

The Kathmandu Valley: Three Cities in One

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Scott Coates

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Few cities on earth are as accessible, while totally unique, and a world unto their own like Kathmandu and its greater valley. Steeped in rich history, mixing Buddhism, Hinduism and other beliefs with traditional yet friendly culture, an incredible array of food, and stunning sites, all this is bundled into one supreme destination. And it's reachable from most Southeast and South Asian countries in just a few hours by plane. This area really is one valley with three distinct cities.

Modern Nepal was formed in 1768 by *Prithvi Narayan Shah* who united varied and unforgiving territory, and a wide range of peoples, under what is now more or less modern day Nepal. Prior to this the Kathmandu Valley had three city-states: *Kathmandu*, *Patan* and *Bhaktapur*. Each had their own sitting kings and elaborate *Durbars* (Royal palaces), which today are UNESCO World Heritage Sites and serve as the centerpieces to each city. Not only do these *Durbars* rank as must-see during a visit but the cities and their residents are very unique, holding stories and allure around every corner.

*Kathmandu* has always been the trading point between India and Tibet, with people converging to trade their goods and while doing so meet friends, have a drink, mix and mingle. As a result it's always been more open and tolerant, with a vibrant mix of people and food. Over the centuries many people have moved here and the old structure of societies have eroded. Its old buildings have and are being replaced with new ones, a sign that people don't traditionally value these items as much and are looking for progress. People from all over Nepal come to live in the modern day capital, with older settlers moving a bit further afield to municipalities like *Swayambunath*, famous for the 'Monkey Temple' as it's known to most visitors, and renting out their houses in Kathmandu proper.

*Patan* is the city of artisans, and as such is rich in heritage preservation, not only because foreign aid dollars have been thrown at it, locals also see the value in preserving old ways, designs, and keeping crafts alive. These items are not only beautiful but often useful in their culture, religion and of course for selling as a source of income too! The city holds a nice mix of old and new and they've not gone overboard with tearing down old structures in favor of new ones. A good balance has been struck, with many residents renovating and upgrading existing structures, showcasing their beauty for future generations. It's a closely-knit society here: Patan people live in Patan.

*Bhaktapur* has always had a slower heartbeat and is the city of farmers. Its residents have never had the same financial means as those in the other cities; it's not been as open to foreigners and has remained a rather closed society over the centuries. As they don't have much financial means, it's still much the way it was hundreds if not thousands of years ago.

Non-governmental-organizations have seized this city-stuck-in-time over the last couple decades and have been restoring its structures, helping to keep it much as it's always been. It remains very conservative and its UNESCO World Heritage Status means can't change its current make-up very much, ensuring it will likely remain a celebration of a time almost gone by.