

# Freak Street to temple—East, West meet in Katmandu

By Rex Henderson

**Katmandu.**  
The name rings of the exotic, of ancient, ornate temples and mystic rituals. Although the city is now a regular stop on the 15-day whirlwind tours of the east, it is still as exotic as it sounds.

Katmandu is the capital of Nepal—a nation the size of North Carolina, wedged between India on the south, west and east, and China to the north. For centuries Katmandu was the crossroads of trade routes that cut through the tropical forests in south Nepal to India, and through the mountains, sometimes by rope bridges, to Tibet.

According to Robert Stoddard, a UNL associate professor of geography who spent a year in Katmandu on a Fulbright grant, western influence is confined to a few blocks in the downtown district. Just around the corner in the Orient

There are two pockets of westernization in Katmandu, according to Stoddard. In downtown Katmandu, western hotels and restaurants offer a haven for tourists.

On Freak Street young western people spend their days hanging out and taking advantage of inexpensive drugs in the city. Katmandu lies just west of the opium producing Golden Triangle and in the heart of the hashish producing Himalayas.

According to Stoddard, tourists can "play it safe" by eating and sleeping in the expensive western hotels. But for the adventuresome, or the poor, native food and hostelrys are much cheaper.

Stoddard said a native restaurant near where he lived in Katmandu served a multi-course dinner for only 50 cents a person.

As for sights, on a clear day, six of the highest mountains in the world are visible from the city.

To the northwest the Himalchuli lifts itself to 25,897 feet. Further east the Annapurna II towers to 26,041. Northeast of Katmandu the Hindi holy mountain, Gauri Sankar, 23,443 feet high, hides Mount Everest.

Katmandu lies in the temperate Katmandu valley between the forbidding wall of mountains to the north and dense tropical rain forest to the south.

It was never a part of either the Chinese-tibetan culture



or the Indian culture. The people, culture, and religion are a unique mixture of the two.

The author of a photographic essay on Nepal, Jurgen Winkler, said, "This is hardly another place on earth where so many temples, shrines and works of art are concentrated in such a small area as in the Katmandu valley."

The great eastern religions, Hinduism and Buddhism exist side-by-side.

Prince Siddhartha, who spent years in meditation to become the buddha, was born in what is now Nepal. A Buddhist sanctuary, the Svayambhunath just a mile north west of Katmandu, is said by local legends to be more than 2,500 years old.

Just east of Katmandu is the Buddhist shrine Yakshevara. The explicitly erotic carvings on the outside of the shrine are said to frighten away the goddess of lightning who in local mythology is said to be a virgin.

The exotic mysticism of Katmandu may not cost much, but getting there is expensive and takes two days.

According to the Four Seasons Travel Agency in Lincoln, the flight leaves New York's Kennedy International Airport at 10 p.m. There are plane changes in London and Delhi, India. You arrive in Katmandu at 8:55 p.m. almost 48 hours later.

The cost of the marathon flight is \$1,135 plus another \$224 to fly from Lincoln to New York.

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