

**ALL-SEEING WISDOM**  
The Great Stupa of Bodnath, in Nepal's Kathmandu valley (by Jean-Marie Hulot)



Photos courtesy of CECILY MABASA. Additional photographs by WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, JEAN-MARIE HULLOT, LUCA GALUZZI, JULESAR, SUNDARI, MIKE FROM VANCOUVER, NASA, BERNARD GOLDBACH

THE BIRTHPLACE OF BUDDHA SERVES AS THE GATEWAY TO MANY ADVENTURES, BE IT THE USUAL TOURIST MUSTS OR THE OFF THE BEATEN TRACK ROUTES. For many, it stands as a treasure trove for culture and shopping. For me, Nepal is a beloved playground, a gateway to adventure. Here is a list of key places to get the complete Nepal experience.

**SHOPPING IN BHAKTAPUR**

Bhaktapur, known by locals as Bhadgaon (the town's old name) or Khwopa (City of Devotees), is set in the Kathmandu Valley, which also houses two more cities: Nepal's capital Kathmandu, and Patan. Famous for its opulent old-world architecture and top-rate craftsmanship, Bhaktapur is hardly an obscure destination. It's a living open-air museum filled with distinct Nepalese handicraft making it the best shopping haunt for unique gifts to bring home.

NEPALESE PARADIGM

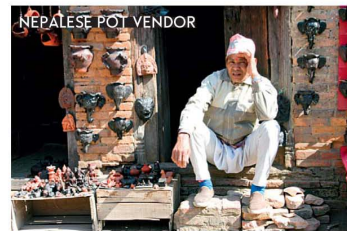
*Nepal, with its rich culture and breathtaking scenery, is a magical land everyone needs to visit*

BY CECILY MABASA

Bhaktapur's culture is on full display—artists create pottery, metalwork and jewelry on the streets, town squares are filled with merchants selling cloth, colorful handwoven scarves, exotic spices, and paper crafts. You won't need a tour guide to take you around shopping. Just make sure you bring enough cash and luggage space!

Not to be missed- Durbar Square: Bhaktapur's tourist gem,

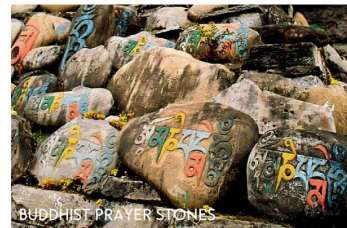
which was added to UNESCO's World Heritage Sites in the late 70s. It still has physical remnants of it being an old palace complex. Surrounded by beautiful Pagoda structures, Durbar Square boasts of Nepal's finest artisans. We had the rare chance to see them continuing the time-honored Nepalese cultural tradition of pottery. Potters' Square is just to the south of Durbar, where we also



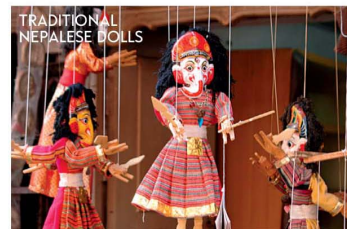
NEPALESE POT VENDOR



KATHESIMBHU STUPA, KATHMANDU



BUDDHIST PRAYER STONES



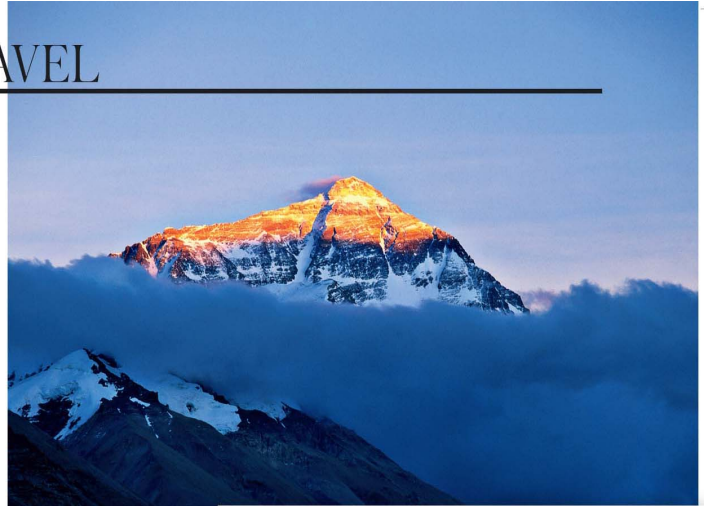
TRADITIONAL NEPALESE DOLLS

chanced upon a monk blessing prayer flags. We headed for the first stall selling such flags and had ours blessed.

## TREKKING THE EVEREST

Luxury trekking is the one item on the Nepal must-do list that is of utmost importance. The grandiose Mt. Everest (Sagarmatha to its inhabitants) has attracted the world's most skilled and daring trekkers. While Mt. Everest does not present grave technical challenges, it does pose certain dangers such as altitude sickness and extremely harsh weather conditions given it's the world's highest mountain. This is why luxury trekking solves the problem of wanting to climb the mountain without having to endure the usual hardships that go with it. Luxury lodges make this possible, but in Everest, luxury has a different meaning. Case in point: after a long steep climb towards Pangboche, we were greeted with a soft mattress inside a heated room, complete with a hot tub. Treks are made more special with generously portioned gourmet lunches, including the Nepalese specialty Dahl Baht—an aromatic meal of lentil soup with rice and potatoes. Things that you usually take for granted are considered lavish in a place like the Himalayas. Simple luxury, if you will.

MT. EVEREST DOES POSE CERTAIN DANGERS SUCH AS ALTITUDE SICKNESS AND EXTREMELY HARSH WEATHER CONDITIONS GIVEN IT'S THE WORLD'S HIGHEST MOUNTAIN



THE HILLS ARE ALIVE Everest, the world's tallest mountain, is even more grand and imposing in person (Mount Everest by Bernard Goldbach)



NATURAL WONDER The Himalayas from the International Space Station (by NASA)

## SIGHTS & HEIGHTS IN POKHARA

Take out the culture, food and people and you'll still be in awe of the breath-taking scenery of Nepal. Pokhara has one of the most spectacular sites: the snow-capped mountain ranges of Annapurna stretching from East to West and the most distinct peak of Macchapuchhare (known as Fishtail Mountain). Nobody has made it to the summit of the mountain, (also believed to be the dwelling place of the god Shiva). It is considered sacred among the natives, and has since been forbidden to climbers. But its striking profile, with a fishtail-shaped

peak, can still be enjoyed by everyone. A common ritual in Pokhara is to get up just before the sun rises. We woke up at the crack of dawn one day, rented a boat, and rowed alongside the Himalayan range. It was misty, peaceful, and quiet. Seeing the rays of the sun illuminating the outline of the mountains was just magical. Once we had experienced the serene side of Pokhara, we ventured into a pulse-racing, yet equally magnificent activity: paragliding. Soaring over rivers and greenland with a gorgeous view of the mountain ranges—truly exhilarating.



ANAPURNA RANGE



INTO THE WILD left Rowing alongside the Himalayan range; right Paragliding over the serene rivers and exhilarating greenland of Pokhara

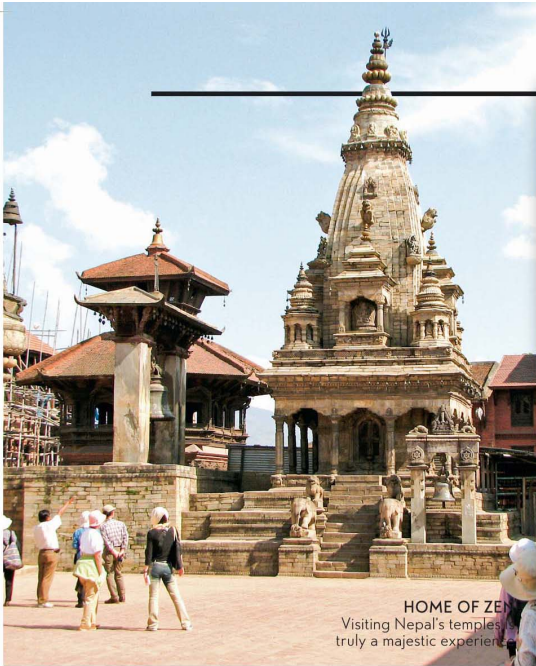


# TRAVEL

## GASTRONOMIC KATHMANDU

Nepal's capital has unique architectural heritage burgeoning with temples and palaces, and is a melting pot for artists, writers and trekkers. It is the entrance to Annapurna, Langtang, the Everest and the Himalayan mountain ranges. Kathmandu is rich with Nepalese characteristics but I was pleasantly surprised by the tremendous variety of restaurants found in the capital. Being used to serving tourists, choices include traditional Nepalese festival dishes and international cuisine such as Italian, Chinese, Mexican, and so on. The Newari has a very rich culinary history. Nepal being a Hindu Kingdom, beef is strictly prohibited among Hindus and Buddhists, making such cravings a bit difficult to satisfy. The best meal I had in Nepal was at Krishnarpan, located at Kathmandu's finest hotel and my personal favorite, Dwarika's Hotel. It is a slow dining experience reminiscent of the meals relished by the

Maharajas of Nepal. A typical dinner ranges from six to 22 courses, using only fresh organic vegetables straight from the Dwarika's own farm. The hotel is designed in the famed Nepalese aesthetic, with the perennial use of wood and terracotta. Intricate wood carvings of doors and windows perfectly complement the artifact collection housed in the hotel. Modeled on the ostentatious dwellings and lifestyles of Newari royalty, Dwarika's Hotel simply gives its guests an indulging Nepalese experience. Yet, there's also something special about experiencing the other side of the spectrum. After years of organizing all my luxury adventures to Nepal, Sudarshan, my Newari colleague, has made me a part of his family. No trip to Nepal is complete without us sharing a Dhal Bat meal in his lovely home. The hospitality of the Nepalese is also noteworthy—the luscious icing to an already sumptuous cake.



HOME OF ZEN  
Visiting Nepal's temples is truly a majestic experience.

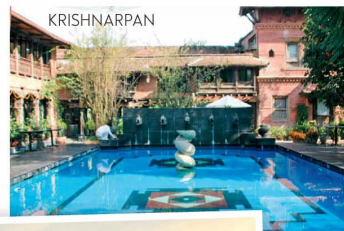


### SUNRISE AT NAGARKOT

The Himalayan Club at Nagarkot, set 2,175 meters above sea level in Kathmandu Valley, is the favorite weekend getaway among those seeking the ultimate mountain view. Nagarkot is one of the best spots to get an awesome sight of Mount Everest, the Indrawati River Valley and the rest of the Himalayan mountain range. I especially favor Nagarkot during springtime, when the different flowers bloom wildly against the pristine snowy mountain peaks. Short treks and picnic lunches are easily available with several walking trails and look-out points along Nagarkot, but the best thing to do at the Himalayan Club is to wake up at the twilight hours. The magnificent hues of violet, orange, yellow, magenta fill the sky so vividly as the sun comes up from the towering ranges – no one should miss this. It is the pure, organic beauty of nature unfolding before your very eyes.



DWARIKA'S HOTEL



KRISHNARPAN



TEMPLE OF SPLENDOR  
Dwarika's Hotel is full of archaic character

### GETTING THERE

The writer flew via Thai Airways to Kathmandu via Bangkok. The writer travelled with the luxury adventure group Sea to Summit Explorations <seatosummitadv.net>; (917) 8687971, (2) 815 8233) on its 14-day Luxury Everest Panorama Adventure.

### WHEN TO GO

Best times to visit are September to December and March. You can expect good views and it will be warm. In spring you have the bonus of the rhododendrons and azaleas being out. Winter can be cold, but views are clear and there are fewer people on the trails. ■



GORGEOUS NEPA  
Civilization in nep  
remains large  
serene and,untouche