

# Kathmandu to Pokhara



Most travellers rush the journey between Kathmandu and Pokhara, missing some of Nepal's hidden gems. The hills that flank the 206km Prithvi Hwy contain some of the most important religious sites in Nepal, but most visitors whistle through on tourist buses and see little of what the area has to offer. We strongly recommend taking at least two days for the journey between Kathmandu and Pokhara to see more of this interesting and unspoiled region.

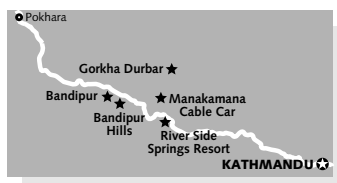
Heading west from Kathmandu, the first of several possible places to break the journey is the Manakamana Mandir near Mugling, one of the oldest temples in central Nepal and an important destination for Hindu pilgrimages. Further west, Gorkha is the former capital of the Shah dynasty, while the nearby hill town of Bandipur is a living museum of Newari architecture and culture.

As well as these historic points of interest, the highway is lined with modern townships that have sprung up around important road junctions and river crossings. Most are fairly unappealing but there's always the chance you could end up staying overnight while changing buses. Dotted between these settlements are numerous roadhouses where buses stop for snacks and toilet breaks. Where you end up will depend on the bus company but the food is normally hygienic and cheap.

Even if you don't stop between Kathmandu and Pokhara, the scenery along the road is dramatic. The highway follows a series of deep river valleys, passing ancient stone villages, cascading rice terraces, rocky gorges and roaring rapids crossed by precarious suspension bridges. On clear days, most of the way to Pokhara there are views of Machhapuchhare and the Annapurna massif.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Experience the exhilarating valley views from the **Manakamana Cable Car** (opposite)
- Hike to Gorkha's magnificent hilltop **Gorkha Durbar** (p239), a triumph of Newari architecture
- Enjoy a lunchtime swim at the luxurious **River Side Springs Resort** (p238) in Kurintar
- Step back in time at **Bandipur** (p242), a perfectly preserved Newari village on an ancient trade route
- Walk to untouched Magar villages and mountain shrines in the **Bandipur hills** (p244)



## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Most places along the Prithvi Hwy are currently under government control, but this could change at any time. Gorkha and Bandipur have been targeted by Maoists in the past and there are army checkpoints all along Prithvi Hwy. As elsewhere, you should check the security situation before you travel. Note that many towns impose curfews during flare-ups of violence.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Assuming things are peaceful, several dozen public and tourist buses run daily between Kathmandu and Pokhara, linking most of the important towns en route. There are several army checkpoints along the way and the journey takes at least seven hours. Foreigners are usually waved straight through, but locals must disembark and show their bags to the authorities.

Note that bus fares are often hiked up for foreigners. Buy at the ticket office to reduce the chances of getting stung. Another hassle for travellers is theft during meals stops – keep an eye on your gear, and don't leave valuables on the bus.

For details of the mountain bike ride between Kathmandu and Pokhara see p88.

## KATHMANDU TO MUGLING

People living in Kathmandu often complain about being trapped in the Kathmandu Valley. There are only really two roads out of Kathmandu, one leading northeast to Lhasa in Tibet and one running west along the gorge of the Trisuli River to Pokhara. Named in honour of Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Prithvi Hwy is the busiest road in Nepal and it passes through a string of small villages on its way to Mugling, the turn-off for Narayangarh and the Terai.

At **Naubise**, 29km from Kathmandu, the Tribhuvan Hwy branches south and makes a dramatic passage across the hills of the Mahabharat Range to the Terai (see p304 for details). It's a thrilling journey but it takes an age and most people skip it in favour of the faster route via Mugling and Narayangarh. For details of mountain biking along this route see p86.

From Naubise, the Prithvi Hwy follows the valley of the Mahesh Khola to meet the mighty Trisuli River, which twists and con torts along a narrow gorge. The next big

settlement is **Malekhu**, famous for its smoked river fish; if your bus stops here, hawkers will line up at the windows selling rolls of smoked fish from long wooden rakes.

About 3km before Malekhu, a side road leads north to **Dhading**, a tiny cluster of stone houses on a terraced ridge overlooking the Ganesh Himalaya. The **Shreeban Rock Climbing Nature Camp** (☎ 01-4258427; www.shreeban.com.np; in Kathmandu; B&B per person per day US\$25, rates for activities vary; ☹ closed winter) offers rock climbing, hang-gliding, mountain biking and trekking in the hills around Dhading – arrange visits in advance in Kathmandu. Accommodation is in an old village house, on a stepped ridge with vertigo-inducing views.

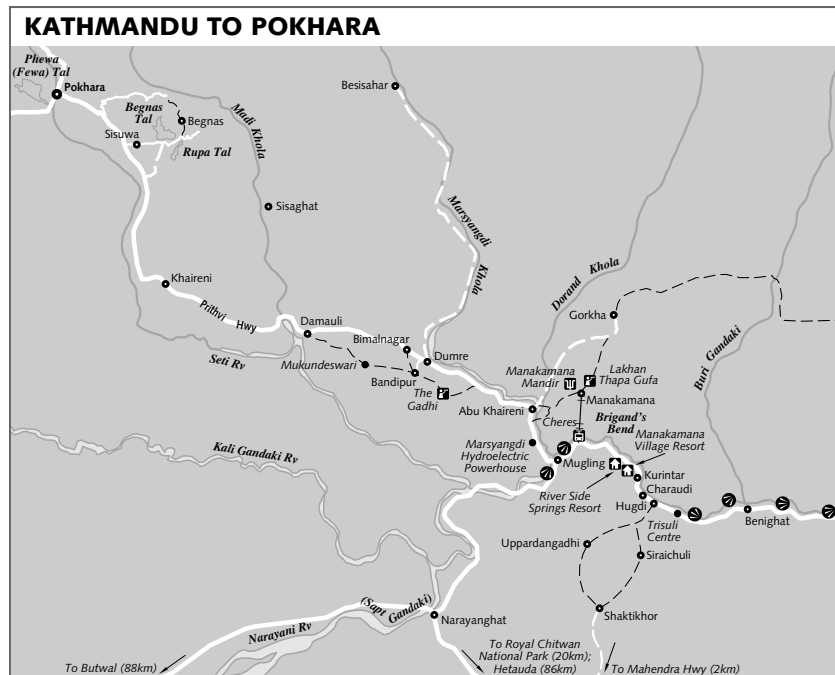
Back on the highway, the next village after Malekhu is **Benighat**, where the roaring Buri Gandaki River merges with the Trisuli. The increased bore of the river creates some impressive rapids and many white-water rafting companies put in at Charaudi, about 20km downriver. **Himalayan Encounters** (☎ 01-4700426; rafting&trekking@himenco.wlink.com.np; in Kathmandu) runs an attractive, low-key rafting centre, the Trisuli Center, in the small village of Bandare. See p95 for more on rafting on the Trisuli.

About halfway between Benighat and Mugling, the tiny village of **Hugdi** is a possible starting point for treks to the Chitwan Hills – see p288 for details. The Manakamana Cable Car, the longest in Asia, begins its dramatic journey up the hillside at **Cheres**, about 6km before Mugling.

## MANAKAMANA

From the tiny hamlet of Cheres, an Austrian-engineered cable car sweeps up an almost impossibly steep hillside to the ancient **Manakamana Mandir**, one of the most important temples in Nepal. Hindus believe that the goddess Bhagwati, an incarnation of Parvati, has the power to grant wishes, and newlyweds flock here to pray for male children. Pilgrims seal the deal by sacrificing a goat or pigeon in a gory pavilion behind the temple. There's even a dedicated carriage on the cable car for sacrificial goats (humans can book the return journey – goats get a one-way ticket).

Built in the tiered pagoda style of the Kathmandu Valley, the temple dates back to the 17th century and the atmosphere is electric, particularly on feast days, when



Manakamana almost vanishes under a sea of pilgrims, pigeons and sacrificial goats. For views of the Himalaya, continue uphill for about 3km past the small Shiva mandir to **Lakhan Thapa Gufa**, a sacred cave offering uninterrupted views of the mountains. Trekkers can continue west along the ridge, reaching Gorkha in about four hours.

Until 1998, the only way to get here was the arduous 18km trek from Abu Khaireni, 8km west of Mugling on the way to Pokhara. Visitor numbers have soared since the construction of the cable car, but foreigners are still a novelty and most things here exist for the benefit of pilgrims rather than tourists.

### Sleeping & Eating

There are dozens of simple pilgrim lodges in the village surrounding the temple. Probably the best is **Sunrise Home** (☎ 064-460055; d/t with bathroom Rs 300/400); rooms are spotless and spacious and the restaurant downstairs serves delicious veg and nonveg curries.

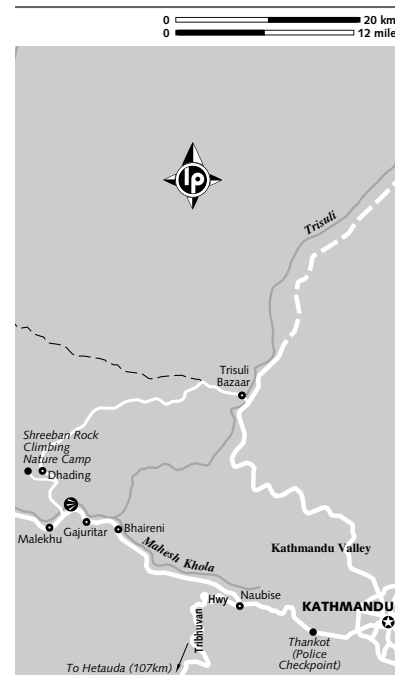
There are a couple of upmarket options down in the valley at **Kurintar**, about 3km east of the cable car station.

**River Side Springs Resort** (☎ 056-540129; nang int@ccsl.com.np; s/d from US\$50/60, discounts of 25%; ♿) This surprisingly sophisticated hotel and restaurant has a prime location on the banks of the Trisuli. Accommodation is in classy cabins and an airy central lodge and there's a glorious ring-shaped swimming pool with a semisubmerged bar (open to nonguests for a Rs 250 fee). Many of the up-market tourist buses stop here for lunch.

**Manakamana Village Resort** (☎ 056-540150; om@hons.com.np; r with bathroom Rs 900, r with air-con Rs 1200; ♿) Across the road, this simpler tin-roofed resort offers simple but clean rooms in cottages dotted around a small, flower-filled garden.

### Getting There & Away

The awesome **Manakamana Cable Car** (foreigner/Nepali US\$12/Rs 320, luggage Rs 8; ☎ 9am-noon & 1.30-5pm) rises nearly 1000m as it covers the 2.8km from the Prithvi Hwy to the Manakamana ridge. The views are breathtaking but Maoists have targeted the cable car in the past so check that everything is calm before you visit.



All buses that run between Kathmandu and Pokhara or Narayangarh pass the turn-off to the cable car (look for the red brick archway). If you want to walk to Manakamana, the trail starts at the village of Abu Khaireni, about 8km west of Mugling.

### MUGLING

Mugling marks the junction between the Prithvi Hwy and the main road to the plains. From here, it's 110km to Kathmandu, 96km to Pokhara, and 34km to Narayangarh. The town isn't particularly interesting or attractive, but many buses travelling between Kathmandu and Pokhara stop here for meals and you may end up staying if you change buses on your way to the Terai.

Mugling is also a possible start and end point for rafting trips, including the leisurely drift down the Narayani River to Royal Chitwan National Park. Most people arrange rafting trips in Kathmandu or Pokhara – see p89 for more information.

Many of Mugling's hotels are fronts for prostitution, but **Machhapuchhare Hotel &**

**Lodge** (☎ 540029; r with bathroom Rs 250) accommodates the occasional stranded backpacker. For food, there are dozens of 'hotel and lodging' places along the main road.

### ABU KHAIRENI

At this small junction town, a rutted road branches north to Gorkha; buses and minibuses around the junction offer transfers to Gorkha for Rs 40. Abu Khaireni is also the starting point for the four- to five-hour climb to the **Manakamana Mandir**.

To reach the temple, turn off the highway onto the road to Gorkha and turn right by the Manakamana Hotel; the trail crosses the river on a small suspension bridge and climbs steadily through terraced fields and small villages to reach the ridge.

### GORKHA

☎ 064

About 24km north of Abu Khaireni, Gorkha was the birthplace of Prithvi Narayan Shah, conqueror of the Kathmandu Valley and founder of modern Nepal. It's a major pilgrimage destination, particularly for Newars, who regard the Shah kings (including the current one) as living incarnations of Vishnu. The main attraction here is the Gorkha Durbar, the former palace of the Shahs, which lords over Gorkha from a precarious ridge above the town.

In the current political climate, being linked to the Shahs is a mixed blessing. The town is a major target for Maoist attacks and there are numerous military checkpoints along the road from Abu Khaireni. During times of political tension, Gorkha is often placed under curfew – check with your hotel before going out at night.

### Sights

#### GORKHA DURBAR

Regarded by many as the crowning glory of Newari architecture, **Gorkha Durbar** (admission free; ☎ 6am-6pm) is a fort, a palace and a temple all in one. This magnificent architectural confection is perched high above Gorkha on a knife-edge ridge, with superb views over the Trisuli Valley and the soaring peaks of the Annapurna and Ganesh Himalaya.

As the birthplace of Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Durbar has huge significance for Nepalis. The great Shah was born here in around 1723, when Gorkha was a minor

feudal kingdom, in thrall to the larger city-states in the Kathmandu Valley. Upon gaining the throne, Prithvi Narayan forced the Kathmandu Valley into submission, forging a kingdom that extended far into India and Tibet. In 1769 the capital was shifted from Gorkha to Kathmandu and Gorkha was relegated to the status of a national monument.

To reach the durbar, you must climb an exhausting stairway of 1500 stone steps, snaking up the hillside above the Gorkha bus stand. Most pilgrims enter through the **western gate**, emerging on an open terrace in front of the exquisite **Kalika Mandir**. Built in the reign of King Ram Shah (1606–36), but extensively remodelled over the years, the temple is a psychedelic fantasy of carved peacocks, demons and serpents. The wood-carving around the doors and windows is particularly striking – note the ornate peacock windows and the erotic scenes on the root struts.

Gory sacrifices of goats, chickens, doves and buffaloes are carried out in the courtyard in front of the temple to honour the

goddess Kali (the destructive incarnation of Parvati, the consort of Shiva). Only Brahmin priests and the king can enter the temple, but non-Hindus are permitted to observe sacrifices from the terrace.

The other major structure in the compound is **Dhuni Pati**, the former palace of Prithvi Narayan Shah. Like the temple, the palace is covered in elaborate wood-carvings, including a magnificent window in the shape of Garuda (the man-bird vehicle of Vishnu). Non-Hindus cannot enter but you can view the room where Prithvi Narayan Shah was born through an ornate star-shaped window.

Behind the palace is the mausoleum of **Guru Gorkhanath**, a reclusive saint who acted as a spiritual guide for the young Prithvi Narayan. This part of the compound is closed to non-Hindus, but you can descend some stone steps to peek into the **cave** where the saint once lived. If you leave via the northern gate, you'll come to a vividly painted carving of **Hanuman**, the monkey god, and a series of carved stone steles. A path leads east from here past a large

### BLOOD SACRIFICE

Although revered as the consort of Shiva, Kali is also an incarnation of the Tantric goddess Shakti, a pre-Hindu deity linked to the worship of female mystical power. The followers of Shakti were notoriously bloodthirsty and human sacrifices to Shakti continued long after Tantric worship was absorbed into mainstream Hinduism. These days, buffaloes, goats, chickens and doves are the preferred victims; hundreds meet their maker each *astami* (the eighth day of the waning moon in the lunar calendar) at the Kalika Mandir in Gorkha. It's a grimly fascinating spectacle but be warned – the air is heavy with tension and the paving stones are slick with sacrificial blood. During Dasain in October, more than 1000 goats and buffalo are slaughtered at the Kalika Mandir to honour the victory of Durga (another incarnation of Shakti) over the buffalo demon Mahisasura.

**chautara** (stone resting platform) to an exposed rocky bluff with awesome views of the mountains and a set of carved stone footprints, attributed variously to Sita, Rama, Gorkhanath and Guru Padmasambhava.

The durbar is an important religious site, and visitors must follow strict rules. Shoes should be removed and photography and leather (including belts) are banned inside the Gorkha Durbar complex. This is strictly enforced by soldiers so use the lockers at the shoe stand near the western gate (bring your own padlock) or leave your camera at the guard house.

To get to Gorkha Durbar, go north from the bus station and follow the main cobbled street through the bazaar. The steps to the durbar start just before the post office – if you reach the public **washing area**, you've gone too far. The final ascent to the durbar is steep and strenuous but there are several stalls selling bottled water. Look out for the huge tin steamers used to strip the feathers off sacrificial chickens to prepare them for the cookpot.

### OTHER MONUMENTS

There are more historic monuments in the old part of Gorkha. Immediately above the bus stand is the fortified **Ratna Mandir**,

the official Gorkha residence of King Gy-anendra. If you follow the road uphill, you'll reach a small compound with three small temples – the two-tiered temple is dedicated to **Vishnu**, the squat white temple with the Nandi statue is dedicated to **Mahadev** (Shiva) and the small white *shikhara* (temple tower) by the tank is sacred to **Ganesh**.

A little further along, the road opens onto a large square with a small wooden temple dedicated to **Bhimsen**, the Newari god of commerce. A monumental gateway leads off the square to **Tallo Durbar**, a huge Newari-style palace, built in 1835 for an errant Rana; it's currently occupied by soldiers but you can peek through the gate.

There are two ruined **forts** on the ridge above Gorkha Durbar, but both are occupied by the Nepali army.

### Sleeping & Eating

Gorkha has a decent range of places to stay. The best restaurants are at the hotels, but there are numerous cheap **bhojanalayas** (snack restaurants) near the bus stand.

**New Prince Guesthouse** (☎ 420030; d/q with bathroom Rs 150/250) Downhill from the bus stand above an arcade of shops, New Prince is basic but good for the price. Some rooms need a lick of paint so see a few before deciding.

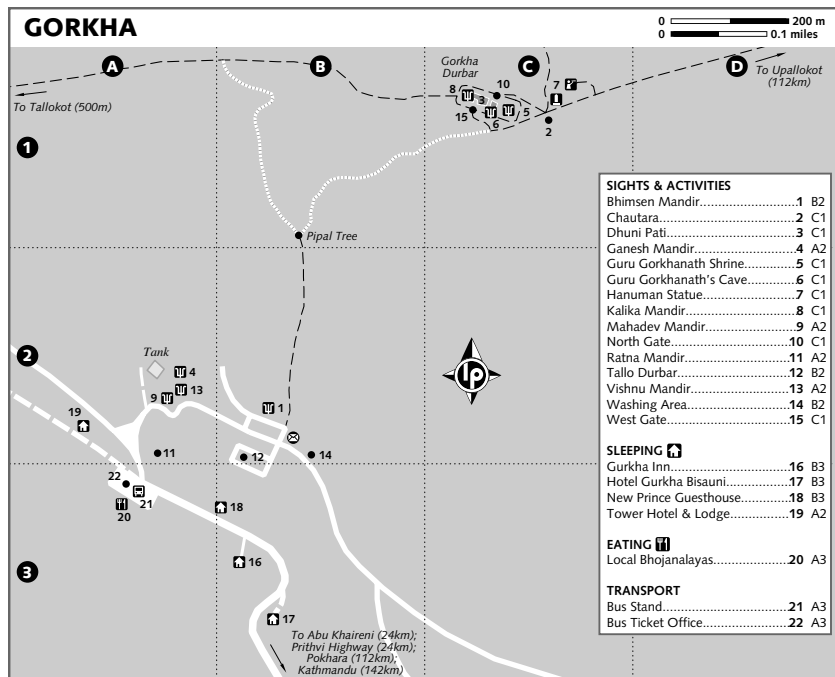
**Tower Hotel & Lodge** (☎ 420335; r without bathroom Rs 150) On the other side of the bus stand, this humble place is run by the friendly shopkeepers downstairs. It's handy for the buses and rooms are basic but clean.

**Gurkha Inn** (☎ 420206; s/d US\$25/35) Styled like a Spanish hacienda, and set in a lovely stepped garden facing the valley, this comfortable place has a cosy patio restaurant and bright, airy rooms.

**Hotel Gurkha Bisauni** (☎ 420107; ghbisauni@wlink.com.np; s/d without bathroom US\$12/18, s/d with bathroom US\$21/32, discounts of up to 60%) With the current discounts, the posh-looking Gorkha Bisauni is a bona fide bargain. It's set in landscaped grounds about 200m downhill from Gurkha Inn and rooms have carpets, TV and private or shared bathrooms with hot showers. The restaurant serves a reassuringly familiar, globe-trotting traveller menu.

### Getting There & Away

The bus stand is right in the middle of town and the ticket office is on the road to Tower Hotel & Lodge. There are three daily buses



to Pokhara (Rs 110, five hours) and 10 daily buses to Kathmandu (Rs 105 to 120, five hours), or you can ride a local bus or mini-bus to Abu Khaireni (Rs 40, 30 minutes) and change there. A single bus leaves Gorkha at 7am for Bhairawa (Rs 210, five hours) and several morning buses run to Narayangarh (Rs 90, three hours).

## DUMRE

About 17km west of Abu Khaireni, Dumre is a dusty (or muddy) roadside bazaar with little to recommend it. Plenty of travellers pass through town on the way to Bandipur or Besisahar (the starting point for the Annapurna Circuit Trek) but few people stop overnight. If you do find yourself stuck here, **Mustang Lodge** (☎ 065-580106; r without bathroom Rs 150) is friendlier than most and the owners speak English.

Any bus travelling between Kathmandu and Pokhara can drop you on the highway in Dumre. Local buses and jeeps run regularly to Besisahar; the official fare for the bumpy three-hour journey is Rs 65 but don't be surprised if the starting price is five or six times this. Jeeps to Bandipur (Rs 20 per person, one hour) loiter around on the highway about 200m west of the Besisahar junction. If you're in a hurry, you can charter the whole jeep for Rs 300.

## BANDIPUR

☎ 065

Bandipur (pronounced 'ban-DI-pur') is a national treasure. Draped like a silk scarf along a high ridge above Dumre, the town is a living museum of Newari culture. People here seem to live centuries apart from the rest of the country and more than 70% of the buildings are traditional Newari houses, with carved wooden windows and overhanging slate roofs. It's hard to believe that somewhere so delightful has managed to escape the ravages of tourist development.

The Bandipur Social Development Committee has shown remarkable maturity in opening Bandipur up to tourism. There are just a few places to stay and eat and money from tourism ventures is ploughed back into restoring temples and houses. Bandipur remains very much a living community – as you wander around the narrow streets, you'll see farmers tending market

gardens, women carrying baskets of freshly cut fodder, children stacking cobs of corn on wooden stakes, and goats, buffaloes and chickens wandering around as if they owned the place.

Bandipur was originally part of the Magar kingdom of Tanahun, ruled from nearby Palpa (Tansen), but Newari traders flooded in after the conquest of the valley by Prithvi Narayan Shah. The town became a major stop on the trade route between India and Tibet and traders invested their profits in temples, slab-paved roads and towering brick shop-houses. Then, 50 years ago, it all fell apart. The new Pokhara–Kathmandu highway passed far below town and traders picked up sticks and relocated to Narayangarh. Even today, many buildings are empty, though some have found a new life as restaurants and guesthouses.

As you may have gleaned from the communist graffiti, locals have some sympathy with the Maoist cause, but there have been no real problems here since the police post was abandoned in 2002. For more information on Bandipur, visit the website [www.bandipure.com](http://www.bandipure.com).

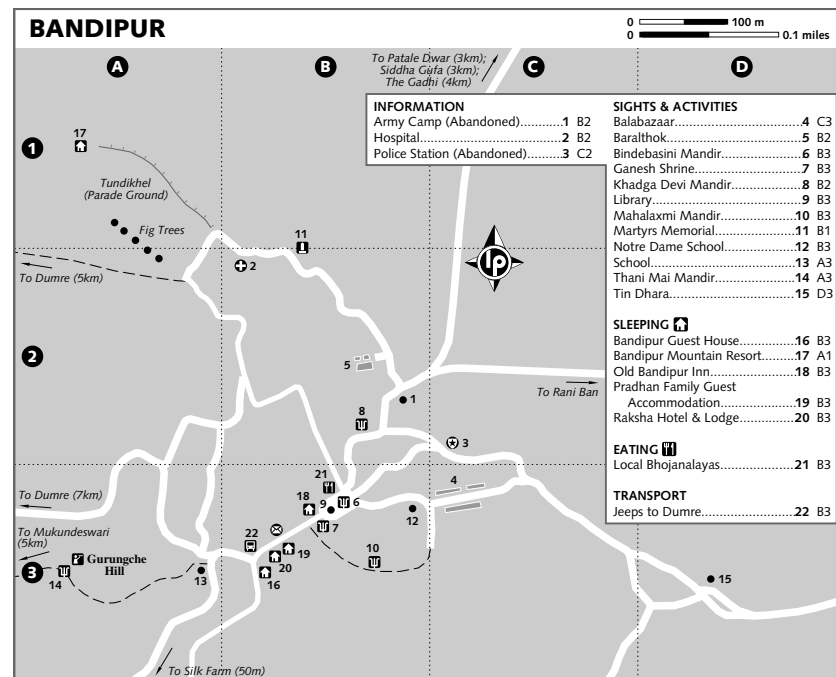
## Sights

With its medieval ambiance and glorious 18th-century architecture, all of Bandipur is a sight. You could spend days wandering around the town and surrounding Magar villages. The residents are singularly hospitable and for now at least, Bandipur has escaped the 'one bonbon, one pen, one rupee' phenomenon that plagues towns in more established tourist areas.

As well as the following sights and monuments, there are some interesting walks in the hills, including the trek to **Siddha Gufa**, the largest cave in Nepal – see the boxed text p244 for details.

## TUNDIKHEL

This ancient parade ground is perched on a flat-topped ridge near the village hospital. Back when Bandipur was a stop on the trade route between India and Tibet, this was the setting for trade fairs and archery contests. The views of the Himalaya from here are breathtaking – come here at dusk when the setting sun picks the peaks out in shades of pink and gold. At the start of the Tundikhel are five enormous fig trees. In



Nepali mythology, the different types of fig tree are symbols for different Hindu gods, and Vishnu, Brahma and Hanuman are all represented here.

If you follow the path north from the Tundikhel past the hospital, you'll reach the **Martyrs Memorial**, a stone pillar commemorating the local men who died fighting the Ranas in the political turmoil that followed Indian Independence. Further along the same track is the abandoned Magar settlement of **Baralthok**, with some stately brick shop-houses. The trail to Siddha Gufa turns off to the left near the abandoned army camp; if you take the right fork after 50m you'll come to **Rani Ban**, a peaceful area of public woodland.

## TEMPLES

The most interesting temple in town is the large, two-tiered **Bindebasini Mandir** at the northeast end of the main bazaar. Dedicated to Durga, the temple is covered in ancient carvings and an elderly priest opens the doors each evening so locals can pay homage to the idol inside. Facing the tem-

ple across the square is the town **library**, a striking 18th-century building with carved windows and beams. Nearby, a set of stone steps runs east to the small **Mahalaxmi Mandir**, another centuries-old Newari-style temple.

Behind the Bindebasini Mandir, a wide flight of stone steps leads up the hillside to the unusual **Khadga Devi Mandir**. The squat, barnlike building houses the sacred sword of Mukunda Sen, the 16th-century king of Palpa (Tansen). According to legend, the sword was a gift from Shiva, but the king gave away all his material possessions to become a wandering ascetic and his sword somehow ended up in Bandipur. With hindsight, it seems likely that the mendicant king swapped his sword for food while wandering in the hills, but the blade is still revered as a symbol of *shakti* (female mystical power). Once a year during Dasain, the sword is marched to the main bazaar and anointed with the blood of a sacrificial sheep.

## OTHER SIGHTS

If you take the path leading east from the Bindebasini Mandir, you'll pass the famous

### WALKS AROUND BANDIPUR

It's easy to pass several peaceful days exploring the hills around Bandipur. There are gobsmacking views of the Annapurna Himalaya from dozens of points along the ridge and the countryside is a gorgeous patchwork of terraced rice and mustard fields and small orchards. Most guesthouses can arrange walking guides for around Rs 300.

One of the easiest walks is the 30-minute ascent to the **Thani Mai temple**, just west of the village at the top of Gurungche Hill. The trail starts near the big pink school at the southwest end of the bazaar (near Bandipur Guest House). The temple is set in a peaceful copse of trees on top of the hill and there are epic views over the mountains and Bandipur village. Don't be surprised if local children make flying gestures as you pass – paragliders have launched from here in the past.

With more time on your hands, you can walk down to the famous **Siddha Gufa**, said to be the largest cave in Nepal. The entrance is narrow but it opens up into a vast vaulted chamber, full of stalactites, stalagmites and bats. The cave has never been fully explored but you can scramble some 200m with a decent torch or lantern. The 1½-hour trek to the cave starts near the abandoned army camp at the north end of the village, but it helps to have a local guide. Some people continue down the hillside to Bimalnagar on the Prithvi Hwy. You can combine a visit to Siddha Gufa with a trip to **Patale Dwar** (literally 'Gateway to the Underworld'), another cavern full of eye-catching geological formations.

An hour's hike northeast of Bandipur is the hill known as the **Gadhi**, topped by the ruins of an ancient *kot* (fort). The view from here takes in an incredible sweep of Himalayan peaks; you can trace the path of the Marsyangdi River north between the Annapurna and Manaslu massifs and most of the way to Manang. Another interesting walk is the two-hour trek to **Mukundeswari**, a Magar shrine atop the distinctive twin-peaked hill northwest of Bandipur. Locals believe that this was the forest retreat of Mukunda Sen and the hilltop is adorned with tridents, knives and swords left by devotees.

**Notre Dame School**, established by Catholic nuns from Japan in 1985. As well as providing an international education to children from rural families, the nuns set up numerous pioneering social projects in the area, which may explain the high levels of education and politeness in Bandipur! The school was closed after pressure from Maoists in 2001, but it reopened in 2003.

Just east of the school is **Balabazaar**, a striking arcade of old shop-houses formerly occupied by Newari cloth merchants. Turn right where the road forks and you'll reach the public washing area known as **Tin Dhara**, where clean, cool spring water emerges from beneath the Rani Ban forest. The name means 'three spouts', but in fact there are five spouts, carved in the shape of mythical beasts. There are several small temples dotted around the spring where you can sit and watch the comings and goings of village life.

Another interesting detour is the **Bandipur silk farm**, an easy 30-minute walk south of the village. The staff don't speak much English but they'll happily show you around.

### Sleeping & Eating

There are several simple food and lodging places along the main bazaar but many are actually hostels for the Notre Dame School.

**Bandipur Guest House** (☎ 520103; r without bathroom Rs 200) Housed in a majestic, crumbling shop-house at the start of the bazaar, this charming place offers simple wooden rooms with tiny balconies overlooking the village. The building is a real museum piece and good meals (of the *daal bhaat* variety) are available in the dining room. Similar rooms to the Bandipur Guest House are available for similar prices at Raksha Hotel & Lodge and Pradhan Family Guest Accommodation further along.

**Old Bandipur Inn** (☎ 520110; r per person per night with meals US\$20) Run by the highly professional team behind Himalayan Encounters (see p90), this beautifully restored Newari mansion is full of Buddhist art and the elegant wooden rooms look right out over the mountains. Rates include Nepali meals and guides for local walks and you can include Bandipur as part of longer rafting and trekking tours.

**Bandipur Mountain Resort** (☎ 520125, 01-220162; www.islandjungleresort.com/bandipur, in Kathmandu; r per person with meals US\$30; 🍴) This midrange resort offers spacious rooms, set amongst the pines at the west end of Tundikhel. It's a little faded, and the pool is frequently empty, but it's not bad for the price. Advance reservations are essential.

### Getting There & Away

The 7km link road to Bandipur branches off the Prithvi Hwy about 2km west of Dumre; jeeps to Bandipur hang around on the highway in Dumre and charge Rs 20 per person or Rs 300 for the whole jeep.

It's also possible to walk to Bandipur from Dumre along the old traders' path. The trail starts on the highway about 500m west of the last house in Dumre, and climbs steeply through small villages, terraced fields and patches of forest, emerging at the southwest end of the Tundikhel. Allow three hours on the way up or 1½ hours on the way down.

### DUMRE TO POKHARA

Heading west from Dumre, the highway follows the winding gorge of the Madi Khola to the district headquarters of **Damauli**, the largest town between Kathmandu and Pokhara with little to recommend it. Beyond Damauli, the Prithvi Hwy enters the broad floodplain of the Seti River, a surreal landscape of truncated gorges and hanging valleys. From here, the magnificent pyramid of Mt Machhapuchhare looms over the highway like a beacon – if you're travelling on the roof of a public bus, the sense that the mountain is calling you is quite profound.

The next town of any size is **Khaireni**, about 24km west of Damauli, but again, there are no real sights to speak of. This final stretch of road is hot and dusty and there are several army checkpoints that slow traffic to a crawl. Most people can't wait to get to Pokhara for a hot shower or a cold drink.

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