

## NEPAL – At the “Roof of the World”



Nepal, or more precisely, the Kathmandu Valley, was the second stage of our September 2013 visit to the Himalayas. For trekkers there is a lot more to see, but for us old, sedentary tourists, the UNESCO World Heritage sites in and around the valley were attractions enough. We had booked a Mt Everest flight from the USA that proved to be a highlight in the middle of our week in Nepal. Unlike our previous stay in Bhutan, we were able to book one hotel for the week and make day trips by taxi or chartered vehicle. Our hotel, the Shanker, originally a palace in mid-city, proved to be a great choice, a literal and figurative oasis amidst the noise, traffic and dust that characterizes most reports about Kathmandu.



### Kathmandu Durbar Square Sights

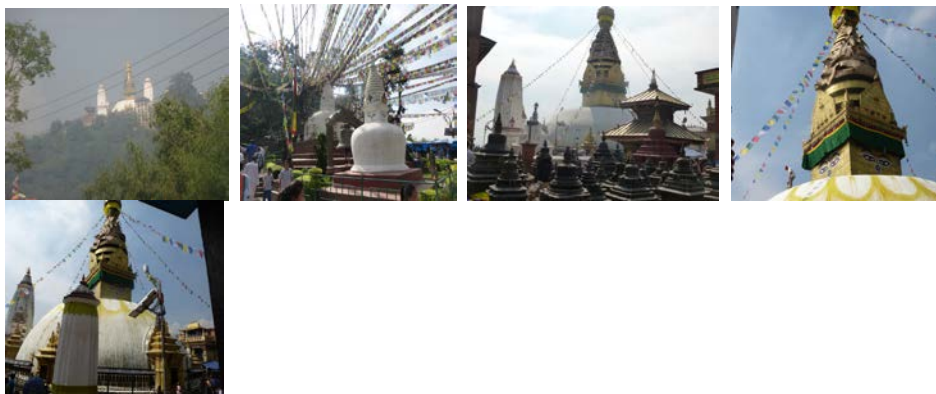
Our first excursion was to the Kathmandu Durbar Square, a term we were to learn refers to the complexes of ruling and religious authorities that were originally in the three rival city-states that now form Kathmandu. These Squares, along with selected temples, comprise the seven World Heritage sites of the Kathmandu Valley. As it turned out, our first visit in Kathmandu coincided with the beginning of a festival and we were encouraged to leave before we got trapped in the crowd. One of the surprises was the military presence, most of it ceremonial, including a contingent of the famous Gurkha warriors with their notorious knives. As hard as he tried, Tom was unsuccessful in working a hat swap.



Gurkhas and Gurkha “Wanna-bes”

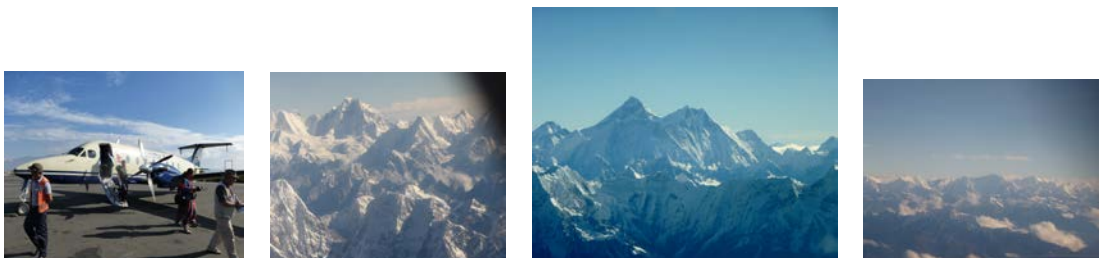
Durbar Square Idol

The Swayambhunath Temple is considered the definitive experience in Katmandu. It is approached up a 300-step pilgrim stairway or by a non-pilgrim approach from the tour bus parking lot. The hilltop temple complex is ablaze with stupas, prayer flags and shrines dedicated to all manner of Buddhist and Hindu deities.



Swayambhunath Temple Views

The temple is also known as the “Monkey Temple” due to the large number of macaque monkeys who clamber all over the statuary pilfering offerings left by pilgrims. From this impressive beginning, we were next scheduled for our flight to Mt. Everest. The day began with an overcast that soon burned off. Since Everest has been known to disappear in the clouds, we were grateful for the great weather for our flight.



Mountain aircraft

Himalayan view

Mt. Everest

Himalayan view

Our hotel looked friendlier with each passing day. Our excursions were always interesting, but that pool and a cold Everest Beer became a good way to end the day.



Hotel Shanker

Tough touring

Kathmandu sunset

They never miss!

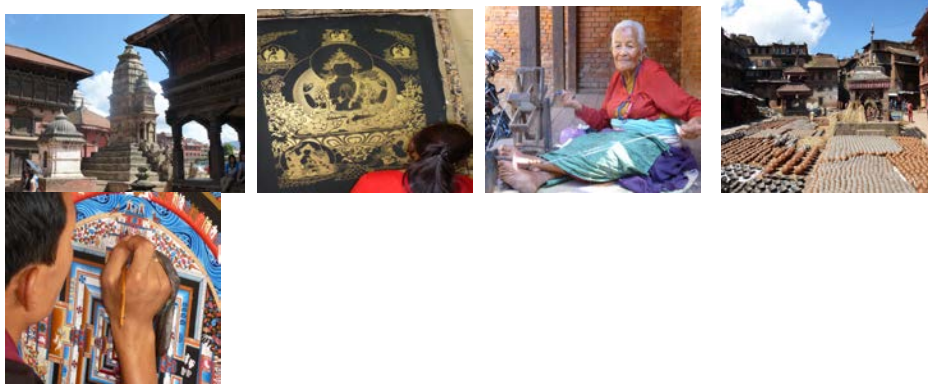
Our days would begin with a taxi ride or chartered vehicle from the hotel. Most attractions have local guides who will greet you when you get out of the car. We would then negotiate a price and use their services at that stop. They were particularly useful and informative at the larger sites, and definitely worth the price. One of those sites was Bhaktapur that we combined with a later visit to Changu Narayan.

Bhaktapur is on the outskirts of Kathmandu and was once a city-state with an impressive Durbar Square. A subtle point made by our guides that in Nepal Buddhists and Hindus get along in harmony, as witnessed by the integration of religious temples and other symbols. This was evident in both Bhaktapur and Patan as well as smaller temple sites.



Bhaktapur Durbar Square Scenes





### Arts and Crafts in Bhaktapur

Near Bhaktapur is the Changu Narayan Temple of Hindu origin and a World Heritage site noted for its carvings and ornate doors.



### Changu Narayan Temple

The Pashupatinath Temple presented an unusual aspect of Hindu teaching reminiscent of Varanasi in India. It is the holiest Hindu site in Nepal that serves as the cremation site for devotees. The temple stands on the holy Bagmati River which serves the same purpose as the Ganges. On the one side are the cremation ghats, tended by the family of the deceased, on the other side families periodically gather in memory of their loved ones.



Hindus Only

Bagmati River

Cremation Ghat

Gold Minor-Miner

Retirement Home

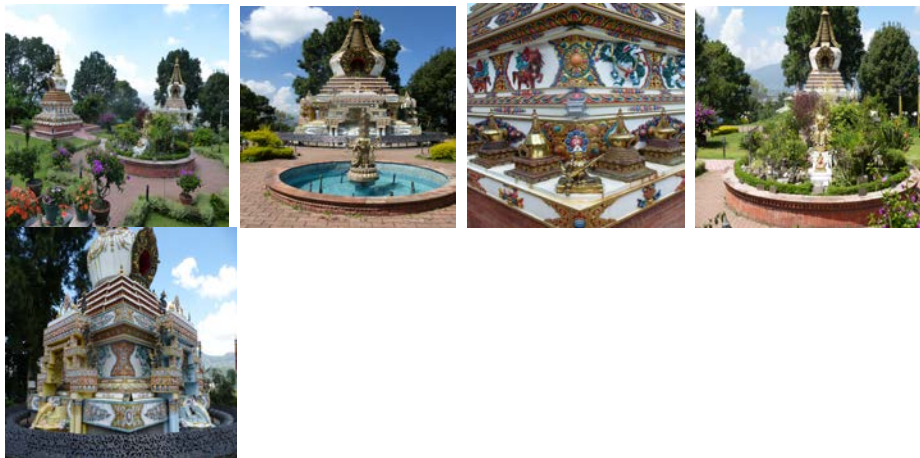
The Bodhanath Stupa is a remarkable sight, the largest stupa in Nepal. It is probably best known for its all-seeing blue eyes on its capstone tower. The stupa is ringed by small prayer wheels spun by pilgrims as they traverse the stupa in a clockwise direction. Small

chapels are interspersed around the perimeter along with religious vendors selling butter candle offerings. Similar to yak butter candles used in Tibet without the strong aroma.



Bodhanath Temple Scenes

Our last stop of that day, the Kopan Monastery was a gamble, since references had indicated visitors are not always welcome since this is an active monastery that also provides retreats for those seeking more foundation in their Buddhist education. We were pleased to gain access, and while there, talked to a Dutch couple who had made several visits and recommended it for healing therapy. Most striking, however, were the ornate stupas found in the garden.

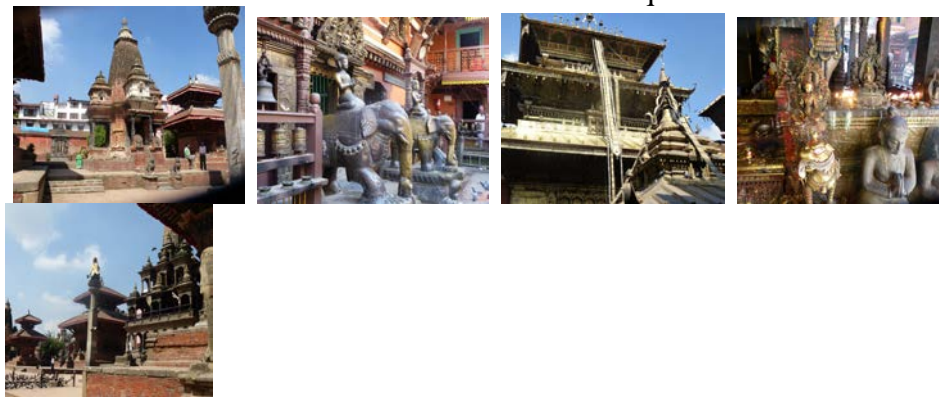


Kopan Monastery Garden of Meditation

Our last visit was to Patan, the third of the city-states who many think has the most attractive Durbar Square with its array of government and religious structures, again, a mix of Buddhist and Hindu temples.



Patan Durbar Square



Patan

Patan Golden Temple

Patan

We also made a few trips into Thamel that had put Nepal and Kathmandu on the map as a haven for hippies and other stray souls in the 1960's. It remains the district for shops, restaurants and people looking for adventure in exotic Kathmandu. Our experience was limited to looking for T-shirts and a few meals that turned out well. Some other sights and scenes follow.





Thamel



Sylvia with Everest



Gorkha Beer



Oasis View



Newfound friend in Bhaktapur



Pashupatinath  
Remembrances



Swayambunath  
Stupas



These long flights are Hell!