camp. Everest Base Camp is the ultimate goal for many trekkers, but the real highlight of the trek is the journey through the Sherpa homeland. See page 259.

Langtang Valley. Away from the crowds of the other teahouse trails, this trek leads through lush forests to grand glacial vistas. See page 245.

Annapurna Sanctuary. From the subtropical foothills, this fabled trek leads through dense rhododendron forests to the icy amphitheatre at the heart of the Annapurnas. See page 239.

BEST ADVENTURES

Whitewater rafting. Running the wild white water of Nepal's rivers is the ultimate thrill for many travellers. See page 141.

Mountaineering. The peaks of the Himalayas are the ultimate testing ground for top-flight mountaineers, the less experienced can test their mettle on other more modest peaks. See page 131.

Mountain biking. The tracks and trails of the Kathmandu Valley and the Middle Hills offer endless opportunities for

lung-busting ascents and thrilling descents. See page 143.

Aerial adventures. Take to Nepal's skies by hang-glider, paraglider, microlight or hot-air balloon for unforgettable thrills and views. See page 145.

The journey to Mustang. Tucked up tight against Nepal's northern frontier, Mustang is a land apart, a forbidden kingdom offering an authentic glimpse of the culture of the Tibetan Plateau. See page 238.

Whitewater rafting.



Revellers celebrate Holi in Kathmandu.

CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Bisket Jatra. The biggest and most boisterous of the Kathmandu Valley's many festivals, this New Year's celebration is marked by the progress of a huge chariot through the streets of Bhaktapur. See page 89.

Holi. This Hindu festival marks the coming of spring, and sees tourists and locals alike cheerfully doused with colour. See page 93.

Prayers in a Tibetan gompa. The rumble of drums, the sounding of horns and the clashing of cymbals opens the daily recitations of Buddhist texts in monasteries around Boudhanath and Pharping. See pages 174 and 206.

A meal in a bhojanalaya. Be it a plate of steaming momos or a platter of *dal bhat* with unlimited refills, a meal amongst the locals in a humble eatery offers an authentic taste of Nepal. See page 69.

A Kathmandu rickshaw ride. A journey through the teeming alleyways of Kathmandu's old quarters on the seat of a rattling cycle-rickshaw is an essential experience – but don't expect to get anywhere very quickly. See page 313.

Carpets and crafts. From Tibetan carpet-weavers to Newari metalworkers, Nepal is home to myriad artisans plying ancient trades and crafting the exquisite artefacts on offer in the boutiques and craft shops of the Kathmandu Valley. See pages 167 and 169.

Elephant-back safari. Of all the ways to view Nepal's wildlife, edging through the *phanta* grass of Chitwan or Bardia atop a swaying pachyderm – with a tantalising glimpse of a rhino or tiger always a possibility – is the ultimate experience. See pages 292 and 298.