



With our bags packed, and our bodies prepared, we reach our first destination, Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. It's all the hectic mayhem that you would expect in a major Asian city. However, there is something about it. Whether it's the surrounding mountains of the Kathmandu valley that you can see in the distance, the occasional street cow or the number of beautiful stupas (temples), the city has a relaxed energy.



*Kathmandu: a sprawling city that excites the senses!*

## Arriving at Kathmandu-Tribhuvan Airport

On arrival at Kathmandu-Tribhuvan airport you're greeted with an initial rush to get your visa sorted (\$40 USD for 30 days), exchange money and then to collect your bags. As you walk out of the doors and enter Kathmandu, the only sound you can hear is "Taxi!". Make sure you pre-arrange a price to your destination whenever hiring a taxi in Nepal. You might get overcharged significantly if you don't do this as they're not metered. A taxi from Kathmandu-Tribhuvan airport to Thamel, the main tourist area, should cost around 500 – 600 Nepalese Rupees (4-5 USD)

## Thamel

Thamel is a hub filled with travellers, shopping, restaurants, bars and cafes, so there is nothing you can't find. If you need more gear for trekking, maybe a sleeping bag or down jacket, these can easily be hired or purchased at any of The North Face or trekking shops. The streets are small, very colourful and full of locals and foreigners. Not many of these



streets are straight, and they all look similar, so it's a wonderful place to get lost! The shopping is great and lots of fun, especially when you haggle with the charismatic shopkeepers for a bargain.



*This is a typical Kathmandu Street view. It can be a culture shock to some.*

## What to eat in Thamel

There is an abundance of food options available in Thamel, – from traditional Nepalese to Western, Middle-Eastern and bakeries. I can highly recommend OR2K on Mandala Street (the only street without cars) for every cuisine under the sun and a very relaxed atmosphere. The Himalayan Java and Blueberry Kitchen does a great breakfast, and the Western Tandoori and Naan House do ripping Indian-style curries.

Don't let the exterior of the Tandoori House put you off, it may look like quite the simple place but it is always full of travellers and the food is incredible. It's also insanely cheap (roughly 1USD for a vegetarian curry). I'd recommend trying the traditional Nepali dish Dal Baht which is available at every restaurant. Momo, which are steamed or fried Nepali dumplings are another must-try.





*Kathmandu offers a new discovery around every corner.*

## What to see and do in Kathmandu

Kathmandu has many sights that are a walk or a short taxi ride away from Thamel. The Garden of Dreams is a sanctuary away from the busy main street and a great place to sit and read on the lawns. There are two main Buddhist Stupas, Boudha Stupa (Boudhanath) and Swayambhunath (monkey temple), both are worth a visit.

You get a fantastic view of the Kathmandu Valley from Swayambhunath. And you can get up close and personal with the monkeys. Remember to walk clockwise around the stupas, especially if you turn the prayer wheels as this will give you good luck. Pashupatinath Temple is the main Hindu temple of Kathmandu located on the banks of the Bagmati River. It's a beautiful and very interesting place to wander – you may even catch a cremation ceremony on the riverbank.

For the uninitiated traveller, Kathmandu can rattle the senses. However, an open-minded approach will reveal a charming city with a crazily wonderful personality that deserves a few days for exploring. Stay tuned for the next stage of our trip which takes us on a flight to Lukla. Landing at one of the most dangerous airports in the world before setting off on foot towards Namche Bazaar.

***Have you immersed yourself in the sights, sounds and smells of Kathmandu? Tell us your story in the comments section below.***