

# Sightseeing in Kathmandu

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## **Pashupatinath Temple**

The magnificent temple of Lord Pashupatinath lies around 5 kms north-east of Kathmandu, it is situated amidst many other temples on the right bank of the river Bagmati (a tributary of the holy river Ganges). It has had a long and interesting history including being attacked and almost destroyed by Sultan Samasuddin in the 14th century.

Pashupatinath is the guardian spirit and the holiest of all Shiva shrines in Nepal. Lord Shiva is known by many different names; Pashupati is one. Pashu means living beings, Pati means master. In other words Pashupati is the master of all living beings of the universe. The first recorded history of some form of worshipping site dates back to 753 A.D. where a stone inscription was erected by the ruler at the time Jayadev 11th. The temple was renovated by a mediaeval King Shivadeva (1099-1126 AD). Further renovation was completed by queen Gangadevi during the reign of Shiva Singh Malla (1578-1620 AD), the present temple dates from 1696. Pashupatinath stands in the middle of an open courtyard built in a square shaped pagoda style on a single platform 23.6 meters above the ground, gold gilt doors are found on all four sides of the temple. In the centre of the temple, there is a three feet high Shivalinga (fertility symbol) with four faces, all these faces have different religious names and significance. The face to the east is known as Tatpuruṣa, the one facing south as Aghora, the faces looking west and north are known by the names Sadhyojata and Vamadeva respectively with the upper portion of this linga known as Ishan. These faces are also defined as the symbol of four dharmas (the most famous places of pilgrimage for Hindus) and four Vedas (sacred books of Hindus). The images of Vishnu, Surya, Devi and Ganesh are also placed in the sanctum of the temple. Kathmandu has a wealth of interesting historical sights to visit, the valley contains seven world heritage sights.

## **Hanuman Dhoka: – Kathmandu Durbar Square:**

Probably the most interesting part of Kathmandu is the ancient Hanuman Dhoka Palace and temple complex in the middle of the old city which forms part of the Kathmandu Durbar square. Built during the Malla period, the area consists of a number of different monuments, the most outstanding of which are as follows: The image of Hanuman –

Standing to the left of the main entrance to the Hanuman Dhoka Palace is an image of Hanuman, the Hindu god who is always depicted in the form of a monkey. The Mallas placed this image of Hanuman at their palace gate both to protect the palace and to bring them victory in war. The image is made of stone but each year it is coated with a layer of red pigment made by mixing oil and vermillion powder, over the years these repeated layers of colour have distorted the face almost beyond recognition. The idol is always clothed in red and is further honoured by the golden umbrella placed over its head. This particular image, and also the smaller one just beyond it, were constructed in 1672 by King Pratap Malla.

## **Kumari Chowk:-Ktm Durbar Square**

Built in 1757 by King Jaya Prakash Malla (1746-68) Kumari Chowk is the home of the 'Kumari' or living goddess who is considered to be an incarnation of the goddess Taleju. The goddess is chosen from an early age and will remain the Kumari until the first signs of menstruation when she will give up her role when another young girl will be chosen to follow on. The Kumari Chowk is a three-storeyed courtyard lavishly decorated with fine woodcarving. The third storey of the building is especially attractive with its fine bay windows in which the Kumari appears from time to time in the company of her guardian priestess to watch over and be seen by her admirers. Taking photographs of her is strictly forbidden.

## **The Golden Door:-**

To the right of the image of Hanuman is the golden main door of the Hanuman Dhoka Palace. It is guarded by a pair of stone lions. Shiva sits on the lion to the right while Shakti sits on the lioness to the left. These custodians date from Malla times, the golden door itself is of a later period. The inscription above the door states clearly that it was erected in 1810 during the reign of King Girbana Yuddha Bikram Shah. Such an

extravagance at that particular period of Nepal's history must surely have a story to explain it, and indeed the story is found there in the inscription. Hundreds of outdated copper plate inscriptions were gathered and sold, the return from which bought the gold that was then pounded into sheets and molded to the posts and panels of the door.

Above the golden door is a well formed large window opening with three interesting images. The central piece shows Krishna Bishwarupa, his multiple arms, the skulls and the terror image, are all indicative of a strong Tantric influences. To the left is a group of three figures, the central figure is clearly of Krishna, very likely the other two are meant to represent his two favorite consorts, Rukmini and Satya Bhama. On the right of the Bishwarupa, two seated figures are found. One of these figures, wearing royal robes and insignia, is playing an instrument. Seated near him in an attentive manner is a woman who is well dressed and heavily ornamented. The face of the King resembles very closely with the features found on the known images of King Pratap Malla. It can therefore be concluded that all the images date from Paratp Malla's time (1641-74).

#### **Basantapur Chowk:-**

At the south-east corner of the Nasal Chowk and the Hanuman Dhoka is an exit through which one can pass through to enter Basantpur Chowk. During the time of King Prithvi Narayan Shah (1768-1846,) the Shah Kings moved from the old quarters formerly occupied by the Malla Kings into this section of the palace. While the woodcarvings in the central courtyard are an especially outstanding feature, the whole building is of equal historic value to all Nepalese.

The nine-storeyed Palace of Prithvi Narayan Shah is known as Basantapur, within the complex there are four towers Basantapur, Kirtipur, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. Apart from the Basantapur tower that dominates the complex the other towers rise two storeys above the courtyard. Both Lalitpur (Patan) and Bhaktapur were in the past the two other main principalities within the valley. Kirtipur was a separate hill fortress and small town which is also situated within the valley.

There is a splendid view from the windows of the Lalitpur tower, lavish gardens were laid out directly below in the past which must have enhanced its charm. The great temple of Taleju lies directly north and can be clearly seen from the tower. The Kirtipur Tower is laid with a copper roof of a most unusual design and complexity, it represents an important piece of Nepalese architecture. There is a clear view into the courtyard of Nasal Chowk and also across the roofs to Degu Taleju temple and Jagannath temple in the Hanuman Dhoka area.

The Basantapur Tower raises a full five storeys above the general level of buildings in the whole palace and dwarfs the other three. It is a mark of pride to the Nepalese that King Prithvi Narayan Shah saw fit to build his Kathmandu Palace in the Nepalese style, thus not only showing his appreciation for the merits of the traditional architecture of the valley but also establishing a firm example that was to continue during the coming century.

The new Construction:

In the 19 century a large white building built in neoclassical style was built onto the original Basantapur Palace; it now forms the newer wing of the complex.

#### **Taleju Mandir:-**

Built in 1564 by King Mahendra Malla, this is the most famous of the three Taleju temples built by the Malla Kings; it is situated in Trishul chowk and attached to the Hanuman Dhoka Palace. The temple stands over 36.6 metres high and rests on a twelve-stage pedestal. Its three roofs soar above the rest of the Hanuman Dhoka complex, until very recent times it was considered unlucky to build a house higher than this temple. At the eighth stage of the pedestal, the steps broaden out into a spacious platform on which a wall is mounted which bars further movement into the temple. The temple is open to the public once a year during the Dashain festival.

On the platform just outside the wall there are twelve small temples, each with a double roof and built to a traditional Nepalese style, this is repeated inside the wall. Each temple has a spire, one of the symbols of the attributes of Taleju Goddess. On the south side where the main door is found there are large stone images of men and beasts depicting powerful protecting forces. There are two finely shaped bells on both sides of the main door of the temple, one erected by Pratap Malla in 1645 and one by Bhaskar Malla in 1714. They are

rung only when worship is offered to Goddess Taleju.

### **Kasta Mandap:-**

Known locally as Maru Sattal, this huge open temple has a long history. Popular legend dictates that during King Laxmi Narsingh's reign Kalpa Brikshav who had difficulties with the King at the time came to see the chariot festival of Machhendranath, where he was recognized by one of the priests of Machhendranath. The priest seized him and refused to release him until he promised to give a tree from that wood a rest house could be built, Kalpa Briksha made the promise and was released. Four days later a huge Sal tree was delivered, with the King's permission, the Kastha Mandap (Kastha / wood Mandap / place for puja) was built from the wood of this single tree; Kathmandu has derived its name from Kastha Mandap.

### **The Great Bell:-**

Without the great bell erected by King Rana Bahadur Shah in 1787, the palace area would somehow have been incomplete. The great bells in the Patan Durbar Square and the Bhaktapur Durbar Square were built 50 years earlier and date from 1736. The bell is rung only when worship is being offered in Degutaleju.

### **The Great Drums:-**

Located close to the great bell, two huge drums were made during the reign of Girbana Yuddha Bikram Shah (1799-1816) these are only played during the worship of Degutaleju. An inscription on copper plate informs the one who plays the drums that a buffalo and a goat must be sacrificed for them twice a year.

### **The Image of Kala Bhairab:-**

This huge stone image of Bhairab represents Shiva in his destructive form with its frightening expression symbolising death and destruction. It is undated and was set in its present location by Pratap Malla after it was found in a field north of the city. The image was originally a single stone, however, a portion on the upper right hand side was damaged and repaired by the addition of another stone.

The sun and moon to the left and right of Bhairab and the heads of lions in the upper portion also seem to have been later additions. Such large images made of a single block of stone are very rare in Nepal.

### **Budhanilkantha:- (sleeping Vishnu)**

Situated below the Shivapuri hills, Budhanilkantha is eight kilometres north of Kathmandu. In the centre of the temple complex there is a huge statue of the Hindu God Vishnu reclining on the coils of a cosmic serpent. The huge stone figure is one of the masterpieces of stone sculptures of Lichchavi period (3rd century A.D.-8th A.D.) and is believed to have been built in the fifth century. Swayambhu Stupa

### **Swayambhunath:-**

Listed as a world heritage site, this is one of the world's most famous Buddhist sites in Nepal. The stupa is reported to be 2000 yrs old, its establishment is linked to the creation of the Kathmandu valley. Legend dictates the valley was once a huge lake, in the middle of the lake was a lotus flower which produced a brilliant flame. People would travel from miles around to worship its brightness. A Chinese disciple Manjushri wishing to study the flame more closely slashed the valley rim with his sword draining the waters to expose the most beautiful landscape below. Chobhar gorge where the valley waters still drain today represents the site of his action. Swayambhunath is reached by a steep stone flight of steps and stands on a high hillock (77mtrs) it is built where the lotus was originally located, candles have burnt here for many centuries in reverence to the original flame. Near the beginning of the stairs there is a stone footprint, which is said to be either that of the Buddha or of Manjushri.

On top of the high central stupa on a golden colored square of the all watchful eyes of the Buddha looking in all four directions. The nose represents the Nepali number one (ek) and symbolizes unity, above the two normal eyes is a third eye that symbolizes the spiritualist powers of the Buddha. The base of the stupa represents the four elements — earth, water, fire and air.

At the top of the stairs are two shikara Indian style temples with two stone lions and a huge dorje (Buddhist word for thunderbolt). The right temple is the Pratappura temple, the one on the left is the Ananthapura temple. Dorje is always depicted along with a series of bells. The thunderbolt symbolises the male force, the bell symbolises the female wisdom.

There are several temples on top of the hill, one of these is a temple dedicated to Hariti Devi, the goddess of smallpox and fertility (The Newars know her as Ajima), she is worshiped to protect children and is portrayed sucking the inside out of a corpse. It is said that she was asked by the Buddha to stay near Buddhist temples to prevent disease if she was worshipped. The symbols of the five elements are located around the hilltop —

earth, water, fire, air and either of these. Behind the Ananthapura temple there is Vasupura, the symbol of the earth and Vayupura, the symbol of air. Northwest of the platform is Agnipura, the symbol of fire and Nagpura, the symbol of water. Shantipura, the symbol of sky (either) is north of the platform. Near the north part of the platform, there is a big statue of the Buddha and an ancient stone inscription dating from 1372.

#### **Boudhanath:-**

Lying some 6km to the east of Kathmandu, this huge and ancient stupa is one of the biggest in the world, and the largest in the valley. A world heritage site, Boudhnath is believed to have been built by using dew to mix the mortar as Kathmandu was reeling under a severe drought during its construction. The stupa looms 36 metres high and presents one of the most fascinating specimens of stupa design. It is not known who actually started the construction although the legend goes that a poor girl Ajima gave birth to four sons by four different fathers. The sons over the years gathered a lot of wealth, with this wealth Jyajima decided she wanted to build a stupa. She approached the King for permission, the King granted her wish but insisted she build no larger than the size of a buffalo. Ajima was clever, she cut the skin into thin strips, laid them lengthwise next to each, and by doing so created a large area of land to construct on. During her life the stupa was erected up to the dumba level. After her death, her four sons had completed above the bumba level in this way the stupa was eventually erected. Boudhanath is one of the most sacred places for Buddhists a Tibetan community has built up around it. Early mornings are quite surreal with many pilgrims visiting to worship, meditation and prayer. There are one hundred and eight small niches all around the stupa accommodation, the icons of the Buddha's conjoint figures in erotic poses. Likewise at the bottom level, it is surrounded by three prayer wheels embossed with the famous mantra OM MANI PADME HUM fixed in more than hundred and forty inches.

#### **Kirtipur:-**

Situated on a ridge 8-10km south-west of Kathmandu, this ancient Newar township has many places of interest from old shrines, temples, artistic old houses to people dressed in old traditional costumes. Chilamchu stupa and the temple of Bagh Bhairav are major attractions, the town is a natural hill fortress and has a proud and courageous history.

#### **Dakshinkali:-**

Dedicated to the Hindu Goddess Kali around 22km from the city centre on the southern rim of the valley, it is a popular place for worshippers. Tuesday and Saturday are the most auspicious days when the ritual of animal sacrifice is performed for the deity.

On the way to Dakshinkali about 9km southwest of Kathmandu lies Chobbar Gorge. Lord Manjushree (mentioned above) in legend sliced a portion of the hills to create Chobar where the waters of the valley drain today. The temple at Adinath at the top of the west part of the gorge is well worth visiting, it also provides some fine views of the Nepal Himalaya.

#### **Sightseeing in Bhaktapur or Bhadgaon:-**

Bhaktapur lies 12km east of central Kathmandu; it is best reached by taxi negotiable rate from Kathmandu or local bus. Bhaktapur is the least developed of the three major settlements in the valley, a rich farming community it is far less reliant on tourism for its survival. Most tourists visit for a few hours during the day returning to their hotels in Kathmandu, there are a few guest houses available if you want to stay overnight. The town is locked in centuries old ancient beliefs and customs with a hidden treasure of some sort lurking around most corners. There are many fine examples of architecture, sculptures and woodcarving here. The city is shaped like a conch shell, one of the emblems of the God Visnu, it was founded by King Ananda Deva in 889 A.D. The altitude of the city is 1,402 metres above sea level. Pottery and weaving and wood carving are its major traditional industries.

#### **Siddha Pokhari:-**

A large rectangular water tank located near the main city gate. It was built during the reign of King Yakshya Malla in the early fifteenth century and is associated with a number of different myths. From this location a wide range of the Nepal Himalaya is visible on clear days.

#### **Bhaktapur Durbar Square:-**

Bhaktapur Durbar Square is a collection of pagoda and Shikhara-style temples grouped around The fifty-five-window palace of brick and wood. The square is one of the most charming architectural showpieces of the

valley highlighting the ancient arts of Nepal. Golden images of the Kings set on the top of stone pillars with guardian deities looking out from their Asylum ( Ashram ) woodcarvings dominate the square with many fine examples – struts, beams, uprights, gateways and windows are all finely detailed into a well-orchestrated work of art.

Main sites of interest in the Durbar Square:

#### **The Lion Gate:-**

Dates back to 1696 A.D. The gate is guarded on either side by two huge statues of lions. Alongside there are two stone images of Bhairab (the dreadful aspect of Shiva) and Ugarchandi (the consort of Shiva in his fearful manifestation).

The Golden Gate:-Golden Gate in Bhaktapur

The Golden Gate is said to be the most beautiful and richly moulded specimen of its kind in the entire world. The door is surrounded by a figure of the Goddess Kali and Garuda (mythical man-bird) and attended by two heavenly nymphs, it is also embellished with monsters and other mythical creatures. In the words of Percy Brown, a well-known English art-critic and historian, the Golden Gate is “the most lovely piece of art in the whole Kingdom”. It is placed like a jewel, exposing innumerable sides in the handsome setting of its surroundings. The gate was erected by King Ranjit Malla, it is the entrance to the main courtyard of the palace of fifty-five windows.

#### **The Palace of Fifty-five Windows:-**

This magnificent palace was built during the reign of King Yaksha Malla in 1427 A.D. it was later restored and newly designed by King Bhupatindra Malla in the seventeenth century. Among the brick walls in their well laid setting and sculptural design, is a balcony of fifty-five windows, considered to be a unique masterpiece of woodcarving.

The Picture Gallery:-

The Picture Gallery contains ancient paintings belonging to Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism of various periods and descriptions. This gallery is open every day except Tuesdays.

The Statue of King Bhupatindra Malla:-

The statue shows King Bhupatindra Malla in the act of worship on a column facing the palace. Of the square's many statues, this is considered to be the most magnificent.

#### **Batsala Temple:-**

The stone temple of Batsala Devi has many finely detailed carvings, famous for its bronze bell known to local residents as ‘the bell-of barking dogs because when it is rung, all dogs in the area begin barking’. The huge bell was hung by King Ranjit Malla in 1737 A.D., it was used to sound the daily curfew. It is nowadays rung every morning when Goddess Teleju is worshipped.

The Pashupati Temple:-

This temple is an imitation of the famous temple by the Bagmati river in Kathmandu and is widely noted for the erotic carving on its struts. It was built by King Yakshya Malla.

#### **Nyatapola Temple:-**

This five-storey pagoda was built by King Bhupatindra Malla in 1702 A.D. It stands on five terraces, on each terrace squat a pair of figures: two famous wrestlers (who were said to have dominated Bhaktapur) are found on the first plinth followed in ascendance by two elephants, two lions, two griffins and finally two goddesses. Each pair of figures is considered ten times stronger than the one immediately below. The lowest pair, the two strong men Jaya Malla and Phatta Malla were reputedly ten times stronger than any other men. This is one of the tallest pagoda-style temples in Kathmandu valley, it is famous for its massive structure and fine workmanship. Just beside the temple is a monastery (Nath) with exquisitely carved peacock windows. The monastery is full of intricate carvings of latticed windows and engraved columns.

Bhairab Nath Temple:-

This is another pagoda style temple of Lord Bhairab depicting the dreadful aspects of Shiva. It stands a short distance away from the temple of Nyatapola, it was originally built by Jyoti Malla on a modest scale in 1614 A.D. but later re-constructed by King Bhupatindra Malla into what is now a three-storey temple..

#### **Dattatraya Temple:- (Dattatreya Square)**

The temple of Dattatraya was built at the same time as the palace of fifty five windows by King Yakshya Malla and his son Raja Malla in 1427 A.D. According to popular belief, the temple was built out of the trunk

of a single tree. It was further renovated by King Vishwa Malla in 1458 A.D. This is only temple in Nepal that is dedicated to the God Dattatraya – who represents the combined incarnation of the three Gods of Hinduism Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva (Maheswar). Just off this square the Peacock window can be found, it is recognised as one of the best pieces of carving in Nepal and carved from a single piece of wood. There is a lot more to the Kathmandu valley than just the main sites of historical interest. The valley is blessed with many other beautiful and interesting smaller towns and settlements, each with their own history and legend, shrines and stupas. Most of these smaller towns and villages can be reached by car or bus, others require a good walk or cycle ride. There are also several scenic spots on the edge of the valley that command dramatic views of the great himalayan peaks; two in particular (Nagarkot and Dulikhel) have good overnight accommodation. The valley is ideal for short treks of between one to three days where some of these smaller settlements can be visited on route.

### **Changu Narayan Temple:-**

The Temple is the oldest temple of the Kathmandu valley located 6km north of the Bhaktapur city. The original structure was built in the 5th century AD established in Changu by the Licchavi King Manadev Malla in 464 A.D. It was further developed in According to mythology, Lord Vishnu unknowingly beheaded a demon who was a Brahmin. He later discovered his crime and decreed a temple should be built to atone for his act.

### **Sightseeing in Patan:**

Patan lies 5 kms south west of central Kathmandu the other side of the Holy Bagmati river which forms the boundary between the two towns. Patan nowadays has virtually become part of sub metropolitan Kathmandu, although the pace of life is noticeably different. Originally known as Lalitpur (city of beauty) it amply reflects this with its many fine examples of art and architecture. The town is laid out in a circular format with Buddhist stupas constructed at the four main points of the town's demarcation. As with both Kathmandu and Bhaktapur the major focus of the town is its main Durbar square which is situated in the middle of the marketplace. The city has an abundance of Buddhist monuments and Hindu temples, with fine bronze gateways, guardian deities and wonderful carvings. Noted for its craftsmen and metal workers, it is also known as the city of artists. Patan Durbar Square

### **Patan Durbar Square:-**

This whole square is a cluster of fine pagoda temples and stone statues dominated by the Kings palace neatly tucked into the business center of the city. Images of various deities in unique detail gives evidence to the expert skill of Patan's artists of the past. The ancient palace of the Malla Kings and the stone water baths associated with various legends and episodes of history are especially interesting to visitors. In particular the stone temple of Lord Krishna and the Royal Bath (Tushahity) with its intricate stone and bronze carvings.

### **Hiranya Varna Mahavihar:-**

Is a three-storey golden pagoda of Lokeshwar (Lord Buddha) built in the twelfth century A.D. by King Bhaskar Varma. Located in the courtyard of Kwabahal, this temple belongs in a class of its own. A golden image of Lord Buddha and a big prayer wheel can be seen on the pedestal of the upper part of the Vihar. Intricate decorative patterns adorn its outer walls, adding a certain charm to the richness of the shrine.

### **Kumbeshwar:-**

Kumbeshwar is a five-storey pagoda style temple dedicated to lord Shiva. Inside the courtyard is a natural spring whose source is believed to come from the famous glacial lake of Gosainkunda in the Nepal Himalaya some sixty miles north of Patan. The temple was built by King Jayasthiti Malla in a golden finial was added later in 1422 A.D.

King Jayasthiti around this time ordered a pond near the temple to be cleaned. Various images of Narayan, Ganesh, Sitala, Basuki, Gauri, Kirtimukh and Agamadevata were installed around the pond in the courtyard. Ritual bathing takes place here every year on the holy day of Janai Poornima. Kumbeshwar temple in Patan & Nyatapola temple in Bhaktapur are the only temples in the valley with five roofs, with the exception of the round five tiered Pancha Mukhi Hanuman of Kathmandu Hanuman Dhoka Palace.

### **Jagat Narayan:-**

The Jagat Narayan temple is a tall Shikhara-style temple consecrated to Lord Vishnu. The temple is built out of the red bricks and is situated near the Bagmati river at Sankhamul. It preserves many stone images along

with particularly striking fine metal statues of Garuda Ganesh and Hanuman on top of stone pillars.

**Krishna Temple:-**

The temple of Lord Krishna maintains a dominant position in Patan's palace complex. Its style is not wholly native, it is however considered to be one of the most perfect specimens of Nepalese Templecraft. Built by King Siddhi Narasingha Malla in the sixteenth century A.D., the minute detail of this work clearly shows the high level stone carving had achieved in the sixteenth century.

**Mahaboudha:-**

The Buddhist temple of Mahaboudha is built to a Shikhara design and is considered a masterpiece of terracotta brick tile. Like the Krishna Mandir, it reveals a traditional art which evolved outside of Nepal, a style often seen in South India. Its existence proves clearly that by this time the native craftsmen of Nepal were able to do proper justice to any art form. It is also known as the temple of thousand Buddhas, each individually cast around its sides. Construction began in 1564 A.D. under the orders of Abhaya Raj Shakyas, a local Buddhist priest, it was finally completed in 1600 A.D., a total of nine thousand bricks were laid. It was leveled to the ground during the great earthquake of 1933 but soon restored to something like its original form. In 1999 A.D. The temple was brought back to its former glory by a society of friends of the Temple.

**Rudra Varna Mahavihar:-**

Remains one of Patan's oldest Buddhist monasteries, next to the monastery there is a temple that contains a fine image of Lord Buddha. The courtyard of this temple is a gallery of different bronze and stone art works and popularly believed, though not scholastically agreed to have been built by Ashoka, the Buddhist Emperor of India.

These stupas stand at four different corners of Patan giving the whole city a monastic feature. The mounds were built in 250 A.D. at the time when Buddhism was making headway in the Kathmandu valley.

**Machhendranath Temple:-**

The temple of Machchhendranath is another splendid attraction in Patan. The temple lies in the middle of a wide spacious courtyard on the outer rim of the marketplace. A fine clay image of Avalokiteshwar or red Machchhendranath is housed here for six months every year after which it is taken round the city of Patan in a colourful chariot. The festival begins in April-May and lasts sometimes for several months.

Itinerary