



Earthbound Expeditions

Kathmandu Valley Cultural Tour

5 days, from US\$447 per person

Duration

5 days

Start and end

Kathmandu

Accommodation

Hotels

Getting around

Private vehicle

Grade

Easy

On foot

3 to 4 hours a day

Meals

Breakfast daily

Max altitude

2,175 m

Best season

Oct to Apr

Group size

Private, from 1

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Kathmandu Valley Cultural Tour Overview

A guided tour of the three medieval cities of the Kathmandu Valley at a relaxed pace and in a planned order, with a guide who explains the carvings and a night on the valley rim at Nagarkot.

Tour overview

Four guided days in the Kathmandu Valley, which contains seven UNESCO monument zones within an area about twenty miles across. Three of them are the royal squares of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur. These were rival kingdoms until 1769 and spent three centuries competing to build the finest monuments. That rivalry explains much of what you see in the valley today.

The order of the visits

Many itineraries cover all three squares in two days, which makes them hard to tell apart. We visit Swayambhunath and Pashupatinath first, so that you understand the Hindu and Buddhist background. We then visit one square each day and finish with a night on the valley rim, where you can see the whole valley. By day 4 you will be able to understand the buildings, not only photograph them.

Your guide

The guide is central to this trip. A carved roof strut in Patan can look like simple joinery, but it may also record a three-hundred-year-old dispute about kingship, and a guide can explain this. We work with licensed cultural guides who have many years of experience in the valley, and we pay them fairly so that they stay with us.

Who this trip is for

Anyone who wants to see Nepal without trekking: first-time visitors, families, people with a few days at the start or end of a longer trip, and trekkers returning from the Everest region who want to see the cultural side of the country. It runs for one traveller or more.

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	–	–	1,400 m
2	Swayambhunath, Durbar Square, Pashupatinath	3 to 4	–	1,400 m
3	Patan, then Bhaktapur	4	–	1,400 m
4	Bhaktapur at dawn, then Nagarkot	3	–	2,175 m
5	Nagarkot to Changu Narayan, and out	2 to 3	8 km	1,540 m

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

We meet you at the airport and take you to your hotel. The afternoon is free for you to rest after your flight. In the evening we take you on a one-hour walk around Thamel so that you can find your way back to the hotel on your own, and we go through the plan for the tour over dinner.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, arrival day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Dinner

Day 2

Swayambhunath, Kathmandu Durbar Square and Pashupatinath

You climb the east stairway to Swayambhunath early in the morning, while pilgrims are walking around the stupa and mist still lies over the valley. In the late morning you visit Kathmandu Durbar Square, where the guide explains what the 2015 earthquake damaged and what has since been rebuilt. In the afternoon you visit Pashupatinath, where cremations take place in public on the ghats. We explain what to expect before you arrive.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: 3 to 4 hours on foot Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast

Day 3

Patan and its workshops, then drive to Bhaktapur

You spend the morning in Patan Durbar Square, the finest and least crowded of the three squares. You then walk through the back lanes, where lost-wax metal casters and woodcarvers still work in family courtyards. After lunch we drive east to Bhaktapur and check in to your accommodation inside the old city. The square outside empties of visitors at five in the evening.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: 4 hours on foot Night: Guesthouse inside the old city, Bhaktapur Meals: Breakfast

Day 4

Bhaktapur in the early morning and drive to Nagarkot

You set out at six, when the square is still empty. This is the main reason for staying overnight in Bhaktapur. You visit Taumadhi Square, the Nyatapola temple, the pottery square and the Golden Gate, then the vegetable market as it opens. After lunch we drive for an hour up to the Nagarkot ridge at 2,175 m, where you spend the evening watching the sunset over the mountains.

Altitude: 2,175 m On foot: 3 hours on foot Night: Hotel, Nagarkot Meals: Breakfast

Day 5

Nagarkot sunrise, walk to Changu Narayan and return to Kathmandu

You rise before six for the sunrise. On a clear winter morning the view extends from Ganesh Himal to the summit of Everest. After breakfast you walk down the ridge for two and a half hours to Changu Narayan, a fifth-century temple on a spur that most visitors do not reach. From there we drive you back to the airport or your hotel.

Altitude: 1,540 m On foot: 2 to 3 hours downhill Night: No overnight Meals: Breakfast

What's included

- Airport transfers and all transport in a private vehicle with a driver
- Four nights of accommodation: two in Kathmandu, one inside old Bhaktapur and one at Nagarkot
- A licensed cultural guide for the whole of days 2, 3, 4 and 5
- Breakfast every morning, and dinner on the first evening
- All monument entry fees for the seven sites, which total about \$55
- The walk from Nagarkot to Changu Narayan, with the guide, and a vehicle waiting at the end
- A map of the valley and a short written guide to the sites

Not included

- International flights and the Nepal visa
- Lunch and dinner from day 2 onwards, which are inexpensive in Kathmandu and allow you to choose your own restaurants

- Drinks, tips and personal expenses
- Travel insurance
- Optional extras: the Everest scenic flight, a cooking class, a rickshaw evening

Packing list

Headwear

- A sun hat. The valley is at 1,400 m and the sun is stronger than the temperature suggests
- Sunglasses
- A warm hat for the evening at Nagarkot from November to February

Clothing

- Clothes that cover your shoulders and knees, which are expected at every temple and appreciated elsewhere
- One warm layer for Nagarkot, which is seven degrees colder than Kathmandu
- A light waterproof jacket in any month, as the valley has afternoon storms outside winter
- Smarter clothes for the final dinner, if you wish

Footwear

- Shoes with good grip that you can take off quickly, as you remove them at every temple
- Clean socks for standing on temple floors
- Shoes that are already worn in, as four days on cobbles can cause blisters

Health

- A dust mask or buff for the Kathmandu traffic, which is the most common complaint from visitors
- Hand sanitiser, and your usual remedy for an upset stomach
- Sunscreen, factor 30 or above
- Your prescription medicines in their original packaging

Bags

- A daypack, which is the only bag you carry
- A refillable water bottle, to avoid buying plastic bottles
- Your camera, and a spare battery for the Nagarkot sunrise

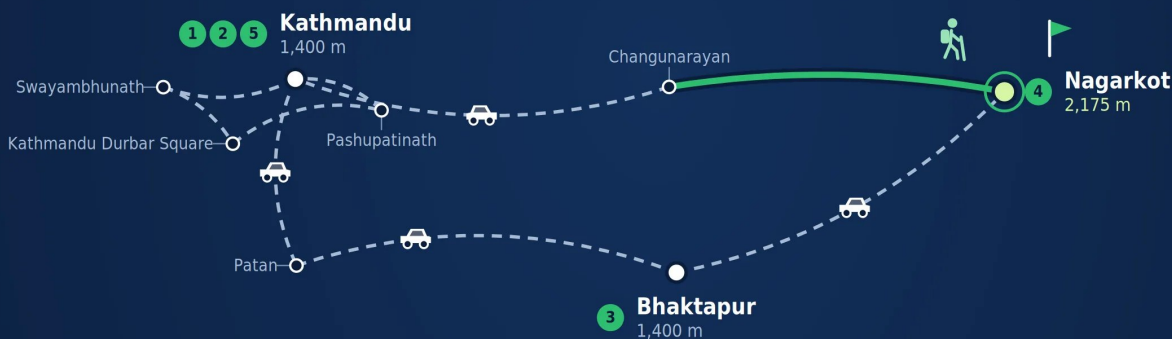
Documents

- Passport valid for at least six months, and two passport photographs for the visa
- US dollars in clean notes for the visa counter
- Travel insurance details, on paper as well as on your phone

Route map

Kathmandu Valley Cultural Tour

5 days | Highest point 2,175 m | Easy



- Main trekking route
- Drive
- Trek starts
- Overnight on day
- Highest points

Altitude by day



Optional extras

Everest scenic flight

\$220, 1 morning

A one-hour flight along the Himalaya with a guaranteed window seat, returning to Kathmandu before breakfast. It can be added to day 2 or day 5 without changing the rest of the itinerary. It operates only at first light, and if it is cancelled you receive a full refund.

Newari cooking class

\$45, half a day

Held in a family kitchen in Patan rather than a hotel demonstration room. You shop at the market first, cook six dishes and eat them with the family. We consider it the best value option on this list.

Boudhanath at dusk, with a monastery visit

\$55, one evening

You join the kora (circuit) around the stupa at lamp-lighting time, when several thousand people walk around it together, and attend evening prayers at one of the Tibetan monasteries nearby. Added to the evening of day 2.

Two extra days: Panauti and Namobuddha

\$240, 2 extra days

An extension east of the valley. It includes Panauti, a rarely visited Newari town, a hilltop stupa at Namobuddha with a very good monastery guesthouse, and a walk between the two. This is the extension we recommend most often.

Chisapani to Nagarkot ridge walk

\$349, adds 3 days

Our five-day ridge trek, combined with the end of this tour rather than booked separately. It includes Shivapuri forest, two nights in lodges and views of the Himalaya on your left throughout.

Airport day room on departure

\$35, same day

A hotel room kept until the evening if your flight home is late. Recommended after four days of sightseeing on foot.

Photos, videos and reviews of this trip: enepaltrekking.com/kathmandu-valley-tour