

# First time in Kathmandu



World Heritage-listed Durbar Square

*Nepal's capital is a riot of sights, sounds and smells. This list will help you barrel through the traffic-jammed alleyways of the Old Town in a rickshaw, marvel at medieval temples and more.*

## 📍 SIGHTS

### Asan Tole (Between Durbar Square and Thamel)

From dawn to dusk the six-spoked junction of Asan Tole is jammed with vegetable and spice vendors selling everything from yak tails to dried fish. It's a fascinating place to linger. Cat Stevens allegedly wrote his hippie-era song *Kathmandu* in a smoky teahouse in Asan Tole.

### Durbar Square (Old Town)

Kathmandu's Durbar Square was where the city's kings were once crowned, and where they lived (durbar means 'palace'). As such, it remains the traditional heart of the Old Town and Kathmandu's most spectacular legacy of traditional architecture.

### Garden of Dreams ([gardenofdreams.org.np](http://gardenofdreams.org.np); Kaiser Mahal, Thamel)

The beautifully restored Swapna Bagaicha (Garden of Dreams) remains one of the most serene, beautiful enclaves in Kathmandu. It's two minutes' walk and a million miles from central Thamel, the business district.

### Hanuman Dhoka (Durbar Square, Old Town)

Kathmandu's royal palace, known as the Hanuman Dhoka, was originally founded during the Licchavi period (4th to 8th centuries AD), but the compound was expanded considerably by King Pratap Malla in the 17th century. Sadly, the sprawling palace was hit hard by the 2015 earthquake, and the damage was extensive.

### Indra Chowk (Old Town)

The busy street of Makhan Tole spills into this courtyard. Locals crowd around the square's newspaper sellers, scanning the day's news. Indra Chowk is traditionally a centre for the sale of blankets and cloth, and merchants cover the platforms of the Mahadev Temple to the north.

### Itum Bahal ([itumbaha.org](http://itumbaha.org); Old Town)

The long, rectangular courtyard of the Itum Bahal is the largest bahal (Buddhist monastery courtyard) in the Old Town and remains a haven of tranquillity among its chaotic surroundings. On its western side is Kichandra Bahal, one of the oldest bahals in the city, dating from 1381.

### ✂ EATING 1905 Suites

INTERNATIONAL £££  
([1905suits.com](http://1905suits.com); Naryan Chaur)  
This classy restaurant is set in the charming former residence of a court musician, where the lovely garden contrasts with a modern glass pavilion. Come for tapas, snacks, an all-day breakfast menu, salads and heavier mains for dinner. It's a wonderfully romantic place for drinks.

Baan Thai THAI £££  
(00 977 1 4231931; Durbar Marg)  
This unpretentious place looking over Durbar Marg is a good choice

for authentic Thai food. Starters include squid salad and som tam thai (young papaya and dried shrimp salad). The tom kha ghai (chicken coconut milk soup) is big enough for two.

### Bhojan Griha NEPALI £££ ([bhojagriha.com](http://bhojagriha.com); Dilli Bazaar)

The most ambitious of the city's traditional restaurants, Bhojan Griha is in a restored 150-year-old mansion in Dilli Bazaar, just east of the city centre. It's worth eating here to see the renovation of this beautiful old building, once home to the caste of royal priests. There's a cultural show at 7pm.

### 📍 DRINKING Himalayan Java ([himalayanjava.com](http://himalayanjava.com); Tridevi Marg)

This buzzing coffeehouse is the place to lose yourself with a book and a pulse-reviving americano. There are breakfasts, paninis, salads and cakes. This main Tridevi Marg outlet has a balcony and a big-screen TV for football matches. It feels like a hotel foyer, but the smaller Mandala Street branch in Thamel is quieter.

### Jatra (00 977 01 4211010; Chaksibari Marg)

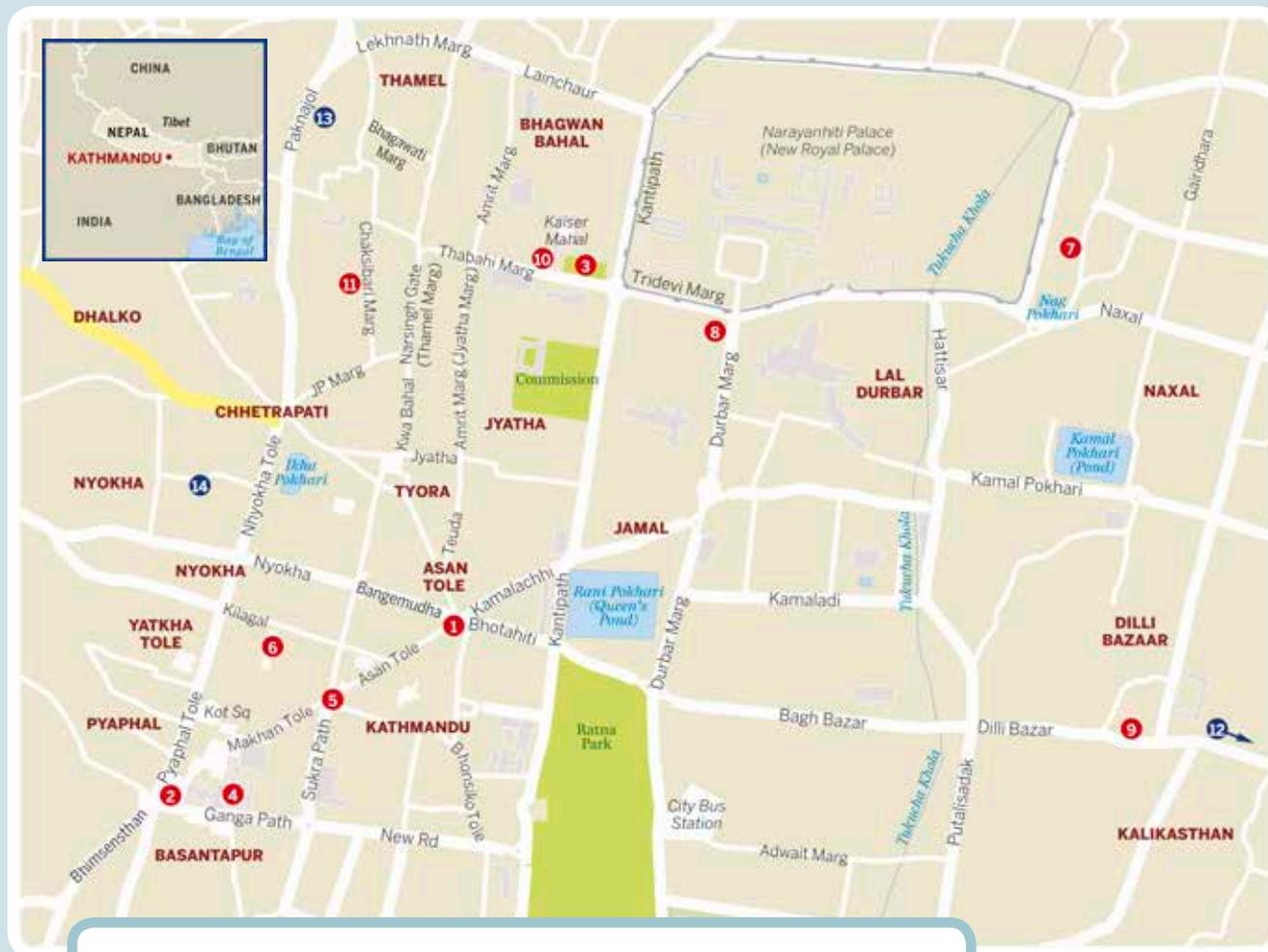
A quiet, intimate and pretty cool venue for a beer and local snacks or a full dinner, with spacious indoor and terrace seating, a global soundtrack and live music on Fridays.

## Good to know

**Gandharba Culture & Art** (00 977 1 4700292) represents the city's musician caste and members offer lessons in the sarangi (four-stringed instrument played with a bow), madal (drum) and bansari (flute). The office is located in central Thamel (on the third floor).



## FIRST TIME IN KATHMANDU



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## 🏨 Sleeping

### Hotel Florid

Best for a private garden ([hotelflorid.com.np](http://hotelflorid.com.np); Z Street, Thamel)

This is one of several small guesthouses just north of central Thamel, down Z St. There is a pleasant garden restaurant at the rear, giving a feeling of space that is often lacking in the area. The suite-like deluxe rooms overlooking the garden are sunny and spacious. Doubles overlooking the road are noisier but they do come with a shared balcony.

### £ Hotel Ganesh Himal

Best for a sociable atmosphere ([hotelganeshhimal.com](http://hotelganeshhimal.com); Chhetrapati)

Our pick for mid-range comfort on a budget is this well-run and super-friendly place. The rooms are among the best value in Kathmandu, with endless hot water and lots of balcony and relaxing garden seating. Throw in free airport pick-up, and this place is hard to beat. There's a lovely little garden that's a calming retreat from the city outside.

### ££ Dwarika's

Best for unique interior design ([dwarikas.com](http://dwarikas.com); Battisputali)

For stylish design and sheer romance, this outstanding hotel is unbeatable; if you're on your honeymoon, look no further. Over 40 years the owners have rescued thousands of woodcarvings from around the Kathmandu Valley and incorporated them into the hotel design. The end result is a beautiful hybrid – a cross between a museum and a boutique hotel, with a lush, pampering ambience.

£££



### FURTHER READING

Our *Nepal* guide (£17.99) has a chapter on Kathmandu. You can download the whole as an eBook (£12.59) or as separate PDF chapters (£2 each).