

Kathmandu

Nepal

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Kathmandu is Nepal's capital and the usual first stop for any trip to the country. It sits at about 1,400 m in a wide valley ringed by green hills. On clear days you can see the Himalayas from the rooftops. The city is loud, crowded and dusty, but it has a very large number of active temples, shrines and royal palaces.

Hindu and Buddhist traditions mix everywhere. You will see morning offerings at street shrines, prayer flags on stupas and festivals that fill whole squares. A few nights here suit anyone interested in culture, religion and architecture. Kathmandu is also the base for treks, jungle safaris and trips to the rest of the valley.

When to visit

The best time is late October and November, after the monsoon, when the air is clear and the mountains are most visible. Early October can still bring rain. March and April are also pleasant and warm, though haze often hides the peaks. Winter days are sunny and mild, but nights are cold and the air is often polluted. The monsoon runs from June to September, with heavy rain most afternoons. Showers start again in May.

The festival to plan around is **Indra Jatra**, eight days in September or early October at Kathmandu Durbar Square. Masked dancers perform, and the living goddess Kumari is pulled through the old town on a wooden chariot. Dashain and Tihar usually follow in October and November; many shops close during Dashain.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Great Great for hiking	17° / 20° Feels like 14°	6° / 3°	Dry air · Calm winds
February	Great Great for hiking	20° / 24° Feels like 17°	8° / 4°	Dry air · Calm winds
March	Great Great for sightseeing	26° / 30° Feels like 22°	12° / 9°	20 sunny days · Dry air · Calm winds
April	Great Great for sightseeing	30° / 34° Feels like 27°	16° / 13°	Dry air · Calm winds · UV 9 (Very high)
May	Fair Fair for sightseeing	31° / 35°	19° / 16°	15 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 9 (Very high)
June	Poor Poor for sightseeing	30° / 35°	20° / 18°	21 rainy days · Calm winds · UV 8 (Very high)
July	Poor Poor for sightseeing	26° / 30°	20° / 19°	27 rainy days · Muggy, humid air · Calm winds
August	Fair Fair for sightseeing	25° / 28°	19° / 18°	26 rainy days · Muggy, humid air · Calm winds
September	Good Good for sightseeing	24° / 27°	18° / 17°	20 rainy days · Muggy, humid air · Calm winds
October	Great Great for sightseeing	23° / 27°	15° / 12°	Calm winds
November	Great Great for sightseeing	21° / 24°	11° / 9°	21 sunny days · Dry air · Calm winds
December	Great Great for hiking	18° / 21°	7° / 4°	22 sunny days · Dry air · Calm winds

Best months: January, February, March, April, October, November, December

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

Top sights

A Basantapur Durbar Square is the historic heart of the old city, a square packed with pagoda temples, shrines and former royal buildings. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and foreigners pay an entry fee at the ticket booths.

Inside the square, B Hanuman Dhoka is the old royal palace of the Malla and Shah kings, with carved courtyards and a museum. Nearby, C Kumari Ghar is the carved 18th-century home of the Kumari, a young girl worshipped as a living goddess.

On a hill west of the centre, D Swayambhunath is one of the oldest and most sacred Buddhist sites in Nepal. Its stupa with painted Buddha eyes looks over the whole city. Many people call it the Monkey Temple because of the monkeys that live here.

E Boudha Stupa is one of the largest stupas in the world and the centre of Kathmandu's Tibetan community. Monasteries, cafés and shops ring the white dome.

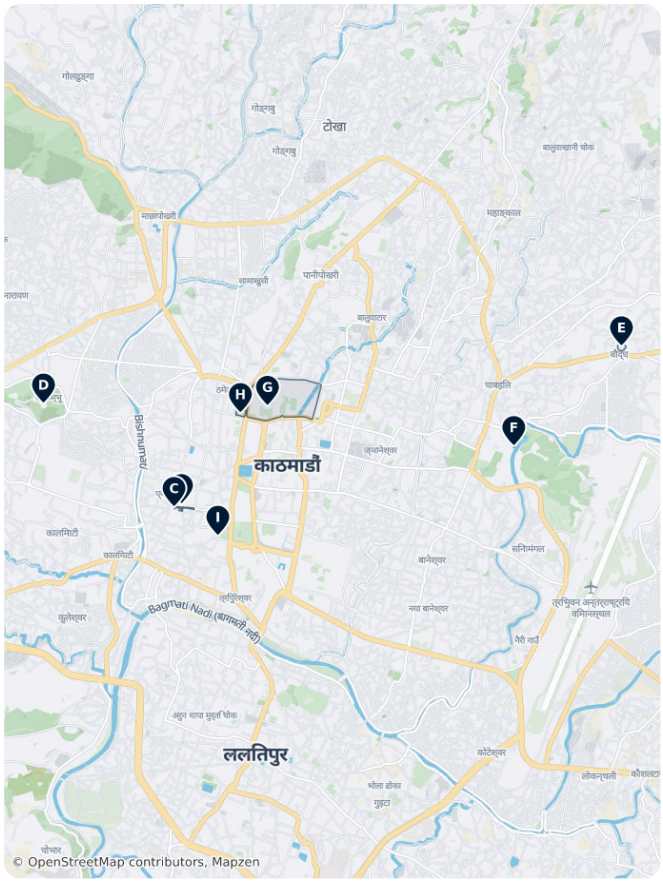
On the Bagmati River, F Pashupatinath Temple is Nepal's holiest Hindu temple, dedicated to Shiva. **Only Hindus may enter the main temple**, but visitors can walk the riverbanks, where open-air cremations take place.

G Narayanhiti Palace Museum is the former royal palace, now a museum of the monarchy that ended in 2008. You can see the state rooms and the site of the 2001 royal massacre. It is closed on Tuesdays and

Wednesdays.

H Garden of Dreams is a restored 1920s garden with pavilions and fountains at the edge of Thamel. It is a quiet place to rest after the busy streets.

I Dharahara is a white tower rebuilt after the 2015 earthquake and reopened in 2024. Its viewing deck gives a wide view over the city.



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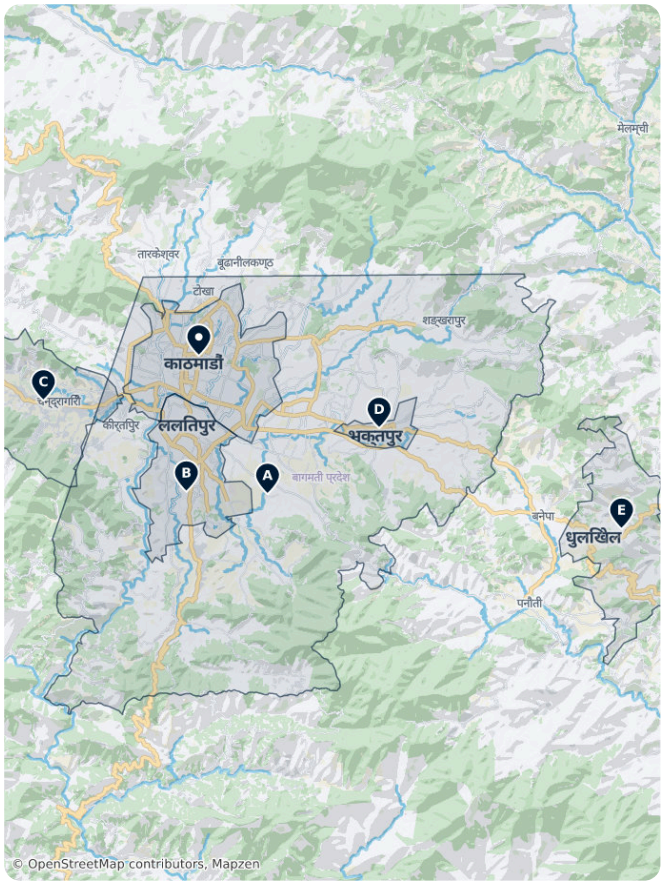
What to experience

Some of Kathmandu's best moments are daily rituals you can join or watch.

- **Evening aarti at Pashupatinath Temple**: every evening, priests perform a fire ceremony with lamps, bells and chanting on the banks of the Bagmati. Non-Hindus watch from the eastern bank; arrive early for a place.
- **Walk the kora at Boudha Stupa**: at dawn and dusk, pilgrims circle the stupa clockwise, spinning prayer wheels. Join the flow, then watch from a rooftop café as the butter lamps are lit.
- **Morning in the old bazaars**: walk from Thamel to Durbar Square through Asan Bazar and Indra Chowk early in the morning, when locals shop for spices and vegetables and make offerings at small street temples.
- **Wait for the Kumari**: in the courtyard of Kumari Ghar, the living goddess sometimes appears briefly at a carved window. **Photographing her is not allowed.**
- **Tihar lights**: during Tihar in October or November, families decorate houses with oil lamps and flower garlands, and groups sing door to door in the evenings.

Day trips

The A Kathmandu Valley has two more royal cities and several hill viewpoints within easy reach. Hire a taxi for the day or join a tour, as local buses are slow and crowded.



- B Lalitpur: the old city of Patan, about 5 km south, across the Bagmati River, 20–30 min by taxi. Its Durbar Square is packed with fine Newar temples, and the palace houses the Patan Museum of religious art.
- C Chandragiri: a cable car from Thankot, on the western edge of the valley, climbs in about 10 minutes to Chandragiri Hills. The top has a Shiva temple and wide views of the valley and, on clear days, the Himalayas.
- D Bhaktapur: about 13 km east, 30–60 min by taxi depending on traffic. It is the best-preserved of the old royal cities, with brick squares, pottery workshops and the five-storey Nyatapola temple. Foreigners pay a separate entry fee to the old town.
- E Dhulikhel: a hill town about 30 km southeast of the city, with mountain views and walking trails. It combines well with Bhaktapur or Nagarkot.
- Nagarkot: a hill village about 32 km east, at around 2,175 m. People come for the sunrise over the Himalayas; on clear mornings you can see Everest. Many visitors stay one night.

Where to explore

Most visitors stay in Thamel, the busy traveller district just north of the old city. The city itself lies within the wider Kathmandu Valley.

For nature close to town, ShivaPuri Nagarjuna National Park covers the forested hills on the northern edge of the valley, with day hikes and viewpoints.

Farther afield, Pokhara is Nepal's lakeside base for Annapurna treks. Annapurna is the country's most popular trekking region, and Chitwan National Park is the place for jungle safaris with rhinos and elephants.

Getting there

- **By air**: Tribhuvan International Airport is Nepal's main international airport, about 6 km east of Thamel. A taxi to Thamel takes 30–40 minutes depending on traffic. The prepaid taxi counter in the arrivals hall charges about NPR 1,000.
- **Domestic flights**: Short flights link Kathmandu with Pokhara (about 30 minutes) and other towns. Delays and cancellations due to weather are common.
- **By bus**: Tourist buses to Pokhara and Chitwan leave early in the morning from Sorhakhutte, just west of Thamel. The road to Pokhara is often under repair, so allow a full day. Book through your hotel or a travel agent.
- **Visitor information**: Nepal Tourism Board

Getting around

- **Buses and microbuses**: There is no metro or tram. Crowded local buses and microbuses cover the city, and you pay the conductor in cash. The cooperative Sajha Yatayat runs larger, more comfortable buses on some main routes. Sajha Yatayat
- **Taxis and ride-hailing**: Taxis are the easiest way to get around. Agree the fare before you start, because meters are rarely used. Ride-hailing apps such as Pathao, inDrive and Yango are widely used, often for motorbike rides as well as cars.
- **On foot**: The old city, Thamel and the Durbar Square area are best explored on foot. Streets are narrow, have few pavements and are busy with motorbikes, so walk with care. Swayambhunath, Boudhanath and Pashupatinath are too far to walk comfortably; take a taxi.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

Moderate

The old city and Thamel are compact and best explored on foot, but lanes are narrow, pavements are rare and motorbike traffic is heavy. Take a taxi to the stupas and Pashupatinath.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Low

Heavy, chaotic traffic, dust and few bike lanes make cycling in the city unpleasant; mountain biking on the valley rim is a better option.

Driving

- **Is a car worth it?** No. Traffic is heavy and chaotic and road rules are loosely followed. Most visitors use taxis in the city and hire a car with a driver for trips outside.
- **Driving side**: Traffic drives on the **left**.
- **Parking**: Parking in the old city and Thamel is very limited. Leave the car at your hotel and walk or take a taxi.

Food & drink

Kathmandu is the home of Newari cooking, the rich food of the valley's original people. Look for the *samay baji* platter with beaten rice, spiced meat and pickles, and *yomari*, sweet steamed dumplings. Momos are everywhere, from street stalls to smart restaurants. In Bhaktapur, try *juju dhau*, a sweet, creamy buffalo-milk yogurt.

For international food and rooftop dining, go to Thamel, which has the widest choice of cafés and restaurants. For Tibetan food, eat around the stupa in Boudha. For street snacks and local tea shops, explore the lanes around Asan Bazar and Indra Chowk. Many tourist restaurants add a service charge and VAT to the bill, so check before you tip.

What to eat & drink

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Momo · मम:
Steamed or fried dumplings filled with meat or vegetables, usually served with a spicy tomato dip.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Sel roti
A ring-shaped, slightly sweet rice-flour bread, deep-fried and often eaten during festivals.

DRINKS

Chiya
Milk tea spiced with ginger or cardamom, sold everywhere from street stalls to trekking lodges.

Raksi
A clear, home-distilled spirit made from rice, millet, or barley.

SIGNATURE DISHES

Dal Bhat · दाल भात
Lentil soup, rice, and vegetable curry. The everyday staple meal, often served with unlimited refills.

Newari khaja set
A festive mixed platter from the Kathmandu Valley's Newar community, with beaten rice, buffalo meat, and pickles.

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Safety & health

Kathmandu is generally safe for visitors, and violent crime against tourists is rare.

- **Petty theft**: Pickpockets and bag snatchers work in Thamel, on buses and at the airport. Keep valuables in your hotel safe.
- **Traffic**: The biggest daily risk. Pavements are few, and motorbikes come from every direction.
- **Air quality**: Dust and smog are bad in winter and spring. People with asthma or breathing problems should bring a mask.
- **Protests**: Demonstrations and strikes (bandh) can close roads and shops, and curfews are sometimes imposed. Avoid crowds and follow local news.
- **Water**: **Do not drink tap water.** Use bottled, filtered or boiled water, and refill stations where your hotel offers them.
- **Earthquakes**: Tremors are common across Nepal. Note the emergency exits in your hotel.

History

Kathmandu grew from settlements founded under the Licchavi kings from around 400 AD. Its name comes from Kasthamandap, a large wooden rest house on the old trade route. The name means "wooden pavilion". Archaeologists now think the first building dates from the 7th century.

Under the Malla kings, from the 12th to the 18th century, the valley split into three rival city-states: Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur. Each built its own palace square, which is why the valley has three Durbar Squares. In Kathmandu, King *Mahendra Malla* built Taleju Temple in 1564, the most prominent temple on the square.

In September 1768, *Prithvi Narayan Shah* of Gorkha took Kathmandu, and the last Malla king, *Jaya Prakash Malla*, fled to Patan. The Shah kings made the city the capital of a unified Nepal and ruled from Hanuman Dhoka and later Narayanhiti Palace Museum. The monarchy ended in 2008, and Nepal became a republic.

On 25 April 2015, a major earthquake destroyed many monuments, including Kasthamandap and the old Dharahara tower. Rebuilding took years. Kasthamandap reopened in 2022, and the new Dharahara in 2024. You will still see scaffolding and fresh timber on some temples.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Nepal at a glance:

CURRENCY
NPR Rs

ELECTRICITY

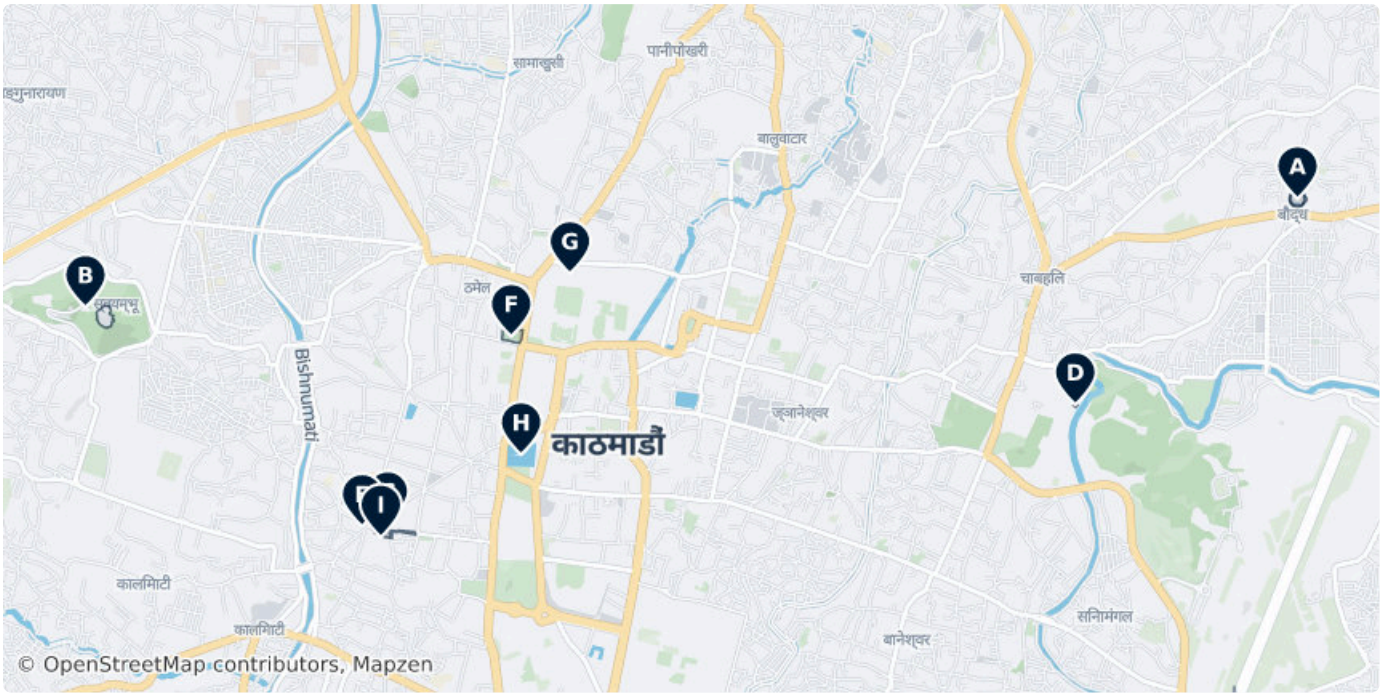
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LANGUAGES
Nepali

TAP WATER
Not safe to drink

Kathmandu Essentials

Kathmandu's historical center is defined by the UNESCO-listed Durbar Square, featuring the Hanuman Dhoka palace and the reconstructed Kasthamandap. The city's spiritual landscape includes the massive Boudha Stupa, a focal point for Tibetan Buddhism, and the hilltop Swayambhunath complex. Significant Hindu sites like the Pashupatinath Temple sit along the Bagmati River, while the neoclassical Garden of Dreams provides an Edwardian-style escape. These sites collectively showcase the intricate woodcarving and brickwork of traditional Newari architecture.





A Boudha Stupa

Boudha Stupa; or Jarung Kashor, also known as Khasti Chaitya or Khāsa Chaitya, is a stupa and major spiritual landmark seen as the...

(Unnamed Road), Nepal (27.72144, 85.36200)

boudhanathstupa.org, +977 01 4471908



B Swayambhunath

Swayambhu is an ancient religious complex atop a hill in the Kathmandu Valley, west of Kathmandu city.

Nepal (27.71565, 85.28916)



C Basantapur Durbar Square

Kathmandu Durbar Square in front of the old royal palace of the former Kathmandu Kingdom is one of three Durbar Squares in the Kathmandu...

Kathmandu, Nepal (27.70415, 85.30733)



D Pashupatinath Temple

Sacred Hindu temple complex on the Bagmati River dedicated to Lord Shiva. Features pagoda-style architecture with a gilded roof and silver-plated doors. It is a primary site for ritual cremations and the annual Maha Shivaratri festival.

Nepal (27.71048, 85.34865)

pashupati.gov.np/contact/



E Kasthamandap

Kasthamandap is a reconstructed three-storied public shelter which was built by Lila Vajra.

Kathmandu, Nepal (27.70400, 85.30579)



F Garden of Dreams

Neoclassical sunken garden built in 1920 featuring three pavilions, a library, and European-inspired architectural elements. The landscaped grounds include fountains, ponds, and marble inscriptions, offering a quiet retreat from the Thamel district.

Kathmandu, Nepal (27.71410, 85.31475)

Mo–Su 09:00–21:00

gardenofdreams.org.np, +97714525340

G Kathmandu Valley (UNESCO)

UNESCO World Heritage site encompassing seven monument zones, including royal palaces, Buddhist stupas, and Hindu temples. It preserves the cultural and architectural achievements of the Newar civilization dating from the 12th to 18th centuries.

Kathmandu, Nepal (27.71745, 85.31828)



H Rani Pokhari

Rani Pokhari meaning queen's pond, originally known as Nhu Pukhu meaning new pond, is a historic artificial pond located in the heart of...

(Unnamed Road), Kathmandu, Nepal (27.70782, 85.31535)

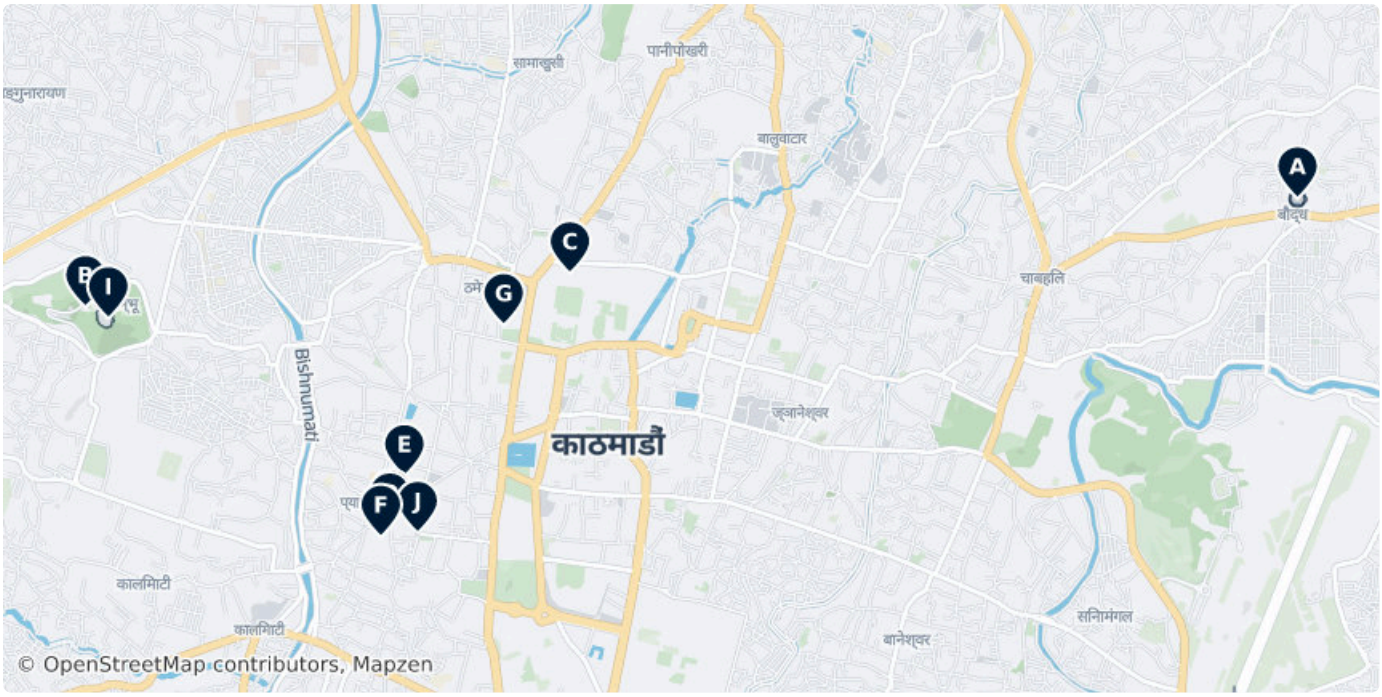
I Old Freak Street

Historically known as Jhochhen Tole, this street served as the epicenter of the 1960s and 70s hippie trail. Located south of Durbar Square, it is characterized by its budget guesthouses and legacy of counterculture history.

(27.70344, 85.30691)

UNESCO & Historic Landmarks

Kathmandu's historical landscape is defined by its seven UNESCO World Heritage monument zones. This collection features the massive Boudha and Swayambhu stupas, alongside the Hanuman Dhoka palace complex and its coronation courtyard, Nasal Chowk. The selection spans from the ancient Newari monastic architecture of Itum Bahal to the 20th-century Rana-style Keshar Mahal and the legendary hippie-era hub of Freak Street, illustrating the city's evolution from a medieval kingdom to a cultural crossroads.





A Boudha Stupa

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(Unnamed Road), Nepal (27.72144, 85.36200)

boudhanathstupa.org, +977 01 4471908



B Swayambhunath

Swayambhu is an ancient religious complex atop a hill in the Kathmandu Valley, west of Kathmandu city.

Nepal (27.71565, 85.28916)

C Kathmandu Valley (UNESCO)

This World Heritage site encompasses seven monument zones, including the Durbar Squares of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur, the Buddhist stupas of Swayambhunath and Boudhanath, and the Hindu temples of Pashupatinath and Changu Narayan.

Kathmandu, Nepal (27.71745, 85.31828)



D Hanuman Dhoka

A sprawling complex of royal palaces and courtyards that served as the residence of the Malla and Shah dynasties. It features the 17th-century statue of Hanuman and several tiered temples showcasing traditional Newari craftsmanship.

Basantapur Durbar Square, Kalimati, Kathmandu 44066, Nepal (27.70410, 85.30745)

E Itum Bahal

One of the oldest and largest Buddhist monasteries in the city, featuring a spacious courtyard and a 14th-century sanctuary adorned with intricate wood carvings and historical bronze plaques.

इतु बहा, Kalimati, Kathmandu 44600, Nepal (27.70666, 85.30833)

F Old Freak Street

Historically known as Jhochhen Tole, this street gained fame in the 1960s and 70s as the center of the hippie trail. It remains a historical link to Kathmandu's counterculture era.

(27.70344, 85.30691)

G Keshar Mahal

A grand Rana-era palace built in the early 20th century, housing the Kaiser Library. It is notable for its European-style architecture and a collection of over 28,000 rare books and manuscripts.

(27.71470, 85.31430)

H Nasal Chowk

The largest courtyard inside the Hanuman Dhoka palace, historically used for royal coronations. It contains the five-story Pancha Mukhi Hanuman Temple and exhibits traditional Malla-era architecture.

(27.70423, 85.30754)

I Shree Karma Raja Maha Vihar

A Tibetan Buddhist monastery located on the northern side of the Swayambhu hill, known for its large Buddha statue and its association with the Karma Kagyu lineage.

(27.71506, 85.29054)

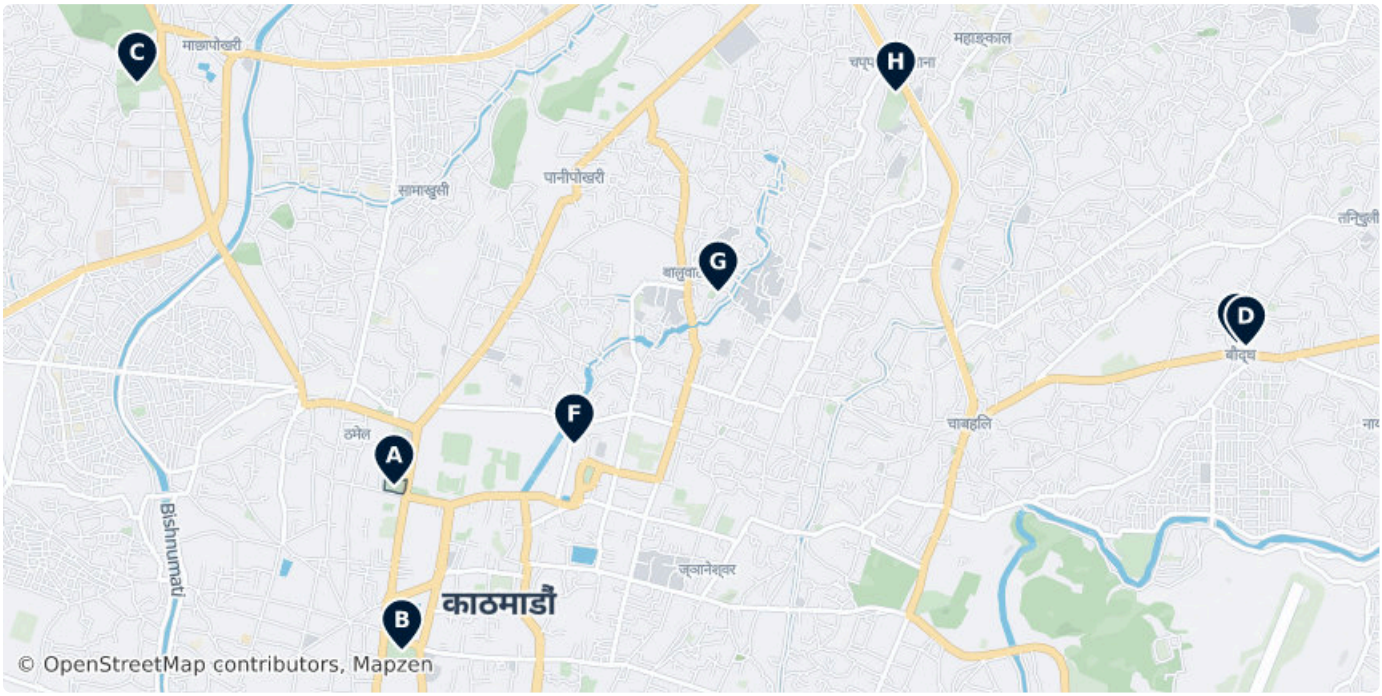
J Juddha Shamsher

A bronze statue and square dedicated to the former Prime Minister of Nepal, Juddha Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana, marking the entrance to the historic New Road district.

(27.70365, 85.30913)

Tranquil Parks & Local Art

Explore Kathmandu's quieter side through its diverse green spaces and traditional art institutions. This selection includes the neo-classical Garden of Dreams and the historic Balaju Park, known for its 22 stone water spouts. Complementing these natural retreats are specialized centers like the Tushita's and Tibet House Thangka schools, where visitors can observe the meticulous process of Tibetan Buddhist scroll painting. From the central lawns of Ratna Park to contemporary local galleries, these locations showcase Nepal's artistic heritage and urban landscaping.





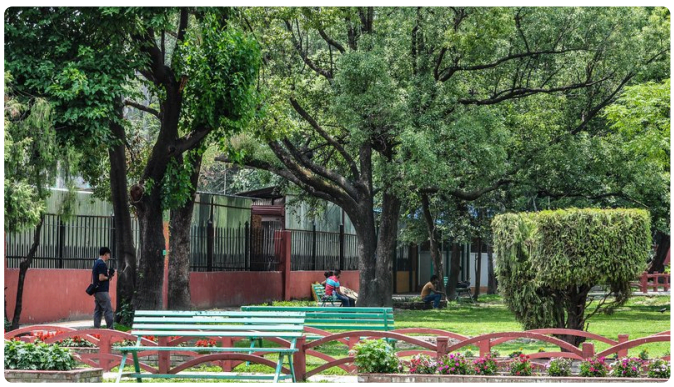
A Garden of Dreams

Neo-classical garden built in 1920, featuring three pavilions, an amphitheater, and sunken ponds. Designed by Kishore Narshingh for Field Marshal Kaiser Sumsher Rana, it reflects Edwardian architectural styles with marble inscriptions and fountains.

Kathmandu, Nepal (27.71410, 85.31475)

Mo–Su 09:00–21:00

gardenofdreams.org.np, +97714525340



B Ratna Park

Ratna Park is a park and surrounding district in central Kathmandu, Nepal. It is named after Queen Ratna, the wife of King Mahendra.

(Unnamed Road), Kathmandu, Nepal (27.70601, 85.31519)

C Balaju Park

Historic park featuring 22 carved stone water spouts known as Baise Dhara. The grounds contain a replica of the Budhanilkantha sleeping Vishnu statue, a swimming pool, and several small temples.

Nepal (27.73387, 85.30049)

D Tushita's Co-Operative Thangka School

Traditional art center near Boudhanath specializing in Tibetan Buddhist scroll paintings. It offers demonstrations of the intricate techniques, iconography, and natural pigments used in Thangka art.

(27.72093, 85.36202)

E Tibet House Thanka School

Educational center and studio dedicated to preserving traditional Tibetan painting techniques. Located near the Boudhanath Stupa, it showcases hand-painted scrolls depicting Buddhist deities and geometric mandalas.

(27.72106, 85.36152)

F Bhav Art Gallery

Local gallery focusing on contemporary Nepalese art, illustration, and design. It features a curated collection of stationery and works by local artists in a modern exhibition space.

(27.71613, 85.32475)

G Santu Art Gallery

Art studio and gallery showcasing traditional and contemporary Nepalese paintings.

(27.72360, 85.33272)

H Shankha Park

Public green space along the Ring Road, named for its central conch-shell sculpture. The park features paved walking paths and terraced lawns used for exercise and relaxation.

(27.73341, 85.34259)

DATA SOURCES

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