



THE SOUL OF KATHMANDU

*Where Gods and Festivals Come **Alive***



THE SOUL OF KATHMANDU
Where Gods and Festivals Come Alive

HANUMAN DHOKA DURBAR SQUARE

The palace we see today is the product of four centuries of royal ambition. But the story begins long before Hanuman Dhoka even had its name.

Every visitor knows Hanuman Dhoka as the palace of the Malla kings.

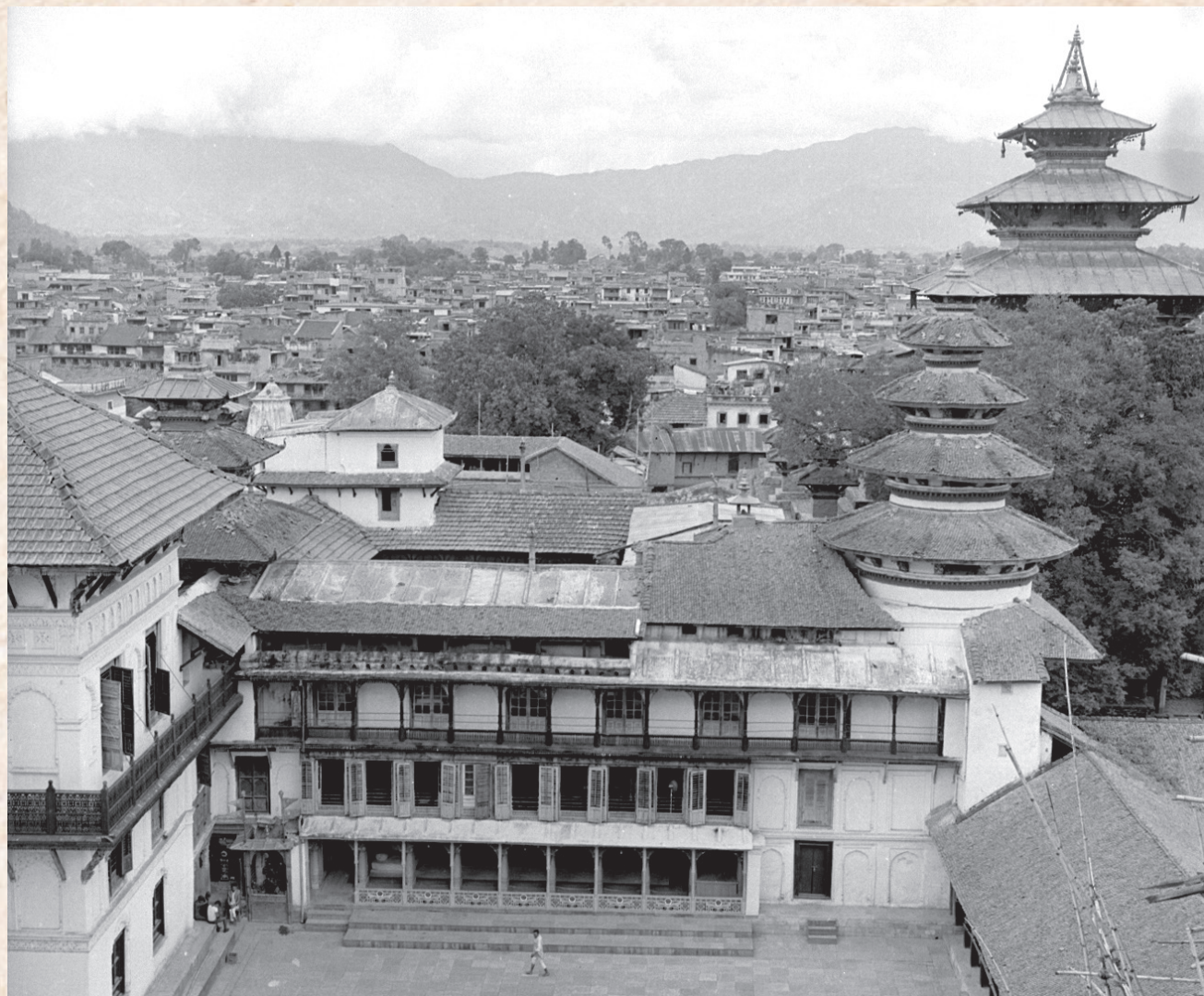
That is true—but only partly.

The buildings standing today were largely built between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, yet the ground beneath them has a much older story. Long before Pratap Malla's gilded temples, before the Taleju shrine dominated the skyline, and even before the name Hanuman Dhoka existed, this area formed part of the political heart of the Kathmandu Valley.

Unlike Pashupatinath, Changu Narayan, Budhanilkantha, or Gokarna, whose histories stretch deep into the Licchavi period, early Kathmandu was still evolving. The city existed, but not in the form we know today. Instead of one great capital, it consisted of several settlements that gradually expanded and merged. Over the centuries, those scattered communities became the royal city that eventually grew around the palace.

Hanuman Dhoka, in other words, was built over generations.

It grew—king by king, courtyard by courtyard, temple by temple—for almost four hundred years.



THE FIRST CITY

During the Licchavi period (c. 400–750 CE), Kathmandu looked very different from the one visitors explore today.

Ancient inscriptions describe the area as two neighbouring settlements: Dakshinakoligrama, covering much of the present palace precinct and southern city, and Koligrama, centred around today's Itumbahal and Seto Machhindranath neighbourhoods. These were thriving communities linked by trade, religion and administration, but they had not yet merged into the dense medieval capital that later generations would inherit.

At the time, Patan was already an important urban centre, while Bhaktapur had yet to emerge as the great royal city it would later become.

A PALACE THAT GREW WITH EVERY KING

Unlike many royal palaces elsewhere in Asia, Hanuman Dhoka was never designed by a single ruler. Each generation added something new.

Ratna Malla established Kathmandu as the seat of his kingdom after ending the rule of the Vaishya Thakuris. His successors expanded the palace gradually, but it was Mahendra Malla who transformed it into a monumental royal complex.

Within only a few years, Mahendra Malla commissioned some of the palace's most important monuments: Mahendreshwar Temple, the Jagannath Temple with its Chaturmurti Vishnu, and the magnificent Taleju Temple, completed in 1563 CE. These works established the architectural language that later Malla kings would continue to develop.

No king embraced that tradition more enthusiastically than Pratap Malla.

His reign filled Hanuman Dhoka with gilded roofs, carved windows, stone sculptures, courtyards, fountains and inscriptions. Much of what visitors admire today—the palace's artistic richness—is the result of his extraordinary building programme.

TIMELINE

400–750 CE

The Licchavi Period
Kathmandu develops around the settlements of Koligrama and Dakshinakoligrama.

Late 15th century

Ratna Malla establishes Kathmandu
The Malla court moves its royal residence here, beginning the palace's long expansion.

1562–1563 CE

Mahendra Malla transforms the palace
Mahendreshwar Temple, Jagannath Temple and the great Taleju Temple are constructed.

1641–1674 CE

Pratap Malla's Golden Age
Hanuman Dhoka receives its finest artistic works, courtyards, fountains and monuments.

1768 CE

Prithvi Narayan Shah captures Kathmandu
The palace becomes the seat of the Shah dynasty.

Late 18th century

Basantapur rises
The Shah kings expand the palace while preserving Newar architectural traditions.

THEN CAME THE SHAHS

When Prithvi Narayan Shah captured Kathmandu in 1768, he inherited far more than a palace.

He inherited the artistic heart of Nepal.

Rather than replacing the Malla buildings, the Shah kings expanded them. Prithvi Narayan Shah added the celebrated Vasantapur Palace, whose soaring towers announced the arrival of a new dynasty while deliberately preserving Newar craftsmanship

His policies encouraged local artisans, discouraged dependence on imported luxury goods and promoted indigenous architecture. The result was a remarkable continuity: although political power changed hands, the palace continued to grow in the same architectural tradition.

Today's Hanuman Dhoka is therefore neither entirely Malla nor entirely Shah. It is both.



GETTING THERE

10-minute walk from Thamel. Taxi from Thapadali takes about five minutes. No vehicles in the square itself.

Entry: NPR 1,000

Hours: 10am – 5pm (Tue–Sun)

Best time to visit: October to March





THREE KINGDOMS. ONE VALLEY

QUICK FACTS

Visit all three Durbar Squares over consecutive days—the similarities become much more obvious.

Look for the Mul Chowk in each palace; it's the architectural heart of every Malla kingdom.

Notice the narrow doorways and maze-like passages—they were designed for defense, not convenience.

Don't skip the monasteries. Buddhist bahals use many of the same architectural ideas as the royal palaces.

Best time: Early morning, when the courtyards are quiet and the woodcarvings catch the light.

For centuries, Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur competed, copied and fought one another. The result was not just political drama—it created one of the world's most extraordinary architectural landscapes.

Stand in any of the valley's three Durbar Squares and you'll notice something strange: the palaces look uncannily alike. Each has a Mul Chowk, a towering Taleju Temple, a treasury garden, gilded water spouts, carved wooden windows, bronze bells and courtyards linked together like a maze. Walk from Hanuman Dhoka to Patan and then to Bhaktapur, and it feels as though you're visiting three different versions of the same royal city.

That similarity wasn't an accident. For nearly four hundred years, the Malla kings ruled the Kathmandu Valley as three rival kingdoms, each dreaming of uniting the valley under its own crown. They traded with one another, borrowed each other's artists, married into each other's royal families, spied on one another and fought frequent wars. Whenever one king built something magnificent, the other two felt compelled to respond with something grander. A taller temple inspired another; a golden water spout demanded a richer one; a fortified courtyard became larger, stronger and more elaborate than the last. The Mallas weren't simply building beautiful palaces—they were building fortresses, royal residences, ceremonial stages and political statements all at once.

TIMELINE

1510 CE

Bhaktapur becomes a fortified city. An inscription records King Yakshamalla strengthening Bhaktapur with moats, walls and guarded gates.

17th c.

The great Malla building boom. Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur compete to build grander temples, courtyards and palaces.

1768–69

Prithvi Narayan Shah conquers the valley. After a long campaign, Gorkhali forces break through the fortified cities and unify Nepal.

Today

A shared architectural legacy. The three Durbar Squares remain the clearest expression of the Malla kingdoms' rivalry and creativity.



ARTWORKS & SPACES



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THE GREAT STONE TROUGH (JALADRONI)

A Fountain of Water, Wisdom, and Wit

Hidden beneath the eastern veranda of Jagannath Temple, the Great Stone Trough (Jaladroni) was once an essential public water source for the people of Kathmandu. Commissioned by King Pratap Malla in 1653 CE, it is renowned not only for supplying water but also for its remarkable multilingual inscription, carved in several scripts as a playful challenge to the scholars of the day.

QUICK FACTS

Commissioned: 1653 CE by King Pratap Malla.

Location: Beneath the eastern veranda of Jagannath Temple, Hanuman Dhoka.

Unique Feature: Inscription carved in Nepali, Tibetan, Persian, Roman, and other scripts.

Purpose: Public Jaladro ī (stone water trough) serving residents and travellers.

Don't Miss: The multilingual inscription—one of the most unusual and intellectually playful monuments in Kathmandu Durbar Square.

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"More than a water trough, it is a monument to King Pratap Malla's wit, scholarship, and love of learning."

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HANUMAN

The Guardian of Hanuman Dhoka Palace

Stationed beside the Golden Gate, the vermillion-covered statue of Hanuman has guarded the royal palace for more than three centuries. Installed by King Pratap Malla in 1671 CE, the statue gave Hanuman Dhoka its name and became the enduring symbol of royal protection. Covered in layers of sacred vermillion and oil applied by devotees over generations, Hanuman continues to watch over the palace as he has since the Malla era.

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For over 350 years, Hanuman has stood watch—protecting the palace, its people, and its history.

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QUICK FACTS

Installed: 1671 CE by King Pratap Malla.

Location: Beside the Golden Gate, the main entrance to Hanuman Dhoka.

Royal Symbol: The Malla kings revered Hanuman as their protector and proudly bore the title Hanuman-dhwaja ("Bearers of Hanuman's Banner").

Living Tradition: The statue is anointed with oil and vermillion each year during Bam Dwadashi, giving it its distinctive crimson appearance.

Did You Know? Similar Hanuman statues stand at the royal palaces of Patan and Bhaktapur, reflecting the devotion shared by the three Malla kingdoms.

AGAMCHHEN TEMPLE

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Some of Hanuman Dhoka's greatest treasures are not meant to be seen—but simply revered.

The Palace's Most Sacred Secret

Hidden within a corner tower of Mohan Chowk, Agamchhen Temple was the private sanctuary of the Malla kings. Dedicated to their secret Agam Devata (family deity), the temple was reserved exclusively for royal Tantric worship and has remained closed since the end of the Malla dynasty. Its sealed doors continue to preserve one of Hanuman Dhoka's greatest mysteries.

QUICK FACTS

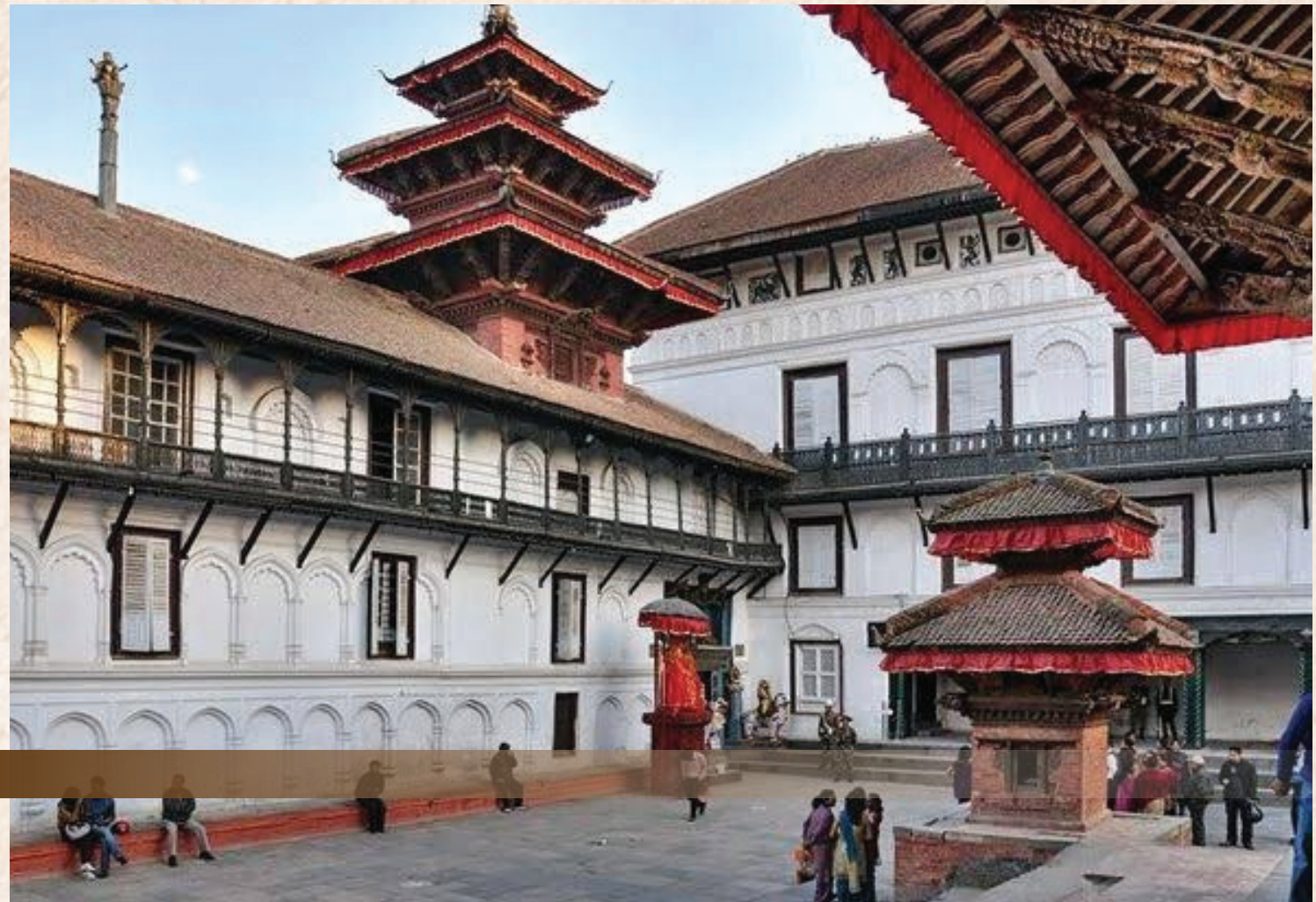
Location: Corner tower of Mohan Chowk.

Purpose: Private shrine for the Malla kings' Agam Devata (family deity).

Architecture: Elegant three-tiered temple reflecting traditional Nepali design.

Historic Feature: Bell donated by King Girvan Yuddha and Suvarna Prabha Devi in 1857 BS.

Access: Closed to the public, preserving centuries-old Tantric traditions.





THE GOLDEN GATE

The Grand Entrance to Hanuman Dhoka

The magnificent Golden Gate (Suvarnadwar) is the ceremonial entrance to Hanuman Dhoka Palace and one of the finest examples of Nepalese metal craftsmanship. Adorned with gilded copper, guardian lions, and beautifully carved wooden panels, the gate welcomes visitors into the historic royal palace. More than an architectural masterpiece, it symbolizes centuries of royal power, artistic excellence, and the enduring legacy of Kathmandu's kings.

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Every journey into Hanuman Dhoka begins beneath the Golden Gate—where history, art, and royalty meet.

QUICK FACTS

Built: 1810 CE, replacing the earlier Malla-period gateway.

Highlights: Exquisite gilded copper panels, guardian lions, and ornate wooden carvings. **Artwork Above:** Panels depicting Krishna, Vishvarupa, and a royal portrait believed to represent King Pratap Malla and his queen.

Historical Note: The gateway was funded using recycled copper from the royal archives, reflecting the changing priorities of the Shah era.

Don't Miss: Look above the entrance to admire the intricate wooden carvings that many visitors overlook.

NASAL CHOWK

The Courtyard Where Nepal's History Unfolded

As the largest courtyard within Hanuman Dhoka Palace, Nasal Chowk has long been the ceremonial heart of Nepal's royal history. During the Malla era, it hosted royal audiences, public ceremonies, and sacred dance performances dedicated to Natyeshwara, the deity of dance. After the unification of Nepal, the Shah kings transformed Nasal Chowk into the venue for royal coronations, making it one of the nation's most historically significant spaces.

QUICK FACTS

Location: Immediately inside the Golden Gate of Hanuman Dhoka Palace.

Significance: The palace's largest ceremonial courtyard.

Malla Era: Venue for royal audiences, public ceremonies, and sacred dance performances.

Shah Era: Traditional site of royal coronation ceremonies.

Dedicated To: Natyeshwara, the deity of dance who once presided over the courtyard.

From royal audiences to coronations, Nasal Chowk has witnessed the defining moments of Nepal's monarchy.



PANCHAMUKHI HANUMAN TEMPLE

A Rare Masterpiece of Sacred Architecture

Standing at the northeast corner of Nasal Chowk, the Panchamukhi Hanuman Temple is one of the most distinctive monuments in Hanuman Dhoka. Built by King Pratap Malla, this remarkable five-tiered, round temple is one of only two of round temples in the Kathmandu Valley. Dedicated to the powerful five-faced form of Lord Hanuman, it reflects the king's vision, devotion, and passion for architectural innovation.

Unique in form and rich in symbolism, the Panchamukhi Hanuman Temple is where faith meets architectural brilliance.

QUICK FACTS

Built By: King Pratap Malla.

Location: Northeast corner of Nasal Chowk.

Unique Feature: One of only two circular temples in the Kathmandu Valley.

Dedicated To: Panchamukhi Hanuman—the five-faced manifestation of Lord Hanuman.

Architecture: Five-tiered with round roof pagoda, symbolizing protection in all directions.

MOHAN CHOWK

The Palace's Private Royal Court

Hidden beyond Nasal Chowk, Mohan Chowk was the private residence of the Malla kings and the centre of royal diplomacy. Built by King Pratap Malla in 1648 CE, this elegant courtyard witnessed royal audiences, political negotiations, and historic meetings between the rulers of Kathmandu, Gorkha, and Bhaktapur. At its centre stands a magnificent gilded Sundhara (Golden Waterspout), one of the finest examples of Malla craftsmanship.

QUICK FACTS

Built: 1648 CE by King Pratap Malla.
Purpose: Private royal residence and diplomatic reception courtyard.

Highlights: Sundhara (Golden Waterspout) at Mohan Chowk, built by King Pratap Malla in 1649 CE for royal morning rituals.

Historical Significance: Hosted diplomatic meetings with the kings of Gorkha and Bhaktapur.

Don't Miss: The beautifully carved Makara waterspout featuring elephants, tortoises, tigers, and a playful calf emerging from its mouth.



Behind these quiet walls, kings negotiated alliances, welcomed rivals, and shaped the history of the Kathmandu Valley.



SUNDAR CHOWK

The Palace's Most Beautiful Courtyard

Tucked away beyond Mohan Chowk, Sundar Chowk is one of Hanuman Dhoka's finest architectural treasures. True to its name—Sundar means beautiful—the courtyard showcases exquisite Malla-period craftsmanship, from elegant lattice windows and intricate woodcarvings to the graceful golden Sundhara commissioned by King Pratap Malla. Standing before the spout is the exquisite stone sculpture of Kaliyadaman, depicting Lord Krishna subduing the serpent king Kaliya—a masterpiece so rare that experts consider it unmatched anywhere in the Indian subcontinent. Once the palace's most private royal courtyard, it remains a hidden masterpiece waiting to be discovered.

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Behind a narrow passage lies the palace's finest artistry—where every carving tells a royal story.

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QUICK FACTS

Meaning: Sundar means "Beautiful."

Location: Northwest of Mohan Chowk, accessed through a narrow passage.

Highlights: The Sundhara (Golden Waterspout) dedicated to Queen Rupamatidevi in 1650 CE.

Hidden Treasure: The magnificent Mahakala wooden panel at the entrance vestibule.

Royal Legacy: Home to a gilded Sundhara installed by King Pratap Malla in 1650 CE.

MUL CHOWK

The Sacred Heart of the Royal Palace

Hidden beyond Nasal Chowk lies Mul Chowk, the oldest and most sacred courtyard of Hanuman Dhoka Palace. Built during the reign of King Mahendra Malla in the early 17th century, it was the spiritual centre of the Malla kings, where coronations, royal weddings, and the most important state rituals took place. Dominated by the revered Taleju Temple, the courtyard remains a powerful symbol of Nepal's royal and religious heritage.

For centuries, Mul Chowk was where kings sought the blessings of the goddess before ruling the kingdom.

QUICK FACTS

Built: 1617-1639 CE by Raja Mahendra Malla

Purpose: Royal ceremonial courtyard

Highlights: Taleju Temple, royal coronations, Dashain rituals, exquisite Malla woodcarving and stone sculpture

Don't Miss: The sculptures of Ganga and Jamuna at the entrance to Taleju Temple and the historic pillars erected by King Pratap Malla.

Access: Open during guided tours and on selected public days.



Guarded by the sacred trident, Trishul Chowk has witnessed centuries of royal rituals and timeless traditions.



TRISHUL CHOWK

The Courtyard of the Sacred Trident

Located just north of Mul Chowk, Trishul Chowk is named after the towering stone trident (trishul) that symbolizes the divine power of Goddess Taleju, the royal deity of the Malla kings. This serene courtyard is also home to a historic fire hall and the impressive pillar statues of King Pratap Malla and his sons, reflecting the deep spiritual traditions and royal devotion that shaped Hanuman Dhoka.

QUICK FACTS

Named After: The monumental stone trident dedicated to Goddess Taleju.

Highlights: Historic pillar statues of King Pratap Malla and the royal family.

Hidden Gem: A 17th-century fire hall (Agnishala) built in 1660 CE by Lakshmi Narasimha Malla.

Living Heritage: Home to the rare Shwetakali Dance, performed during Dashain.

Access: Located north of Mul Chowk, with an additional entrance from Singha Dhoka.

TALEJU TEMPLE

The Sacred Shrine of the Royal Goddess

Rising above the palace complex, Taleju Temple is the spiritual heart of Hanuman Dhoka and the most revered shrine of the former Malla kings. Built in 1620 CE by King Mahendra Malla, the temple is dedicated to Goddess Taleju Bhawani, the royal guardian deity of the Kathmandu Valley. Closed to the public for most of the year, its doors open only during the annual Dashain festival, when thousands of devotees gather to seek the goddess's blessings.

For centuries, Taleju Bhawani has watched over Kathmandu from the highest point of the royal palace.

QUICK FACTS

Built: 1620 CE by King Mahendra Malla.

Dedicated To: Goddess Taleju Bhawani, the royal deity of the Malla kings.

Significance: The most sacred and tallest temple within Hanuman Dhoka Palace.

Access: Open to the public only once a year during Dashain.

Don't Miss: Its magnificent tiered architecture, intricate metalwork, and commanding views over Kathmandu Durbar Square.



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For most of the year it sleeps—during Dashain, it becomes the spiritual heart of the palace.

DASHAIN GHAR

The Home of Nepal's Greatest Festival

Tucked beside Mul Chowk, Dashain Ghar comes to life only during Dashain, Nepal's most important festival. For the rest of the year, it remains quiet, but during the festival it becomes the ceremonial heart of the royal palace, where sacred rituals are performed and the royal weapons are worshipped in accordance with centuries-old tradition.

QUICK FACTS

Location: East of Mul Chowk.

Purpose: Royal ceremonial house for Dashain rituals.

Festival Role: Sacred worship of royal weapons and traditional Dashain ceremonies.

Highlight: A large historic well at the centre of the courtyard.

Best Time to Visit: During Dashain (September–October), when the courtyard is transformed by rituals and celebrations.

NAG POKHARI

The Sacred Serpent Pool

Nestled beside Dashain Ghar, Nag Pokhari is one of Hanuman Dhoka's most symbolic water features. At its centre rises a striking golden serpent pillar (Nagastambha), representing the mythical naga revered in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. According to history, the serpent pillar was brought from Bhaktapur by King Pratap Malla, making it both a sacred monument and a lasting reminder of the rivalries among the Malla kingdoms.

More than a sacred pool, Nag Pokhari tells a story of faith, power, and royal ambition.

QUICK FACTS

Location: Beside Dashain Ghar within the Hanuman Dhoka Palace Complex.

Highlight: The iconic golden Nagastambha (serpent pillar) rising from the centre of the pond.

Historical Legacy: The serpent pillar was brought from Bhaktapur's Tawopokhari by King Pratap Malla in 1671 CE.

Symbolism: The naga represents protection, prosperity, and divine guardianship.

Don't Miss: The stone elephant sculptures and beautifully preserved Malla-era brickwork surrounding the pond.



BHANDARKHAL

The Royal Treasury Garden

Hidden behind the royal palace, Bhandarkhal was far more than a peaceful garden. It served as the kingdom's protected treasury, where royal wealth was safeguarded beneath the ground during times of conflict. The garden is also home to the magnificent Reclining Vishnu statue, one of the palace's finest yet least-visited masterpieces, admired by both Nepalese rulers and early foreign travellers.

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Beneath the serenity of Bhandarkhal once lay the hidden wealth of a kingdom.

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QUICK FACTS

Purpose: Royal treasury garden with underground vaults for safeguarding valuables.

Highlight: The magnificent Reclining Vishnu (Seshasayani Narayan) statue in the sacred pond.

Historical Record: Described by Capuchin missionary Father Giuseppe during his visit to Kathmandu in the 18th century.

Royal Legacy: Developed and enhanced during the reign of King Pratap Malla.

Don't Miss: Visit after the monsoon, when the pond is full and the Reclining Vishnu is at its most visible.

BASANTAPUR CHOWK

The Courtyard That Heralded a New Kingdom

Built after the unification of Kathmandu, Basantapur Chowk became the architectural statement of King Prithvi Narayan Shah and the newly established Shah dynasty. Distinguished by its four elegant towers and richly decorated palace buildings, the courtyard blends royal grandeur with traditional Nepali craftsmanship. More than a palace square, it symbolizes the beginning of a unified Nepal and the king's commitment to preserving indigenous art, architecture, and culture



Basantapur Chowk stands as a monument to a king who built not only a palace, but a nation.



QUICK FACTS

Built By: King Prithvi Narayan Shah after the unification of Nepal.

Famous For: Four iconic towers—Vilas Mandir, Basantapur Kailash, Bajradhara, and Lakshmi Vila Mandir.

Architectural Style: Traditional Nepali design celebrating local craftsmanship.

Historical Significance: A symbol of the Shah dynasty and Nepal's unification.

Best View: From Kathmandu Durbar Square, near Kumari Ghar, where all four towers can be admired together.



DAKH CHOWK

The Courtyard of the Sweet Grapes

Once adorned with flourishing grapevines and flowering gardens, Dakh Chowk takes its name from the dakha—the sweet grape once cultivated here. Although the original gardens have disappeared, the courtyard remains a fine example of Shah-period architecture, featuring elegant halls, richly carved wooden details, and historic portraits that reflect Nepal's royal legacy.

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From royal gardens to grand halls, Dakh Chowk reflects the changing face of Nepal's palace history.

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QUICK FACTS

Meaning: Named after the dakh (sweet grape) once grown in the courtyard.

Period: Present buildings date primarily to the Shah era.

Highlights: Historic portraits of King Prithvi Narayan Shah and prominent Rana-period figures.

Architecture: Elegant wooden carvings, spacious halls, and distinctive white-plastered façades.

Don't Miss: The beautifully preserved 19th-century wall paintings in the northern wing.

LAM CHOWK

The Palace's Longest Courtyard

Named after its distinctive shape, Lam Chowk—meaning "Long Courtyard" in Nepal Bhasa—is one of Hanuman Dhoka's quieter yet intriguing spaces. Hidden within its southern wing is the modest Vayudevata Temple, dedicated to the Hindu god of wind. Though it resembles an ordinary palace building from the outside, historical records confirm that worship has continued here since the reign of King Pratap Malla in the 17th century.

Sometimes the palace's greatest treasures are the ones hidden in plain sight.

QUICK FACTS

Meaning: Lam means "Long" in Nepal Bhasa.

Location: South of Dakh Chowk, accessible from Nasal Chowk.

Hidden Gem: Vayudevata Temple, dedicated to the god of wind.

Historical Record: Mentioned in a 1710 CE inscription during the reign of King Pratap Malla.

Don't Miss: Look for the golden finial (gajur)—the only clue that this unassuming structure is a temple.



KAH-HEHOL CHOWK

Where Dance, Devotion and Tradition Flourished

Named after the vibrant karabi flower, Kah-hehol Chowk was once the palace's celebrated cultural courtyard. At its centre stands the shrine of Natacheshwara, the deity of dance, where royal performances, sacred rituals, and traditional dance festivals enlivened the palace during the Malla era. Though once believed to have been a royal cremation ground, historical evidence instead highlights its enduring role as a stage for ritual performances and artistic expression.

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Long before it became a quiet courtyard, Kah-hehol echoed with the rhythms of sacred dance.

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QUICK FACTS

Meaning: Named after the karabi flower (kah-hehol in Newari).

Centrepiece: Natacheshwara Temple, dedicated to the deity of dance.

Heritage: A royal venue for Malla-era ritual dances and cultural performances.

Historic Records: Dance traditions documented in inscriptions from 1772, 1791, and 1801 CE.

Don't Miss: The beautifully carved two-tiered dance pavilion and the historic bell inscription at the temple.

NHULCHHEN CHOWK

Where a New Dynasty Entered the Palace

Meaning "New House" in Newari, Nhulchhen Chowk became a defining space in Nepal's history when King Prithvi Narayan Shah made his first ceremonial entry into Hanuman Dhoka after the unification of Kathmandu. Later transformed into the royal throne hall, the courtyard also housed the kingdom's historic cotton treasury, reflecting the Shah rulers' support for Nepal's textile tradition.



Through the gates of Nhulchhen Chowk, a new chapter in Nepal's history began.

QUICK FACTS

Meaning: Nhulchhen means "New House" in Newari.

Historical Moment: First ceremonial entry of King Prithvi Narayan Shah into Hanuman Dhoka after the conquest of Kathmandu.

Highlights: Royal Gaddi (Throne Hall), historic Kausi Tosakhana (Cotton Treasury), and exquisite Malla-era wall paintings.

Don't Miss: The five-faced painted hall and the beautifully preserved Matrika and Ganesh murals.

Present Day: The courtyard remains an important ceremonial space during the annual Kumari Jatra procession.





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FESTIVALS & CULTURE



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DUMAJU JATRA

Two palanquins, one ancient goddess, and a procession that has never once explained itself.

Dumaju Jatra is among the quietest and least-documented festivals connected to Hanuman Dhoka – which makes it one of the most fascinating. Two great khat palanquins move from Saval Bahaal through the city's oldest streets to Tundikhel and back, carrying the Dumaju deity – a form of Taleju – in a procession so old that even its own practitioners cannot say with certainty when it began. Malla-period copper documents confirm it was already established during Mahendramalla's reign. It asks nothing of the spectator except attention.

QUICK TIPS

Follow the procession from Saval Bahaal at dusk – the palanquins are most dramatic when lit by torchlight on the old streets. Don't expect crowds or commentary. This is a guthi custom – community-maintained, community-understood. Stand aside, be respectful, and watch.

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The oldest rituals in Kathmandu do not announce themselves. They simply continue.

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BHAGWATI JATRA OF NUWAKOT

A king climbed a mountain to pray to a goddess. She appeared in his dream with a sword. Nepal was never the same.

The Nuwakot Bhagwati Jatra is inseparable from the story of Prithvinarayan Shah – Nepal's unifier and one of the most devoted worshippers this goddess ever had. He camped outside her temple on a bamboo tray for days at a time. He dreamed of her as a seven-year-old girl handing him weapons to bless. After conquering Kathmandu, he brought her temple inside Hanumandhoka palace itself – and every year since, on Vaisakh Krishna Chaturthi, her golden image is carried in a khat jatra through the palace in his memory. The jatra is also a remarkable study in Nepal's religious synthesis – presided over by both a Dhami and a Brahmin priest, belonging to no single tradition.

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Three religions, one goddess, one festival. Nepal's tolerance is not a modern idea – it is ancient practice.

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QUICK TIPS

Meaning: Time your visit to Baishakh Krishna Chaturthi to watch the khat jatra depart from within the palace itself. One detail worth observing closely: the ritual is performed by both a Dhami (shamanic oracle-priest) and a Brahmin priest working side by side – a rare blending of Nepal's indigenous shamanic tradition with mainstream Hindu orthodoxy in a single ceremony.



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Every year the goddess is remembered. Almost no one remembers that the god came first.

KUMAR KHAT JATRA

The Palanquin of The Forgotten God.

Sithi Chaad falls on Vaishakh Shukla Shashthi, and the very next day – Saptami – Kumar Khat Jatra carries the palanquin of Kumar from his temple at Jaisidewal, still known as "Sithidyo ko Dewal," after Shashthi, the deity he was once worshipped alongside. Uniquely, a priest rides inside the khat with the god as it winds through Lagan, Bhimsensthan, and Asan before reaching Hanuman Dhoka, where Taleju's priest offers worship in the palace courtyard. Villagers from Balambu, tied to the ritual since Lichhavi times, still meet the procession along the way – evidence, historians say, that this jatra predates the Malla kings entirely. Centuries later, when Jayaprakash Malla created the famous Kumari chariot procession, he traced her route along the path Kumar had already walked.

QUICK TIPS

Watch from Hanuman Dhoka's courtyard – this is the only point where Taleju's priest formally receives Kumar. The procession is quiet and largely unadvertised, so don't expect crowds. Look for the priest riding inside the khat itself, a feature unique to this jatra. Time your visit for Vaishakh Shukla Saptami (April-May), the day after Sithi Chaad – check the Nepali calendar, as the date shifts yearly.





AI GENERATED

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GAIJATRA- FESTIVAL OF THE SACRED COW

A procession for the dead that somehow became the funniest day of the year.

Gaijatra begins as a solemn duty and ends as street theatre. Families who have lost a member during the past year send a representative – usually a teenage boy dressed as a cow – to walk the streets of Kathmandu. The cow, in Traditional belief, guides the deceased across the river Vaitarani into the afterlife. But what starts as a mourning procession transforms, as the day goes on, into seven days of satirical performance, political comedy, and costume pageantry that the Malla kings encouraged as a way for ordinary people to speak truth to power – walking their cow through the palace courtyard itself to deliver the message. The ancient and the irreverent have never been more perfectly combined.



In Kathmandu, you
grieve and you laugh
at the same time.
That is not
contradiction. That
is wisdom.



QUICK TIPS

The procession passes through Hanumandhoka's courtyard – position yourself near Sinhdhoka early. The first day is the most solemn, the subsequent days increasingly comedic and satirical. For the full experience, attend in the evenings when street performances and comedy acts fill the square. Shravan Shukla Pratipada is the start date – check the Nepali calendar before travelling.



THE SOUL OF KATHMANDU

Where Gods and Festivals Come Alive

CHANGU NARAYAN JATRA

Nepal's oldest temple sends its deity to the palace. Twice a year, every year, for longer than records exist.

Two kos north of Bhaktapur on the Doladri Doladri hill, Changu Narayan watches over the valley from Nepal's oldest temple site. Twice a year – on Shravan Shukla Dwadashi and Poushu Shukla Purnima – three silver kalash representing the deity travel down from the hill and arrive at Hanumandhoka palace with full royal honours. The procession follows ancient routes through Kamalaadi, Nagpokhari and Raanipokhari to reach the palace, where the royal sword is brought out to greet the arriving deity. The kavachmurthi – gilded metal casing – inside the Changu temple is Nepal's oldest surviving metal artwork, dating to the reign of King Anshuvarma in the 7th century. This jatra connects that antiquity directly to the palace at Kathmandu's heart.

QUICK TIPS

For the Shravan jatra, line the route from Kamalaadi to Hanumandhoka. The royal sword ceremony at Singhdhoka is particularly atmospheric. For the Changu temple itself, visit at dawn when the hill is mist-covered and the courtyard empty – the kavachmurthi is best seen in morning light. The temple complex is a UNESCO World Heritage Site with extraordinary Lichhavi-era stone carvings that deserve several hours.



The oldest thing in the valley comes down from the hill twice a year. The city goes out to meet it.





INDRADHWAJ UTSAV

A pole. A god. An eight-day festival that predates the city's own written history.

The Indradhwaj Utsav – the raising of Indra's great flag pole – is one of the oldest continuous ritual traditions in South Asia. Ancient texts including the Mahabharat and Brihatsamhita describe the Indradhwaj ceremony as already established across the Indian subcontinent. When Islam's spread disrupted Hindu ritual culture across India, Nepal's isolation preserved what the rest of the region lost. The lingo – the great pole – is raised at Hanumandhoka's courtyard near Kakeshvar temple on Bhadra Shukla Dwadashi with ceremony involving all government officials, priests and guthiyars. It marks the formal opening of Indra Jatra – eight days during which Kathmandu becomes the most theatrically and spiritually charged city in the Himalayan world.

QUICK TIPS

Be at Hanumandhoka on Bhadra Shukla Dwadashi morning for the pole-raising. The ceremony involves the full participation of priests, guthiyars and officials – arrive before dawn for position. The pole itself – a single straight tree selected over the year from the forests of the Bhadadang area – is remarkable to see up close before it is raised. All subsequent festival events radiate outward from this moment.



**The pole goes up
and eight days of
everything begins.
Some traditions
don't need
explanation. They
need presence.**





THE SOUL OF KATHMANDU

Where Gods and Festivals Come Alive

INDRA JATRA AND KUMARI JATRA

Seven Nights - Eight Days of dancing gods, a chained deity, a living goddess on a chariot, and the entire city awake until morning.

Indra Jatra is Kathmandu's greatest festival – and the most overwhelming thing a visitor to the city can experience. The god Indra, caught stealing flowers for his mother, is displayed in chains at the palace gate. The living goddess Kumari processes through the streets on her chariot. The ten incarnations of Vishnu are displayed in the temple square each night. The demon Bhairav's great face is opened to release a stream of rice wine that devotees queue for hours to catch in their mouths. The Malla kings received the Kumari's blessing on the chariot step – a moment so politically significant that when Prithvinarayan Shah conquered Kathmandu during the same festival, he went to the chariot and continued the ceremony rather than stopping it. The festival runs for eight days and encompasses dance, drama, mock battle, living deity processions and all-night vigils in the palace courtyard.

Indra Jatra is not something you watch. It is something that happens around you, through you, whether you intend it or not.

QUICK TIPS

August or September – check the Nepali lunar calendar for the precise date. Book accommodation months in advance. Basantapur Square is the epicentre – arrive by late afternoon for a position before the chariot procession. For the Akash Bhairav rice wine ceremony at Indrachowk, arrive very early and stand your ground. For Vishnu's ten incarnations display, the nights of Ashtami and Navami are the most atmospheric. Wear comfortable shoes – you will be on your feet for many hours.





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PACHALI BHAIRAV JATRA

The ancient god of Kathmandu's southern quarter. Five days, a metal chariot, and a tradition older than the Malla dynasty.

Pachali Bhairav – whose full name is Swachhanda Bhairav – is the presiding deity of Dakshinakoligrama, the ancient southern quarter of Kathmandu that predates the city as we know it. His jatra is five days long and covers the entire southern district, moving through Brahmatol, Lagantol, Jaisideval, Chikmugal and Marutol before arriving at Hanumandhoka's golden gate for the formal royal audience. The metal ghyampo – the deity's chariot figure – was first made in the 17th century by King Shiva Singh and has been renovated and maintained ever since. A Sanskrit text from 1252 CE – the earliest written record of the festival – confirms its deep antiquity. The Vaishya Thakuri families, whose ancestors preceded even the Malla kings in Kathmandu, are its traditional custodians and still play a central role today.

Some festivals belong to the dynasty. Pachali Bhairav belongs to the city itself – older than any king who tried to claim it.



QUICK TIPS

Follow the procession route through Kathmandu's southern districts on the opening day – Shrawan Shukla Pratipada. The moment the dhyampo arrives at Hanumandhoka's golden gate for the government tika and offerings is the ceremonial highlight. The jatra's route through older neighbourhoods like Lagantol and Chikmugal reveals parts of Kathmandu that most tourists never reach.



THE SOUL OF KATHMANDU
Where Gods and Festivals Come Alive

DASHAIN



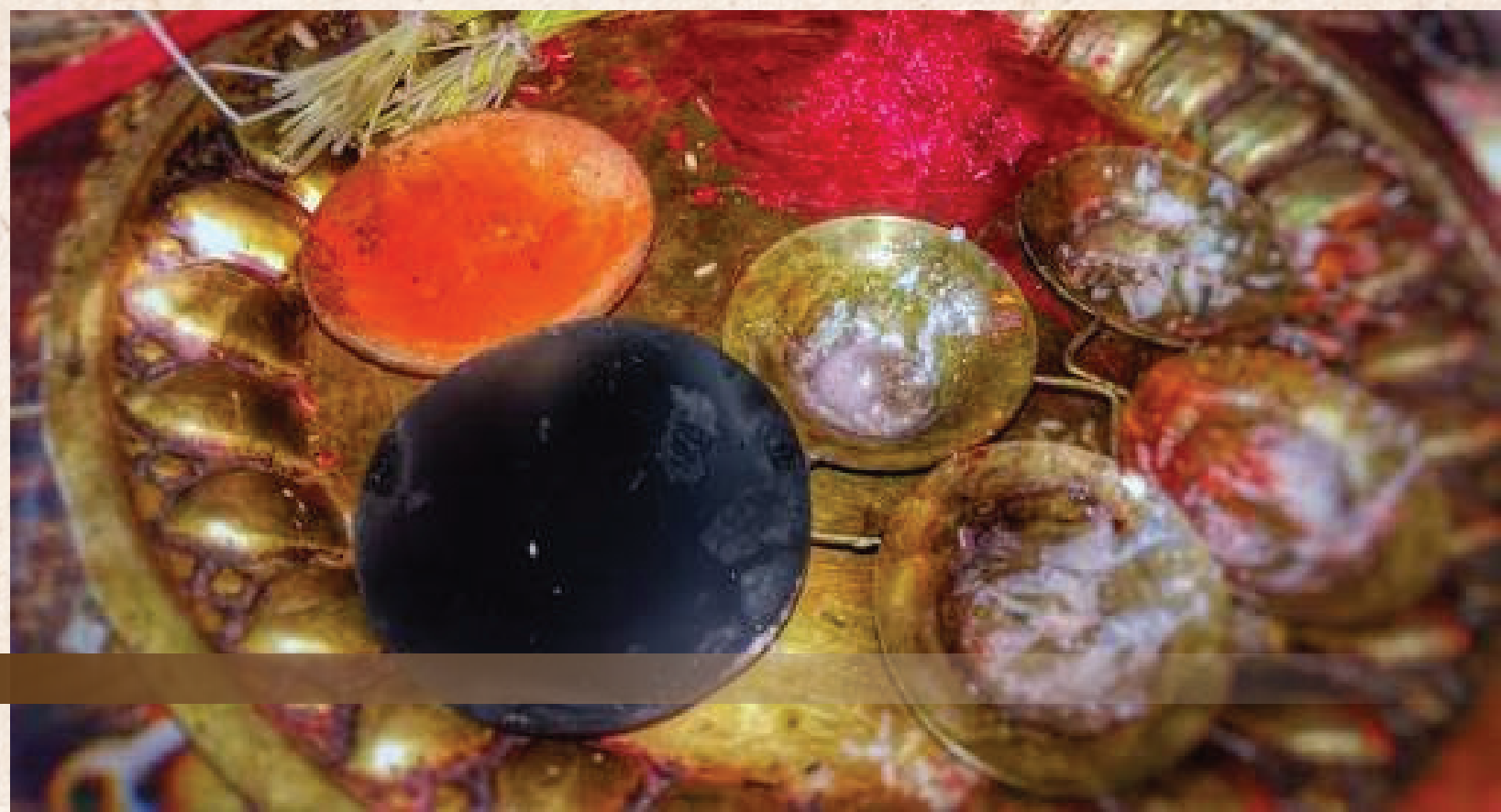
Everyone in Nepal knows where they are going for Dashain. They have always known. That is what the festival means.

Ten days. The goddess defeats the demon. Every family comes home. Nepal stops.

Dashain is Nepal's biggest national festival – ten days during which the entire country comes to a halt, families travel from wherever they are to wherever they are from, and the goddess Durga is worshipped in her victorious form over the buffalo demon Mahishasur. At Hanumandhoka, the festival follows an ancient sequence: Jamara are placed in the Dasain Ghar on Pratipada, Phulpati is brought from Nuwakot's Dhunibesi in formal royal procession on Saptami, the great tika is given on Dashami, and the Khadgajatra sword procession departs from Mul Chowk. On Astami, Taleju Bhavani is brought from the great temple to Mul Chowk's smaller shrine – a moment the public never sees but which has been performed without interruption since the Malla kings made it mandatory. The whole sequence, from the first ghata-sthapana to the final Kitiswari, is a masterclass in how a single festival can be at once deeply personal and profoundly national.

QUICK FACTS

If you are in Kathmandu for Dashain, be at Hanumandhoka on Saptami afternoon for the Phulpati arrival procession – high officials in traditional dress, military honours and music make it extraordinary. On Dashami, the square fills for the Khadgajatra. Book everything weeks in advance – Kathmandu empties and fills with returning families and the city's energy is unlike any other time of year. Tika from an elder on Dashami morning is the emotional heart of the festival – if you have Nepali friends or hosts, accept the invitation if offered.





GUHYESHWARI JATRA

Shiva carried his wife's body across the mountains until it fell apart. Where each piece landed, a goddess was born.

Guhyeshwari is among the most sacred and least publicly understood of Nepal's great goddesses. Her temple, east of Pashupati along the Bagmati, is closed to non-Hindus – but her jatra, which begins at Hanumandhoka's Taleju temple on Margashirsha Krishna Dashami with a formal kalash procession and ends on Phalgu Purnima with the khat's return. The goddess's mythological origin is among the most powerful in the valley: she is where the sacred guhya (anus and rectum) of Sati – Shiva's wife – fell when he carried her shattered body across the mountains in grief, her pieces falling across the subcontinent and creating the Shakti Pitha goddesses. Like Taleju and Degutaleju, Guhyeshwari is a form of the Shakti force – the power behind the Malla dynasty's legitimacy. Raja Jagajayamalla is credited with formally establishing the jatra in 1779 BS. Merchants have been its most faithful participants ever since.

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The valley holds the goddess's most sacred geography. Every important temple is a map of where she fell.

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QUICK FACTS

Attend the jatra's start at Hanumandhoka's Taleju temple on Margashirsha Navami – the kalash procession to Guhyeshwari is the public highlight. For the temple itself, if you are Hindu and wish to visit, go early in the morning when the sacred well in the lotus-shaped kunda is most clearly visible. The festival has a strong merchant community participation – the Rajabhola market area is particularly active during jatra days.



THE SOUL OF KATHMANDU
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VASANT SHRAVAN

Spring arrives. The king sits on his throne. Sanskrit verse fills the palace. The old world is, for a moment, completely intact.

Vasant Shraavan is one of Hanumandhoka's most intimate royal ceremonies – a spring festival during which the Malla king would sit on a metal throne in Nasal Chowk, listened to two chapters of the Geetagovinda – Jayadeva's celebrated 12th-century Sanskrit verse celebrating Radha and Krishna – and marked the formal arrival of spring. The ceremony involves the Mulpurohit performing puja with a full sacred vessel, traditional musicians singing the Vasantaraag and finally the king's Kitiswari completing the ritual. The Geetagovinda was chosen specifically: its imagery of spring, desire, reunion and devotion made it the perfect text for a ceremony meant to welcome warmth back to the valley. Raja Pratapamalla's records from 1705 CE confirm the ceremony at Mohan Chowk – it is ancient, precise and entirely beautiful.



The oldest ceremonies are the simplest. A throne, a text, a season turning. Everything else follows.

QUICK TIPS

Vasant Shraavan falls around Shriipanchami – late January or February depending on the Nepali lunar calendar. The ceremony is formal and palace-based – check with the Hanumandhoka Museum for current access and observance. If you are in Kathmandu around this time, listen for Vasantaraag being sung in traditional gatherings around the city – the spring melody has a distinctive, unmistakable quality that rewards seeking out.





THE SOUL OF KATHMANDU
Where Gods and Festivals Come Alive

PHAGU – HOLI

Nepal's spring festival of colour has its own pole, its own politics, and its own complicated history. Also: expect to get wet.

Phagu is Nepal's Holi – the great spring festival of colour that fills the streets with abir, water and noise for two days every Phalgun. But Kathmandu's version has its own distinct character. The Gopalrajvamsavali records Lichhavi king Manadev as having started the tradition here. The Malla kings raised a great three-coloured Cheer pole near the Hanuman statue at the palace and it became an annual ceremony involving all three kingdoms – and a remarkable source of inter-kingdom rivalry, with mountain kings occasionally stealing each other's poles in competition. Prithvinarayan Shah, who famously told his subjects to wear Nepali cloth and listen to Nepali music, specifically mentioned Phagu in his teachings – limiting foreign entertainment to just two days of the festival as a matter of national identity. Today, Basantapur Square on Phagu Purnima night – when the Cheer pole burns and falls, marking the festival's true climax – is where old and new Nepal come together in colour, music and thoroughly joyful chaos.

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In Kathmandu, even the colour festival has a philosophy behind it. Play hard, but remember whose colours you're wearing.

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QUICK TIP[S

Phagu falls on Phalgun Shukla Purnima – late February or early March. Wear clothes you don't mind ruining. Protect your camera. Basantapur Square is the centre of everything – arrive in the afternoon as the atmosphere builds. The pole-lighting on Purnima night draws large crowds and is genuinely spectacular. Note that street in Holi can be intense in some areas – stick to the main squares for a safer, more festive experience. The day after Purnima, when colour games continue across the city's neighbourhoods, is often more relaxed and more photogenic.





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नेपाल सरकार
संस्कृति, पर्यटन तथा नागरिक उड्डयन मन्त्रालय
हनुमानढोका दरबार संग्रहालय