

Pokhara



Imagine a perfect triangular mountain, capped by snow and buffeted by the icy winds of the Himalaya. Imagine a millpond calm lake, perfectly reflecting the snowy peaks. Now imagine a village on the lakeshore, thronged by travellers and reverberating to the sound of 'om mani padme hum' from a hundred shops selling prayer flags, carpets, masks, singing bowls and CDs of Buddhist mantras. That's Pokhara.

Nepal's second city, at least in tourist terms, Pokhara is the end point for the famous Annapurna Circuit trek and the starting point for a dozen more treks through the mountains of the Annapurna Range, including the perennially popular Jomsom Trek and the equally dramatic (but less busy) trek to the Annapurna Sanctuary. It's unashamedly touristy, in the Thamel mould, but the setting is spectacular – the perfect pyramid of Mt Machhapuchhare looms high above Pokhara, reflected in the placid waters of Phewa Tal.

For many travellers, Pokhara represents a last chance to stock up on creature comforts before hitting the mountain trails. For others, it's a place to enjoy a steak dinner and cold beer after weeks of daal bhaat in the hills. Even if you aren't a dedicated trekker, there's plenty here to keep you busy. Pokhara has numerous museums and there are some fascinating caves, waterfalls and Tibetan villages in the surrounding hills.

For the adventurous, travel agents in Pokhara offer a slew of adventure activities, from trekking and microlight flights to river rafting and jungle safaris. Paragliding from Sarangkot viewpoint has to be one of the most thrilling experiences in the subcontinent. Alternatively, bring a good book and spend your days reading in a café overlooking languorous Phewa Tal.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Go boating on serene **Phewa Tal** (p250)
- Follow the exploits of great mountaineers at the **International Mountain Museum** (p252)
- Enjoy steak dinners and beery evenings in the **restaurants** (p261) of Lakeside
- Stroll through the forest to Pokhara's tranquil **World Peace Pagoda** (p255)
- Revel in the sunset views of the Annapurna range from lofty **Sarangkot** (p265)
- Escape the crowds at **Begnas Tal** (p267), the second largest lake in the Pokhara Valley



■ AREA CODE: ☎ 061

■ POPULATION: 171,000

■ ELEVATION: 884 M

POKHARA IN...

Two Days

Two days will give you a decent taste of Pokhara. Start with a browse through the souvenir shops of **Lakeside** (p263) then rent a boat for a leisurely row around **Phewa Tal** (p253). Lunch on the strip then head inland for a wander round old Pokhara. On day two, wriggle through the **Bat Cave** (p267) and drop in on one of Pokhara's interesting museums.

Four Days

With four days, visit the huge **International Mountain Museum** (p252) and walk north around the lake. Take a trip to one of the **Tibetan settlements** (p253) north and south of Pokhara and trek up to the sublime **World Peace Pagoda** (p255). On day four, hike or take a taxi to **Sarangkot** (p265) for epic views of the Annapurna massif.

One Week

With a week in Pokhara, you'll have time to try some of the adventure activities – **paragliding** (p254) from Sarangkot is strongly recommended. Consider the walk to **Poon Hill** (p268) or hire a bike or motorcycle to explore **Begnas Tal** (p267) and the villages on the northern lakeshore.

HISTORY

Before the construction of the Prithvi Hwy, getting to Pokhara involved a 10-day pony trek, with numerous deadly river crossings along the way. When the Swiss explorer Toni Hagen visited in 1952, he found ambling buffalo carts and streets lined with brick Newari houses. Hints of this time can still be seen in old Pokhara, just north of the Mahendra Pul bazaar.

Aside from the odd explorer, the first Westerners to reach Pokhara were hippies in the 1970s. With its lakeshore setting, laid-back pace and plentiful supply of marijuana, Pokhara made a perfect endpoint for the south Asian overland trail. From these barefoot beginnings, it developed rapidly. By the 1980s, it had transformed into a modern mountain resort, with hundreds of hotels, shops, bars and restaurants.

Today, Pokhara is basically Thamel by the water, but you only have to wander north around the lakeshore to find the peaceful idyll that first attracted people here in the 1970s.

CLIMATE

Pokhara sits about 400m lower than Kathmandu so the autumn and winter temperatures are generally much more comfortable. Even in the height of winter you can get away with a T-shirt during the day time and you'll only need a sweater or jacket for evenings and early morning starts. From June

to September the skies open and the views vanish behind blankets of grey cloud; bring a brolly and be prepared to wade when the streets are flooded.

ORIENTATION

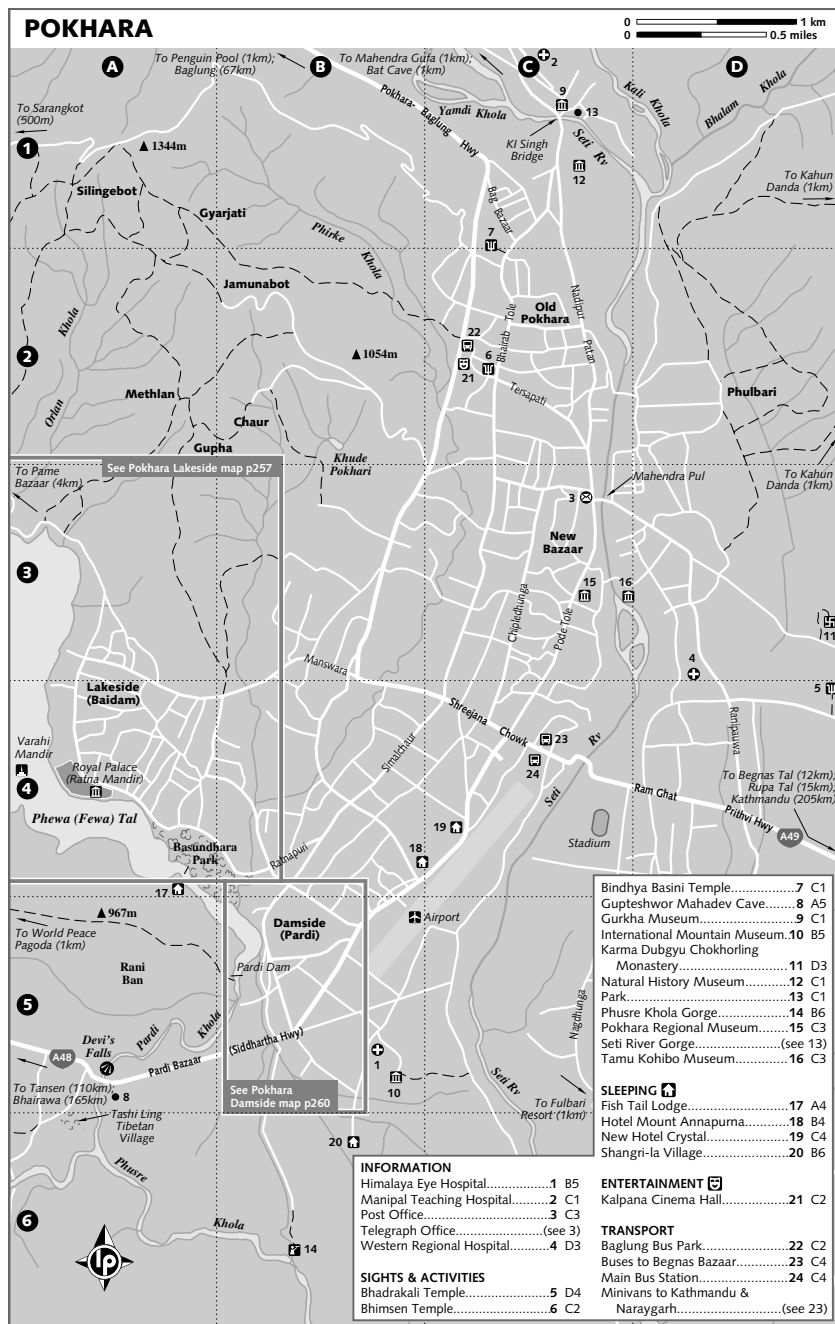
Famed as the city by the lake, Pokhara sprawls along the eastern shore of gorgeous Phewa Tal (Fewa Tal). Most travellers stay on the lake shore in Lakeside, a seemingly endless string of budget hotels, restaurants, bars, Internet cafés and souvenir shops, extending right around the lake from Basundhara Park to the northern shore.

More budget accommodation is available near the Phewa dam in Damside, which also has the tourist office, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) office and the immigration office.

Inland from Lakeside, you'll find the airport and the bus stand for tourist buses to Kathmandu (also known as the Mustang bus stand). The main public bus stand is at the north end of the Pokhara airstrip, while local buses to Baglung (for treks to the Annapurna Range) leave from the highway north of town.

The main shopping area for locals is Mahendra Pul, running north from the public bus stand. Just north of here is Pokhara's old town, bound by the Baglung Hwy and the Seti River gorge.

For convenience, we've divided the lakeshore into several sections. Starting from the



Seti River dam, you'll pass through Damside, then Lakeside East (from Basundhara Park to the Royal Palace), then Central Lakeside (from the palace to the junction known as Camping Chowk), then Lakeside North (from Camping Chowk to the northern shore). All these places have Nepali names, but most people use 'Lakeside' for the whole strip.

INFORMATION Bookshops

There are dozens of bookshops along the strip at Lakeside. All sell maps, guidebooks, postcards and reams of glossy coffee-table books. **Mandala Book Shop** (Map p257; ☎ 523203; ☎ 10am-9pm) opposite the Hotel Snowland probably has the best stock.

Emergency

The direct phone number for the police is ☎ 100. For medical emergencies, contact the hospitals directly (see Medical Services, below).

Internet Access

All the Internet cafés in Pokhara charge the same rate – Rs 2 per minute with a minimum Rs 20 charge.

E-Mail One (Map p257; ☎ 8am-11pm)

MS Communications (Map p257; ☎ 7am-11pm)

Internet Resources

For online information on Pokhara, visit www.pokharacity.com.

Immigration Office

The **immigration office** (Map p260; ☎ 521160; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun-Thu, 10am-3pm Fri) shares a building with the tourist office and Annapurna Conservation Area Project in Damside. Visa extensions cost US\$30 for 30 days – bring your passport and two photos, plus the visa fee in Nepali rupees. For more on visa extensions see p375.

Laundry

Hotels can arrange same day laundry services if you drop your clothes off first thing in the morning, or there are plenty of small laundry shops along the strip in Lakeside.

Medical Services

There are several pharmacies in Lakeside selling everyday medicines. For anything

serious, there are two modern hospitals on the east bank of the Seti River.

Western Regional Hospital (Map p248; ☎ 520066)

Manipal Teaching Hospital (Map p248; ☎ 526416)

Money

There are several foreign exchange offices in Lakeside that change cash and travellers cheques in major currencies. All are open daily but rates are usually better at the **Standard Chartered Bank** (Map p257; ☎ 9.45am-4.15pm Sun-Thu & 9.45am-1.15pm Fri), near Camping Chowk. The bank has two ATMs, one here and one next to the Hotel Snowland.

Post

The main **post office** (Map p248; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun-Thu & 10am-3pm Fri) is a hike from Lakeside at Mahendra Pul. If you want to send anything valuable, **UPS** (Map p257; ☎ 536585) in Lakeside is costly but reliable.

Telephone

There's no real need to go to the **telegraph office** (Map p248; ☎ 24 hr) in Mahendra Pul – Internet cafés in Lakeside offer phone calls to Europe and most other places for around Rs 50 per minute. Call back costs Rs 5.

Tourist Information

Nepal Tourism runs a helpful **tourist office** (Map p260; ☎ 535292; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Sun-Fri) in Damside, sharing a building with the Annapurna Conservation Area Project and the immigration office.

Travel Agencies

Most of the travel agents in Lakeside can book tours, flights and bus tickets, but be

TREKKING PERMITS

If you plan to trek anywhere inside the Annapurna Conservation Area, you'll need a permit from the **Annapurna Conservation Area Project** (ACAP; Map p260; ☎ 540376; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Fri, 9am-4pm in winter) in Damside. The entry fee to the conservation area is Rs 2000/200 (foreigner/SAARC) and permits are issued on the spot (bring two passport-sized photos). There are ACAP checkpoints throughout the reserve and if you get caught without a permit, the fee rises to Rs 4000/400 (foreigner/SAARC).

BEATING THE BOTTLE

Abandoned plastic drinking water bottles are one of the plagues of the Himalaya. Some trekking routes are vanishing under a tide of plastic rubbish that will take thousands of years to decay. You can do your bit to keep the Himalaya beautiful by purifying your own water – there are springs and wells in most villages and water can easily be purified using water purification tablets or a water filter. Some lodges in the Annapurna Conservation Area now offer refills of purified water for a nominal charge – part of a joint initiative by the Annapurna Conservation Area Project and the New Zealand government. Start off on the right foot by visiting the **Kathmandu Environmental Education Project** (KEEP; Map p257; ☎ 531823), based in the Amrit Guest House in Lakeside. KEEP provides all sorts of information on environmental pollution in the hills and offers a canteen refilling service for Rs 10.

wary of anyone offering direct bus trips to towns in India; without exception, you must change buses at the border. The following travel agents are reputable.

Blue Sky Travel (Map p257; ☎ 521435; www.blue-sky-tours.com)

Wayfarers (Map p257; ☎ 532274; www.wayfarers.com.np) See p114 for details.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

There was a time when the worst thing that could happen in Pokhara was paying too much for a Kashmiri carpet. Sadly, the downturn in tourism has led to an upsurge in crime. A number of travellers have been mugged on the walk to the World Peace Pagoda and on the trek from Phewa Tal to Sarangkot and it pays to check the current situation before you set off (see p19). You should be safe if you travel in a group and walk in daylight hours.

Like many traveller towns, Pokhara is mobbed by touts, and the problem has become worse as visitor numbers have fallen. It's almost impossible to get a taxi from the tourist bus stand to Lakeside without a tout coming along to steer you towards a commission paying hotel where you'll pay twice the going rate. The best way to escape their

clutches is to claim you have an advance booking somewhere else.

Swimmers should watch out for syringes and other sharp pieces of junk on the edges of Phewa Tal and steer clear of the dangerous dam. If you hire a motorcycle, be aware of the standard Asian obstacles – potholes, speeding trucks, rogue cows and suicidal chickens.

The insurgency is not currently affecting travel around Pokhara or inside the Annapurna Conservation Area, but road transport to Kathmandu and the Terai may be affected by any sudden upsurges in violence. As always, check the situation locally before you travel.

SIGHTS Phewa Tal

Spreading majestically westwards from Pokhara, Phewa Tal is the second-largest lake in Nepal. On calm days, the mountains of the Annapurna Range are perfectly reflected in the mirrored surface of the *tal*. Away from the shore, the water is clean and deep and the dense forest along the south side of the lake provides shelter for brilliant white egrets.

The best way to appreciate Phewa Tal is by rowboat – see p253. Many people walk or cycle around the lakeshore – the trek up to the World Peace Pagoda (see the boxed text p255 for details) affords breathtaking views over the *tal* and the mountains beyond.

Mountains

Most people come to Nepal for the Himalaya and Pokhara is one of the best places to get an up close view of the peaks. From west to east, the peaks are Hiunchuli (6441m), Annapurna I (8091m), Machhapuchhare (6997m), Annapurna III (7555m), Annapurna IV (7525m) and Annapurna II (7937m). The dramatic Annapurna Massif looms over the city and the lake. There are few places in town where you can't see one or other of the snow-capped peaks jutting up into the clear blue sky.

The skyline is dominated by Mt Machhapuchhare ('Fish Tail' in Nepali) – at 6997m, it's actually one of the smaller peaks of the Annapurna Range, but it looks taller as it's closer to Pokhara. If you walk for a few days along the Jomsom Trek you'll see the second summit that gives the mountain its name, hidden away behind the main peak.

If you get the chance, visit Sarangkot (p265) to see all the Annapurnas lined up against the horizon. Another good place to see the mountain vista is the World Peace Pagoda – you'll see all the peaks twice, reflected in the surface of the lake.

Old Pokhara

For a taste of what Pokhara was like before the rafting agencies and German bakeries set up shop, head to the old town (Map p248), north of Mahendra Pul. The best way to explore is on foot or by bike.

From the Nepal Telecoms building at Mahendra Pul, head north along Tersapati, passing a number of small **religious shops** selling Hindu and Buddhist paraphernalia. At the intersection with Nala Mukh, check out the **Newari houses** with decorative brickwork and carved wooden windows.

Continue north on Bhairab Tole to reach the small two-tiered **Bhimsen Temple**, a two hundred-year-old shrine to the Newari god of trade and commerce, decorated with erotic carvings. The surrounding square is full of shops selling baskets and ceramics.

About 200m further north is a small hill, topped by the ancient **Bindhya Basini Temple**. Founded in the 17th century, the temple is sacred to Durga, the warlike incarnation of Parvati, worshipped here in the form of a *saligram* (ammonite fossil).

Varahi Mandir

Pokhara's most famous Hindu temple, the two-tiered pagoda-style **Varahi Mandir** (Map

p257) stands on a small island near the Ratna Mandir (Royal Palace). Founded in the 18th century, the temple is dedicated to Vishnu in his boar incarnation, but it's been extensively renovated over the years. Rowboats to the temple (Rs 20) leave from near the city bus stand in Lakeside.

Karma Dubgyu Chokhorling Monastery

Overlooking Pokhara on the east side of the Seti River, this huge **gompa** (Map p248; ☎ daylight hr) is worth visiting just for the views. The main prayer hall has a gilded statue of Sakyamuni (the historical Buddha) and there are more Buddhist statues in the monastery gardens. To get here, take the road leading east across the river from Mahendra Pul.

In the same area is the hilltop **Bhadrakali Temple**, a two-tiered Newari-style mandir (Hindu temple) dedicated to the eight-armed Bhadrakali, one of several violent incarnations of Parvati. To get here, walk east from the Karma Dubgyu gompa and east right at the next two junctions.

Museums

GURKHA MUSEUM

Housed in a new building just north of Mahendra Pul and near to the KI Singh Bridge, this **museum** (Map p257; ☎ 541966; entry foreigner/SAARC/Nepali Rs 50/20/10; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Thu-Tue) focuses on the history and achievements of the famous Gurkha regiment – see the boxed text, below for more information on the Gurkhas.

SIMPLY THE BEST

It might seem like an odd leftover from the days of empire, but the British army maintains a recruiting centre on the outskirts of Pokhara. Every year, hundreds of young men from across Nepal come to Pokhara to put themselves through the rigorous selection process to become a Gurkha soldier.

Prospective recruits must perform a series of backbreaking physical tasks, including a 5km uphill run carrying 25kg of rocks in a traditional *doko* basket. Only the most physically fit and mentally dedicated individuals make it through – it is not unheard of for recruits to keep on running with broken bones in their determination to get selected.

The primary motivation for most recruits is money. The average daily wage in Nepal is less than one British pound, but Gurkha soldiers earn upwards of £1000 per month, with a commission lasting up to 16 years and a British Army pension for life, plus the option of becoming a British citizen on retirement.

Identified by their curved *khukuri* knives, Gurkhas are still considered one of the toughest fighting forces in the world. British Gurkhas have carried out peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Sierra Leone and Gurkha soldiers also form elite units of the Indian Army, the Singapore Police Force, and the personal bodyguard of the sultan of Brunei.

INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN MUSEUM

The newest cultural offering in Pokhara, this vast **museum** (Map p248; ☎ 525742; www.mountainmuseum.org; foreigner/SAARC/Nepali Rs 300/100/50; ☎ 9am-5pm) is devoted to the mountains of Nepal and the mountaineers who climbed them. Inside you can see original gear from many of the first Himalayan ascents, as well as displays on the history, culture, geology and flora and fauna of the Himalaya. The museum is south of the airstrip near the Himalaya Eye Hospital – a taxi from Lakeside will cost around Rs 400 return.

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

At the north end of town, in the Prithvi Narayan University campus, this **museum** (Map p248; ☎ 521102; admission free, donations appreciated; ☎ 9am-12.45pm & 1.30-5pm Sun-Thu 9am-12.45pm Fri) is devoted to the natural history of the Pokhara region. Local wildlife is represented by preserved specimens and some kooky-looking concrete models.

POKHARA REGIONAL MUSEUM

North of the bus station on the road to Mahendra Pul, this interesting little **museum** (Map p248; ☎ 520413; foreigner/SAARC/Nepali Rs 10/5/2; ☎ 10am-5pm, until 3pm Mon, closed Tue) is devoted to the history and culture of the Pokhara valley, including the mystical shamanic beliefs followed by the original inhabitants of the Pokhara Valley. There's an additional fee for cameras and video cameras. In winter, the museum closes an hour earlier, except on Fridays.

TAMU KOHIBO MUSEUM

Over on the east bank of the Seti River, this small but intriguing **museum** (Map p248; admission Rs 20; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is dedicated to the culture and customs of the Gurung (Tamu) people, the indigenous inhabitants of the Pokhara Valley, who follow a mix of animist, Shamanistic and Bonist beliefs, brought here from Tibet in the days before Buddhism. See p45 for more information on the Gurung people. To get here, cross the river via the small bridge just south of Mahendra Pul and head for the cluster of white towers on the side of the gorge.

Seti River Gorge

The roaring Seti River passes right through Pokhara, but you won't see it unless you

go looking. The river has carved a deep, narrow gorge through the middle of town, turning the water milky white in the process. At points, the gorge is less than a metre across and the river gushes by more than 50m below street level.

The best place to catch a glimpse of the Seti River is the **park** (Map p248; ☎ 7am-6pm, entry Rs 10) near the KI Singh Bridge, just north of old Pokhara on the road to Batulechaur. If you peer down through the darkness, you can just see the water churning through the gorge. Nearby is a small Buddhist gompa with friendly novice monks.

In the same area, you can get a dramatic view of the much larger **Phusre Khola Gorge** from the Phewa Power House – the track to the power station leaves the Butwal Hwy just south of Pardi Birauta Chowk, near the small road bridge. Locals come here in the afternoons to watch planes performing giddy turns as they come in to land at Pokhara's tiny airport.

Devi's Falls

Also known as Patale Chhango, this **waterfall** (Map p248; admission Rs 20/10 foreign/Nepali; ☎ 6am-6pm) marks the point where the Pardi Khola stream vanishes underground. When the stream is at full bore, the sound of the water plunging over the falls is deafening, but the concrete walkways don't add much to the atmosphere.

According to locals, the name is a corruption of David's Falls, a reference to a Swiss visitor who tumbled into the sinkhole and drowned, taking his girlfriend with him! The falls are about 2km southwest of the airport on the road to Butwal, just before the Tashi Ling Tibetan Village.

Gupteshwor Mahadev Cave

Across the road from Devi's Falls, this **Hindu cave** (Map p248; admission Rs 20, Rs 70 to falls viewpoint; ☎ 6am-6pm) contains a huge stalagmite worshiped as a Shiva lingam. The standard ticket only covers the temple, but you can pay extra to clamber through a low tunnel behind the shrine, emerging in a damp cavern behind the thundering waters of Devi's Falls. If you look at the ceiling of the cave, you can see branches and other detritus, forced into cracks by the force of the waters when the cave floods every monsoon.

Tibetan Settlements

Most of the Tibetan refugees who hawk souvenirs in Lakeside live in the Tibetan refugee settlements north and south of Pokhara. Both settlements make interesting detours from Pokhara by bike, bus or on foot.

The largest settlement is **Tashi Palkhel** (Map p266), a few kilometres north of Pokhara on the road to Baglung. The colourful **Jangchub Choeling Gompa** in the middle of the village is home to around 100 monks and masked dances are held here in January/February as part of the annual Losar (Tibetan New Year) celebrations. To reach the gompa you have to run the gauntlet past an arcade of persistent handicraft vendors. Nearby is a *chörten* piled with carved mani stones bearing Buddhist mantras and a carpet weaving centre, where you can see all stages of the process and buy the finished article.

Heading southwest from Pokhara on the road to Butwal, you'll come to the smaller **Tashi Ling Tibetan Village** (Map p248). There are several shops selling momos and Tibetan carpets and handicrafts, plus the small **Shree Gaden Dargay Ling Gompa**.

ACTIVITIES

Boating

If the commercialism of Lakeside gets too much, just head out onto the calm waters of Phewa Tal. Colourful wooden *doongas* (rowboats) are available for rent at several boat stations, including near the city bus stand and next to the Fewa Hotel. Rates start at Rs 200 per hour with a boatman, or RS 140/500 per hour/day if you row yourself. You can also rent plastic pedalos (Rs 250 per hour) and miniature sailboats (Rs 200 per hour). If you are boating alone near Damside, keep well away from the dam wall.

Cycling

Pokhara is fairly flat and the traffic is quite light once you get away from the main highway – perfect for cycling. Indian mountain bikes are available from dozens of places on the strip in Lakeside for Rs 20/100 per hour/day. For a description of the day-long or overnight bike ride out to Sarangkot and Naudanda see p88. Contact any of the Lakeside travel agents for details of mountain biking trips in the hills around Pokhara.

Golf

Golfers can hire everything they need at **Himalayan Golf** (Map p266; ☎ 577204; green fees 9/18 holes US\$30/45), about 7km east of Pokhara. There's also a nine-hole golf course at the luxurious Fulbari Resort – see p261.

Horse Riding

Travel agents in Pokhara offer pony treks to various viewpoints around town, including Sarangkot, Kahun Danda and the World Peace Pagoda. Half-day trips (US\$10) stick to the lakeshore; you'll need a full day (US\$19) to reach the viewpoints.

Kayaking & Rafting

Another popular way to explore Phewa Tal is by kayak. **Ganesh Kayak Shop** (Map p257; ☎ 522657; ☎ 8am-9pm) near Moondance Restaurant rents out decent plastic kayaks for Rs 150/650 per hour/day and offers longer kayaking safaris around Nepal.

Pokhara is a good place to organise rafting trips, particularly trips down the Kali Gandaki and Seti Rivers, but also kayak clinics on the Seti River and the scenic drift down the Narayani River to Royal Chitwan National Park. See p92 for more information. Reliable rafting operators include:

Himalayan Encounters (Map p257; ☎ 520873; rafting&trekking@himenko.wlink.com.np)

Swissa/Raging River Runners (Map p257; ☎ 526839; www.swissatrazel.com)

Ultimate Descents/Adventure Centre Asia (Map p257; ☎ 523240; www.upnepal.com)

Massage

Trekkers with aching muscles can get traditional Ayurvedic massage at several places in Lakeside. Next to the Koto restaurant, **Natural Health Center** (Map p257; ☎ 538624) offers Shiatsu and reflexology as well as the usual herbal rubs (from Rs 700 per hour).

Meditation & Yoga

Pokhara is a great spot to contemplate the nature of the universe and several centres around the lake offer meditation and yoga training.

Ganden Yiga Chopen Meditation Centre (Pokhara Buddhist Meditation Centre; Map p257; ☎ 522923; pokharacentre@yahoo.com) This place holds three-day meditation and yoga courses (Rs 3000) as well as daily sessions at 10am (Rs 200) and 5pm (Rs 150). It's down a lane in Lakeside North near the Hungry Feel Restaurant.

Nepali Yoga Center (Map p257; ☎ 532407; www.nepaliyoga.com) Near the Hotel Octagon, this place holds daily Hatha yoga classes (Rs 300, 1½ hours) at 7.30am and 4.30pm and various longer courses can be arranged.

Sadhana Yoga (Map p266; ☎ 542601; www.sadhana-yoga.org.np) This friendly and secluded retreat is hidden away on a ridge overlooking Phewa Tal, about 2.5km northwest of Lakeside. The energetic Asanga offers one- to six-day courses in Hatha yoga for Rs 1600 per day, including tuition, steam and mud baths, accommodation and meals. Call for directions.

Microlight Flights

Based near the Hotel Snowland, **Avia Club Nepal** (Map p257; ☎ 540338; www.avianepal.21bc.net) offers exhilarating microlight flights around the Pokhara Valley. In 15 minutes (US\$65), you can buzz around the World Peace Pagoda and lakeshore, but you'll need 30 minutes (US\$112) or one hour (US\$198) to get up above Sarangkot for the full Himalayan panorama.

Paragliding

Paragliding from the top of Sarangkot must be one of the most exciting experiences in the Himalaya. **Sunrise Paragliding** (Map p257; ☎ 521 174; www.nepal-paragliding.com) offers 30-minute flights exploring the thermals above Sarangkot (US\$75) and one-hour cross-country jumps across the valley north towards Annapurna (US\$120). **Blue Sky Paragliding** (☎ 534737; www.paragliding-nepal.ch) is the other big operator. See p79 for more details.

If conventional paragliding fails to thrill, there's always parahawking. Invented by British falconer Scott Mason, parahawking is an unlikely combination of falconry and paragliding where eagles and pariah kites are trained to lead gliders to the best thermal currents (see p79 for more details). If you want to literally soar with the eagles, you'll need to train up as a solo paraglider first – paragliding centres in Lakeside can start you on your way. Less brave souls can see the avian guides at their roost at Maya Devi Village on the northern shore of Phewa Tal (see right).

Swimming

The cool waters of Phewa Tal are perfect for a dip but there's a fair bit of pollution around at Lakeside so walk around to the northern shore or hire a boatman to take you out onto the lake. Watch out for cur-

rents wherever you swim and don't get too close to the dam in Damside.

The only public pool in the area is the open-air **Penguin Pool** (Map p266; ☎ 527470, 522275; admission Rs 100; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6.30pm, closed Nov to Jan), a few kilometres north of Pokhara along the road to Baglung.

Several upmarket hotels let nonguests swim in their pool for a fee. In Lakeside, **Hotel Barahi** (see p258) charges Rs 200; **Shangri-la Village** (see p261) charges Rs 565 including a buffet lunch (weekends only).

Walking

Even if you don't have the energy or perhaps the inclination to attempt the mighty Annapurna Circuit, there are plenty of short walks in the hills around Pokhara. If you just want to stretch your legs and escape the crowds, just stroll along the north shore of Phewa Tal. A dirt road leads west along the shoreline to the village of Pame Bazar, where you can pick up a bus back to Pokhara.

Another possible hike is the three-hour trip to the viewpoint at **Kahun Danda** (1560m) on the east side of the Seti River. There's a modern viewing tower on the crest of the hill, built over the ruins of an 18th century *kot* (hill-fort). The easiest trail to follow begins near the Manipal Teaching Hospital in Phulbari – ask for directions at the base of the hill. You can also get up here by pony (see p253).

One of the most popular walks around Pokhara is the trip to the World Peace Pagoda (see opposite). For longer walks in the Pokhara area see p268.

TOURS

Travel agents in Pokhara can arrange local tours and activities, but it's just as easy to rent a bike or motorcycle and do things under your own steam – see p253 and p250 for some suggestions.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Every August, Pokhara's Newari community celebrates **Bagh Jatra**, which recalls the slaying of a deadly marauding tiger. Gurungs celebrate **Tamu Dhee** (Trahonte) at around the same time, beating drums to drive away evil spirits. August is also time for **Gai Jatra**, when cows are decorated with paint and garlands, and villagers perform

WALKING TO THE WORLD PEACE PAGODA

Balanced on a narrow ridge high above Phewa Tal, the brilliant-white World Peace Pagoda was constructed by Buddhist monks from the Japanese Nipponzan Myohoji organisation to promote world peace. There are three paths up to the pagoda and several small cafés for snacks and drinks once you arrive, but be warned that there have been muggings on the trails in the past. Check the latest situation before you head off. Lone women are particularly at risk because of the perception, justified or otherwise, that they are an easy target.

The Direct Route (One hour)

The most obvious route up to the pagoda begins on the south bank of Phewa Tal, behind the Fewa Resort. Boatmen charge around Rs 200 to the trailhead from Lakeside and the path leads straight up the hillside on cut stone steps. Ignore the right-hand fork by the small temple and continue uphill through woodland to reach the ridge just west of the pagoda. You can either continue on to Pokhara via the scenic route (described below) or go back the way you came.

The Scenic Route (Two hours)

A more interesting route to the pagoda begins near the footbridge over the Pardi Khola, just south of the Phewa dam. After crossing the bridge, the trail skirts the edge of padi fields before turning uphill into the forest near a small brick temple. From here, the trail climbs for about 2km through gorgeous open *sal* forest and follows the ridge west. When you reach a clearing with several ruined stone houses, turn left and climb straight uphill to reach the flat, open area in front of the pagoda. An alternative start point for this route is Devi's Falls – a small but obvious trail crosses the padi fields behind the falls and runs up to meet the main path at the bottom of the forest.

The Easy Route (20 minutes)

For views without the fuss, take a local bus from the public bus stand to Kalimati on the road to Butwal for Rs 5. Several small trails lead up from the road to the school in Kalimati village and on to the entrance to the pagoda.

dances to bring peace to the souls of the departed. See p363 for more.

Tibetan Buddhists hold celebrations and masked dances at *gompas* (monasteries) around Pokhara to celebrate **Losar** (Tibetan New Year) in January/February and **Buddha Jayanti** (Buddha's birthday) in April/May. Every April in Basundhara Park, the popular **Annapurna Festival** features dance, music and stalls serving regional foods.

SLEEPING

Most people stay near the lake in Lakeside, a nonstop strip of hotels, budget guesthouses, travel agents, traveller restaurants and souvenir shops. People looking for peace and quiet tend to head to the north end of the strip or skip Lakeside altogether in favour of Damside.

Most hotels in Pokhara have a garden and almost all offer rooms with ceiling fans and hot showers, either in private or shared bathrooms. However, showers tend to be

solar-powered, which means no hot water in the morning. Midrange places and better budget hotels provide cable TV, phones and air-con. At the top end, expect the full range of international luxury facilities.

Hotels at the budget end of the spectrum tend not to bother with tax, but midrange and top end hotels add 13% to the bill for VAT and service. Many places list prices in US dollars, but you can always pay in rupees.

Lakeside

As the main traveller centre in Pokhara, Lakeside is packed with hotels – the following hotels are the current pick of the bunch but new places open up all the time so talk to other travellers for recommendations. Take care of your valuables and shut your windows before going out – there have been thefts in the past.

Several of the larger lodges will let you camp in the gardens for a fee, or you can

Top End

There's really only one top-end choice in Lakeside.

Fish Tail Lodge (Map p257; ☎ 526428; www.fish-tail-lodge.com.np; s/d US\$95/105, deluxe US\$110/120, monsoon discounts of 25%; 🏠 🚿 🚿) Reached by a rope-drawn pontoon from Basundhara Park, Fish Tail is charmingly understated and rooms are housed in low slate-roofed bungalows in a lush tropical garden. Its probably the most sensitively designed building in Pokhara and facilities include an outdoor pool and an excellent restaurant and bar (open to nonguests for lunch and dinner). Rooms 16, 17 and 18 have excellent lake and mountain views but you'll need to book well in advance.

CENTRAL LAKESIDE

This is the heart of the action at Lakeside and you're never more than 20 metres from a budget hotel, traveller restaurant, travel agent or Tibetan souvenir shop.

Budget

Sacred Valley Inn (Map p257; ☎ 531792; svalley@cnet.wlink.com.np; r with bathroom US\$8-12, upstairs US\$15-20, discounts of 20%) Set in a tidy garden across from the Royal Palace, Sacred Valley is a long-established traveller favourite. All the rooms are well maintained and those upstairs have gleaming marble floors and windows on two sides, allowing in plenty of light.

Hotel Snowland (Map p257; ☎ 520384; snowland@cnet.wlink.com.np; rear wing s/d US\$15/20, deluxe US\$35/45, super deluxe US\$55/65, discounts of 30%) Close to the Royal Palace and the city bus stand, the inviting Snowland is a midrange hotel with budget prices. You don't get much of a garden, but you do get huge, clean rooms with red-hot power showers and a calm and relaxing atmosphere.

Yeti Guest House (Map p257; ☎ 520394; r with/without bathroom from Rs 300/250) Some places have a good feel about them from the moment you walk in the door. Yeti is set back from the strip in a large, shady patio garden, rooms are neat and bathrooms are massive. It's often full so book ahead.

Noble Inn (Map p257; ☎ 524926; www.nobleinn.com; r with/without bathroom from Rs 400/250, ste US\$15) About 50m along the alley beside Hotel Meera, this big, airy place is excellent value. Plenty of cool air moves through the building and the garden is a delight.

Butterfly Lodge (Map p257; ☎ 522892; pahari_govinda@hotmail.com; dm Rs 150, r with/without bathroom from Rs 500/200) Spread over several Newari-style buildings down the alley beside 7-Eleven, this lodge feels a bit like a miniature mountain village. Some of the money goes to supporting local children.

Hotel Temple Villa (Map p257; ☎ 521203; templevilla_hotel@hotmail.com; d with/without bathroom from US\$10/6, discounts of 30%) A few doors down, Temple Villa feels a bit like a posh family home. The garden is full of exotic butterflies and the bedrooms are spacious and nicely furnished, with large marble bathrooms.

Hotel Octagon (Map p257; ☎ 526978; hoteloctagon@hotmail.com; r with/without bathroom US\$10/5, discounts of 20%) Down the same alley, you can't miss this odd-looking octagonal building. Rooms are spotless, showers are hot and the building is carpeted throughout (shoes should be left outside).

Nature's Grace Lodge (Map p257; ☎ 527220; d with/without bathroom Rs 250/150) Nearby, this simple place has a shady garden and a small guest lounge at the back. It's colourful and clean inside and some of the larger rooms have small divan seating areas.

Midrange

Hotel Fewa (Map p257; ☎ 520151; mike@fewa.mos.com.np; s/d US\$15/30, s/d cottage US\$20/35, discounts of 30%) Run by Mike Frame of Mike's Breakfast fame, this appealing midrange place has a fine location on the lakeshore in central Lakeside. The best rooms are in stone cottages in the garden, styled after Nepali village houses.

Hotel Barahi (Map p257; ☎ 523017; www.barahi.com; s/d US\$32/41, s/d deluxe US\$65/81, discounts of 35%; 🏠 🚿) A surprisingly refined option in this part of Lakeside, Hotel Barahi has a large, lovely pool and smart air-con rooms with small balconies. The stone-clad buildings make it look a bit like a Swiss ski chalet and there's a pool and a popular and upbeat cultural show.

Hotel Stupa (Map p257; ☎ 522608; hstupa@yahoo.com; s/d US\$25/40, discounts of 40%) This big stone-clad place on the alley beside Hotel Mountain Top has a pleasing air of grandeur. Rooms are swish and there are balconies on every level. Look for the miniature statues of the stupa at Bodhnath.

Hotel Khukuri (Map p257; ☎ 532549; www.samrattravel.com/hotel; r US\$10, r with air-con US\$30, discounts

of 30%; 🏠) Down the alley near 7-Eleven, this smart-looking place attracts lots of Indian tourists on package tours. Rooms are bright and spacious and there's the inevitable rooftop terrace.

Hotel Blue Heaven (Map p257; ☎ 532647; s/d from US\$15/22; discounts of 30%; 🏠) Just north of Camping Chowk, Blue Heaven is a monumental blue building that gets the best of the views by being taller than all its neighbours. It's not the most sensitive development, but it's a favourite of Indian travellers and rooms are very snug.

Hotel Hungry Eye (Map p257; ☎ 520908; bikramyoshiya@hotmail.com; r US\$15, r with air-con US\$30, discounts of 30%; 🏠) This hotel was one of the first hotels at Lakeside and it's maturing nicely rather than growing old. Rooms are above the Hungry Eye Restaurant and have all the expected midrange mod cons, including spotless tiled bathrooms.

Hotel Meera (Map p257; ☎ 521031; meera@cnet.wlink.com.np; s with/without bathroom US\$30/7, d with/without bathroom US\$40/10, discounts of 40%; 🏠) A huge place covered in New England-style shingles, Hotel Meera attracts an older crowd looking for peace and quiet. There's a good restaurant in a secluded courtyard and rooms have decent midrange facilities.

LAKESIDE NORTH

Things become simpler, quieter, cheaper as you head northwest from Camping Chowk. Call ahead before traipsing out here with all your baggage.

Budget

Banana Garden Lodge (Map p257; ☎ 542401; s/d Rs 80/100) The best and brightest of the budget guesthouses, Banana Garden benefits from genial owners and a lovingly maintained garden. There are two shared solar-heated showers and the owners provide home-style Nepali meals.

Namaste Lodge (Map p257; r without bathroom Rs 100) Next door, Namaste offers simple rooms with two or three beds and ceiling fans, facing the lake. Rooms are smarter upstairs than down.

View Point Lodge (Map p257; ☎ 526218; r with/without bathroom Rs 150/120) Perched above the lakeshore on a small bluff, this charming guesthouse is one of the last old-fashioned traveller hang-outs. Guests tend to be bookish types in search of peace and quiet and

you can swim in the cooling waters of the tal right in front of the lodge. Rooms are basic but clean and some have gorgeous lake views; there's also a brilliant restaurant.

Green Peace Lodge (Map p257; ☎ 532780; r with/without bathroom Rs 150, d with bathroom from Rs 300) Very similar, Green Peace has two buildings, a rustic lodge overlooking the lake and a larger guesthouse set amongst the padi fields 100m west on the road to Pame Bazar.

Chhetri Sisters Guest House (Map p257; ☎ 524066; trek@3sistersadventure.com; dm Rs 200, r with bathroom Rs 400-700) Much smarter than the surrounding hotels, this tidy brick guesthouse is owned the same people as Chhetri Sisters Trekking. Rooms are tasteful, the location is peaceful and there's a small atrium garden.

Vienna Lake Lodge (Map p257; ☎ 528228; r with bathroom Rs 150, with views Rs 250-350) Up a small track at the north end of the lakeshore development, this spic and span guesthouse has small, bright rooms and balconies full of pot plants looking out over the lake.

Sun Welcome Lodge (Map p257; ☎ 531732; r without bathroom Rs 100) The most inviting of several cheap places on a track leading inland by the Panorama Restaurant. Don't expect the Ritz as rooms contain just a bed and a fan.

DAMSIDE

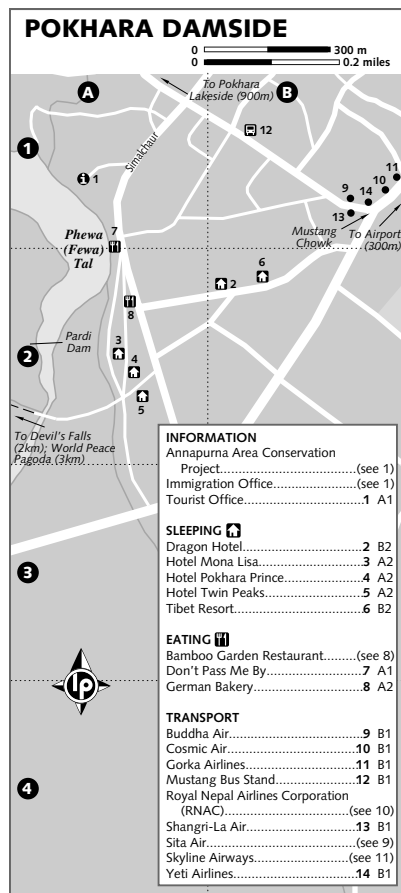
The area around the Phewa dam is officially known as Pardi, but most people call it Damside. This was one of the first areas to be developed for tourists but with visitor numbers falling, it feels pretty quiet these days. It takes longer than you might think to walk to Lakeside – it's worth investing in a rental bike or motorcycle.

Budget

Rooms at all the following hotels have private bathrooms unless otherwise stated.

Hotel Pokhara Prince (Map p260; ☎ 532632; roshan_tamang@yahoo.com; r Rs 500, discounts of 20%) Near the start of the trail to the World Peace Pagoda, this modern, crazy-paved place has marble floors throughout and small balconies with mountain views. It's not bad value and the bathrooms have tubs and reliably hot showers.

Hotel Twin Peaks (Map p260; ☎ 522867; www.pokharainfo.com; s/d from US\$8/12, discounts of 30%) Supported by the Pahar Trust, a charity run by ex-Gurkha soldiers, Hotel Twin Peaks feels a bit like a family home. It's spread



yard, Dragon Hotel is a Pokhara survivor. A timely renovation has raised standards to their old levels and the foyer is full of Tibetan knick-knacks.

Tibet Resort (Map p260; ☎ 520853; tibetres@net.wlink.com.np; s/d with bathroom US\$23/34, discounts of 40%; 🍷) Set back from the road in a huge garden full of marigolds, Tibet Resort has mountain views and an air of peace and seclusion. Rooms are homely and there's a restaurant upstairs.

Elsewhere

You don't have to stay by the lake. There are several hotels inland by the airport and a selection of big luxury places outside the centre by the Seti River or high in the hills above town.

WESTERN SHORE

If you want to escape the tourist bustle of Lakeside, there are two peaceful getaways on the southern shore of the lake.

Fewa Resort (Map p266; ☎ 520885; s/d with bathroom US\$15/25, discounts of 20%) Right on the lakeshore on the south bank of Phewa Tal, this is the place to come for blissful peace and quiet. Rooms are simple but inviting and each has a massive sun deck facing the lake. Call ahead for transfers from Lakeside.

Raniban Retreat (Map p266; ☎ 531713, 522219; www.raniban.co.uk/ranibanretreat.html; s/d with bathroom US\$45/50) Along the ridge from the World Peace Pagoda, this secluded hilltop guesthouse is made up of several attractive stone cottages with awe-inspiring views over the lake and mountains. It's a genuine retreat and all sorts of activities can be arranged by the friendly staff. Call ahead for directions.

AIRPORT AREA

There are a few midrange and top end places near the airport.

Hotel Mount Annapurna (Map p248; ☎ 520037; lodrik@mos.com.np; s/d with bathroom from US\$20/30, discounts of 30%; 🍷) Tibetan-owned and decked out with Tibetan knick-knacks, this '60s-style place is faded but friendly and it's very convenient for the airport. Rooms are plain but well-appointed and there's a large walled garden.

New Hotel Crystal (Map p248; ☎ 520035; s/d from US\$62/72, discounts of 40%; 🍷) Almost opposite the airport, this sprawling place was once the poshest hotel in town, but it's show-

ing its age these days. Nevertheless, rooms are bright and well-appointed and there's a gloriously chintzy bar, backed by a mural of Bhairab's teeth.

Shangri-la Village (Map p248; ☎ 522122; www.hotelshangri-la.com; r with bathroom US\$180; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Close to the Seti River, about 1km southeast of the airport, the Shangri-la is a peaceful haven with a wonderful secluded swimming pool. The tasteful rooms are contained in several imaginatively-designed stone buildings and there are glorious mountain views from the gardens. Other luxury facilities include a fine-dining restaurant, sauna and health spa. Ask about discounts during the monsoon.

OUTSKIRTS

If money is no object, there are several luxury resorts hidden away in the hills around Pokhara. Discounts may be available during the monsoon.

Fulbari Resort (Map p266; ☎ 523451; www.fulbari.com; s/d from US\$140/150; 🍷 🍷 🍷) South of Pokhara on the east bank of the Seti River, the Fulbari is a vast, five-star resort hotel. It's far enough from town for uninterrupted mountain views and inside you'll find every conceivable luxury, including a huge pool, health spa and golf club.

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge (Map p266; ☎ 01-4361500 in Kathmandu; www.tigermountain.com; cottages per person US\$100; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Set on a lofty ridge, Tiger Mountain is about 10km east of town. It's owned by the same team as Tiger Tops at Chitwan and the owners have made a real effort to make the place blend into the surroundings. Rooms are contained in stylish stone bungalows and there's a wonderful mountain-view swimming pool. Rates include meals and transfers to/from Pokhara.

EATING

Pokhara has dozens of restaurants and cafés serving up Western, Nepali and Indian food to hungry travellers and trekkers. Almost every restaurant has the same menu – expect daal bhaat (Nepali plate meals with lentils and rice), momos (Tibetan dumplings), macaroni, pizza and spaghetti, tandoori chicken, chicken in a basket, nachos and burritos, steaks, fish (from the lake) and chips and *rosti* (Swiss potato pancakes).

As well as the following restaurants, there are dozens of ultracheap local canteens offer-

ing momos, chow mein (fried noodles), daal bhaat and fresh fruit juices. Most are fine but do insist on purified water for juices.

Unless otherwise stated, the following restaurants are open from 8am to 10pm.

Lakeside

Lakeside has the best of the traveller restaurants and bars.

LAKESIDE EAST

Caffe Concerto (Map p257; pizzas Rs 120-180) Potted marigolds and jazz on the stereo add to the bistro atmosphere at this cosy Italian place. The thin-crust pizzas are the best in town, wine is available by the glass and the *gelato* (Italian ice cream) is delicious.

Lhasa Tibetan Restaurant (Map p257; meals from Rs 100-250) Piped temple music adds atmosphere at this big Tibetan place near the Royal Palace. The menu runs through familiar momos and *thugpa* (noodle soup) territory and you can warm up after dinner with a tankard of *tongba* (warm millet beer).

Laxman Restaurant & Bar (Map p257; dishes from Rs 90) With video movies, a good selection of north Indian curries and not one but two open fires, Laxman is a great choice for lunch or dinner.

La Bella Napoli (Map p257; pizzas & pasta from Rs 120) Another stalwart on the strip, this traveller restaurant tries its hand at everything. The pizzas and pasta are tasty and good value.

Fish Tail Lodge (Map p257; ☎ 526428; buffet breakfast Rs 525, buffet lunch or dinner Rs 700; 🍷 6am-10pm) The restaurant at the Fish Tail Lodge offers a feast of an evening buffet in exclusive surroundings, over on the south bank of the lake. On clear days, it's worth coming here for a drink in the garden.

CENTRAL LAKESIDE

Moondance Restaurant (Map p257; dishes Rs 80-350) Good service, good food and a roaring open fire all contribute to the popularity of this upmarket-looking place near the palace. The menu features salads, pizzas, steaks and decent Indian curries. There are pool tables upstairs but watch the spiral staircase after a few beers.

New Everest Steak House (Map p257; steaks Rs 175-350) Carnivores flock to this old-fashioned steak house for two-inch thick hunks of freshly grilled beef. Steaks come with a carnival of sauces, but purists go for the

over two buildings linked by a walkway and some rooms have mountain views.

Hotel Mona Lisa (Map p260; ☎ 520863/523680; s with/without bathroom US\$20/6, d with/without bathroom US\$25/10, discounts of) The best and brightest of several similar places in this area, Mona Lisa tempts Japanese visitors with brightly coloured rooms and lounges with low *kokatsu* tables and cushions.

Midrange

There are just a few midrange choices near the dam.

Dragon Hotel (Map p260; ☎ 520391; dragon@mos.com.np; s/d with private bathroom Rs 600/700, with bathtub Rs 700/800, discounts of 20%; 🍷) A huge building reached through a private court-

'half steak' – just grilled meat, veg and fries. Steaks come quite rare – ask for 'well done' unless you like it bloody.

Koto (Map p257; mains Rs 100-300 ☎ 11.30am-3pm & 6-9pm) The Pokhara branch of this popular Kathmandu chain (see p145), never seems that busy but the Japanese food is faultless. The teriyaki beef is highly recommended.

Bistro Caroline (Map p257; mains Rs 90-250) Run by the same people as Chez Caroline in Kathmandu (see p150), this swanky place targets older travellers. It's more a place for a quiet romantic dinner than a noisy evening in the company of strangers but the European, Indian and Nepali food is excellent and there's a good wine list.

Pokhara Thakali Kitchen (Map p257; mains Rs 60-300; ☎ 11am-9pm) Attached to the Trek-O-Tel, this upmarket Nepali restaurant specialises in the traditional cuisine of the Mustang valley and the menu includes regional delicacies such as dried meat rolled in buckwheat.

Hungry Eye Restaurant & Bar (Map p257; mains Rs 75-350) Close to the Royal Palace, the restaurant at the Hungry Eye Hotel is a long-standing survivor. It looks a bit dated but the food is good and there's a popular cultural show from 6.30pm daily.

Punjabi Restaurant (Map p257; curries Rs 40-200) An authentic, Punjabi-run place churning out tasty vegetarian curries and tandoori breads. The front dining room has quite a lot of character and the vegetarian curries with paneer (Indian cheese) are excellent.

Indian Restaurant (Map p257) A little further along the strip, this place serves similarly good food but it has less atmosphere.

Boomerang Restaurant & German Bakery (Map p257; main dishes Rs 80-350) Probably the best of the 'garden and dinner show' places in central Lakeside, Boomerang has a large, shady garden and cultural shows nightly from 7pm. The roadside bakery is also popular – see the entry for Drinking.

Fewa Park Restaurant Located next door to the Boomerang, Fewa Park Restaurant is almost identical.

Tea Time Bamboostan (Map p257; mains Rs 100-300) This place probably wins the prize for the most imaginative name in Pokhara. It's small and cosy and evenings feature DVD movies and cold bottles of Tuborg and Everest beer. The food isn't bad either.

Rice Bowl Tibetan Restaurant (Map p257; mains Rs 80-200) This inexpensive and laid-back place

opens till late, serving decent Tibetan staples like momos and *thugpa*.

Lemon Tree (Map p257; meals Rs 100-300) Quite smart and sophisticated, Lemon Tree has a broader menu than most and excellent service. It's one of the few restaurants in central Lakeside to serve fresh lake fish.

LAKESIDE NORTH

Things get decidedly quieter as you go north of Camping Chowk, but **Sweet Memories** and **Laughing Buddha** offer the usual traveller standards.

Hungry Feel Restaurant (Map p257; meals Rs 50-150; ☎ 8am-9pm) North of Lakeside on the road to Pame Bazaar, this welcoming Nepali-style restaurant sits right on the water. Views are the main attraction but the chef cooks up a mean curried lake fish.

Damside

Most people staying in Damside eat in their hotel, but there's a branch of the **German Bakery** chain for breakfast buns and a few traveller restaurants on the road to Birauta Chowk.

Bamboo Garden Restaurant (Map p260; mains Rs 90-200) Above the German Bakery, this laid-back place serves all the usual traveller favourites and the terrace catches evening breezes.

Don't Pass Me By (Map p260; mains Rs 100-250) A cosy little restaurant on the edge of the lake, where you can sit outside and enjoy pretty good travellers' fare at reasonable prices.

DRINKING Bars

Pokhara nightlife generally winds down around 10pm, but if you've just come back from the hills and you want to party late, a handful of bars flaunt the rules and rock till around midnight. Local bands move from bar to bar on a nightly rotation, playing covers of Western rock hits.

Club Amsterdam (Map p257; ☎ 11am-midnight) An old favourite on the strip, Club Amsterdam is lively and loud. Head out to the firepit in the garden if you want a quiet conversation.

Club Paradise (Map p257; ☎ noon-11.30pm) Loud and brash may be just what you are looking for after weeks in the hills. Club Paradise has a pool table and deafening pop and it pulls in as many local teenagers as foreigners.

Busy Bee Café (Map p257; ☎ 10am-11.30pm) Down an alley opposite the Maya Restau-

rant, Busy Bee is a relatively new arrival on the Pokhara scene. Live bands play on a cramped stage inside, but most drinkers hang out by the fire in the cosy courtyard.

7-Eleven Bar (Map p257; ☎ 6pm-11pm) Just before Camping Chowk, this is a dark bar with loud Hindi pop. It's popular with Indian visitors, less so with Westerners.

Cafés

There are plenty of cafés along the strip in Lakeside where you can sit back with a book and snacks, pastries and a reasonable interpretation of a proper cup of coffee. The following cafés open at around 7am.

Pumpernickel Bakery (Map p257; cakes & sandwiches Rs 20-100) Down an alley off the main drag, this down to earth place has a quiet garden where you can read and munch on sticky cakes with convincing coffee.

Boomerang Restaurant & German Bakery (Map p257; breakfast from Rs 50) The bakery in front of the Boomerang Restaurant serves up fresh baked cakes and buns and decent coffee. There are two other German Bakery branches in Lakeside and one in Damside.

Mike's Restaurant (Map p257; sandwiches Rs 100 to Rs 140) Another enterprise by Mike of Mike's Breakfast in Kathmandu, this lakeside café at Hotel Fewa serves good tea and coffee and gourmet sandwiches.

Sheela Bakery & Coffee Shop (Map p257; sandwiches & cakes from Rs 40) Right by Camping Chowk, this popular little bakery tempts early risers with cakes and freshly-baked baguettes.

If you run out of steam on the walk to Pame Bazaar, **Maya Devi Village** (p266) serves daal bhaat and cold drinks and you can see the parhawks at their roost.

ENTERTAINMENT

Dozens of restaurants and bars offer cheap beers and pirate DVDs of the latest Hollywood blockbusters. Just walk along the strip at Lakeside to see which venues are pulling in a crowd.

Another option is to take in a Nepali cultural show in Lakeside. Several restaurants along the strip have nightly song and dance shows that are enthusiastic, if not entirely authentic. There's no additional charge and most shows start at 6.30pm or 7pm – try **Fewa Park Restaurant**, **Boomerang Restaurant** or **Hungry Eye Restaurant** (see p261).

In Central Lakeside, **Hotel Barahi** (p258) has an upmarket evening buffet dinner and cultural show from 6.30pm (US\$10). If you reserve a table early, you can use the pool for free during the day.

Next to the Baglung bus park, the **Kalpina Cinema Hall** (Map p248; ☎ 520157) screens Nepali films and Bollywood imports, plus the occasional Western blockbuster.

SHOPPING

If you've been to Thamel in Kathmandu, you know what to expect. Dozens of traveller boutiques in Lakeside sell pirate CDs, Buddhist masks, prayer flags, counterfeit trekking gear, Kashmiri carpets, Indian wall hangings, Nepali *khukuri* knives and antiques of dubious antiquity. Pokhara is also a good place to pick up *saligrams* – fossilised sea creatures from the Kali Gandaki valley – but these are often overpriced.

Close to the Royal Palace in Lakeside East, **Dhukuti** (Map p257; www.acp.org.np; ☎ 9am-7pm, from 10am Sat/Sun) sells an interesting selection of arts and crafts produced by village cooperatives around Nepal, and prices are fixed.

As well as the shops in Lakeside, legions of Tibetan refugee women wander from restaurant to restaurant offering Tibetan knick-knacks for sale. For a better selection of Tibetan arts and crafts, including hand-made carpets, head to the Tashi Palkhel and Tashi Ling Tibetan communities north and south of Pokhara – see p253.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Pokhara has good bus and air links to other parts of the country, but overland routes are often affected by the security situation in the country. Check locally before making any long journeys by bus.

Air

Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC; ☎ 521021) and several private airlines offer regular daily shuttle flights between Kathmandu and Pokhara (US\$65 to US\$76, 20 minutes). There are great Himalayan views if you sit on the right-hand side of the plane heading into Pokhara (or the left, on the way to Kathmandu).

RNAC and **Gorkha Airlines** (☎ 525971) also offer flights to Jomsom (from US\$54, 20 minutes), on the Annapurna Circuit trail. RNAC also has a flight to Manang (US\$54,

25 minutes). The only flights to the Terai are the four weekly RNAC shuttle flights to Bharatpur (US\$44, 20 minutes).

All the airlines have offices opposite the airport near Mustang Chowk but it's usually easier to get one of the travel agents in Lakeside to do the running around for a ticket. The domestic departure tax from Pokhara is Rs 170.

Bus

There are three bus stations in Pokhara. The dusty and chaotic main public bus stand at the northeast end of the Pokhara airstrip has buses to Kathmandu and towns in the Terai. The main ticket office is at the back and the office for night buses is at the top of the steps near the main highway.

Tourist buses to Kathmandu and Royal Chitwan National Park leave from the Mustang bus stand at Mustang Chowk, while buses to the trailheads for the Annapurna Conservation Area leave from the **Baglung bus park** (Map p248), about 2km north of the centre on the main highway.

Day buses run from around 5am to noon, while night buses leave between 4pm and 6pm. However, night services only run during lulls in violence between Maoist rebels and the government.

TO/FROM KATHMANDU

The bus trip between Kathmandu and Pokhara takes six to eight hours, depending on the condition of the road and the number of army checkpoints along the way. All buses make a stop at a roadside restaurant along the way.

Tourist buses are the most hassle-free option – in Pokhara buses leave from the Mustang bus stand near Lakeside. It costs Rs 250 to Rs 300, depending on which travel agent you book with, buses leave at 7am from either end. Taxis meet the tourist buses on arrival but watch out for touts.

Greenline (Map p257; ☎ 531472; www.catmando.com/greenline) has a daily air-con bus to Thamel (US\$12, with breakfast) at 7.30am from its depot in Lakeside South. **Golden Travels** (Map p257; ☎ 523096) has a similar service to Durbar Marg in central Kathmandu, leaving from the Mustang bus stand at 7.30am (US\$10/12 with/without lunch).

Public buses to Kathmandu (day/night Rs 190/210) leave from the main public

bus station. Faster minibuses run to Kathmandu (Kalanki) for Rs 325. In Pokhara, you can pick up minibuses on the highway in front of the public bus stand.

Stops along the road to Kathmandu include Dumre (Rs 75, two hours), Abu Khairani (Rs 90, three hours) and Mugling/Manakamana (Rs 95, four hours). There are also four daily direct buses to Gorkha (Rs 110, five hours). See p236 for more information on sights and stopovers along the way.

TO/FROM ROYAL CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK

With the slump in tourism to the Terai, the best way to get to Chitwan is by tourist bus. Buses leave the Mustang bus park daily at 7.30am for Chitrasali (Rs 300 to Rs 350, seven hours) on the outskirts of the park, where jeeps wait to transfer travellers to Sauraha – see p275 for details. Any travel agent in Lakeside can book tickets.

Greenline (left) has a daily deluxe air-con bus to Chitrasali (US\$10) at 7.30am from its depot in Lakeside South.

Public buses to Sauraha Chowk/Tadi Bazaar (Rs 90, five hours), on the Mahendra Hwy 5km north of Sauraha, leave from the public bus stand but it's a long, slow rickshaw ride from the junction to Sauraha village.

TO/FROM THE INDIAN BORDER

The closest border crossing to Pokhara is Sunauli, just south of the town of Bhairawa, but you can also cross at Mahendranagar, Nepalganj, Birganj and Kakarbhitta. See the individual towns in the Terai chapter for more details on transport to India.

Travel agents may try to tempt you with the offer of tourist buses to the border and direct buses to towns in India. Don't be fooled – there are no tourist buses to Sunauli and no through-buses to India; without exception, you must change at the border.

From the main public bus stand, there are nearly 20 day and night buses daily for Bhairawa (Rs 230/270/305 day/night/minibus; eight hours), where you can pick up a local bus to the border post at Sunauli.

There are also day/night buses to Birganj (Rs 225/270, nine hours) and Nepalganj (Rs 400/520, 12 hours), Mahendranagar (Rs 728, 16 hours) and Kakarbhitta (Rs 530, 13 hours).

TO/FROM THE TERAİ

As well as the buses to the Indian border, there are regular day/night services to Narayangarh (Rs 120/140, four hours), where you can change to buses east and west along the Mahendra Hwy. A few buses leave early in the morning for Biratnagar (Rs 480, 12 hours) and Janakpur (Rs 325, 10 hours). All buses leave from the main bus stand.

Most buses go via Mugling, but there are also buses along the dramatic Siddhartha Hwy to Butwal (Rs 160, six hours) and Tansen (Rs 130, four hours).

TO/FROM TREKKING ROUTES

Buses to the trailheads for most treks in the Annapurna Conservation Area (such as the Jomsom Trek) leave from the Baglung bus park at Bhairab Tole. One important exception is the Annapurna Circuit trek, which normally starts at Besisahar. See p333 and p268 for more information on these trekking routes.

The following stops are all on the bus route from Pokhara to Beni:

Stop	Fare (Rs)	Duration (Hrs)	Trek
Hyangja	15	1	Ghachok Trek
Phedi	30	1½	Ghorapani (Poon Hill) to Ghandruk Trek
Naya Pul	55	2	Ghorapani (Poon Hill) to Ghandruk Trek, Annapurna Sanctuary Trek, Jomsom Trek
Baglung	80	3	Jomsom Trek
Beni	130	4	Jomsom Trek

Buses leave about every half hour from 5.30am to 3.30pm. Cranky old Toyota taxis leave from the same bus stand – the fare is Rs 600 to Phedi and Naya Pul, Rs 1250 to Baglung and Rs 2000 to Beni.

For Besisahar (Rs 120, five hours), there are two early morning and two lunchtime buses from the main public bus stand, or you can take a bus bound for Kathmandu and change at Dumre.

GETTING AROUND Bicycle

There are lots of bicycle rental places at Lakeside – see p253 for hire prices.

Boat

Boatmen at Lakeside offer shuttle services around the lake. Expect to pay Rs 250 from Lakeside to the Fewa Resort (for the trail to the World Peace Pagoda) and Rs 350 between Lakeside and Khapeudi (for the alternative trail to Sarangkot).

Bus

Small local buses shuttle between Lakeside, the airport, the public bus stand and Mahendra Pul but routes are erratic and there isn't much space for baggage. Fares start at Rs 9.

Local buses to Pame Bazaar (Rs 5) and other places on the north shore of Phewa Tal leave Camping Chowk every hour or so until mid-afternoon.

Motorcycle

Several places in Lakeside rent out motorcycle and scooters for around Rs 400 per day. Check the bikes out first to make sure they start up easily and brake smoothly.

Taxi

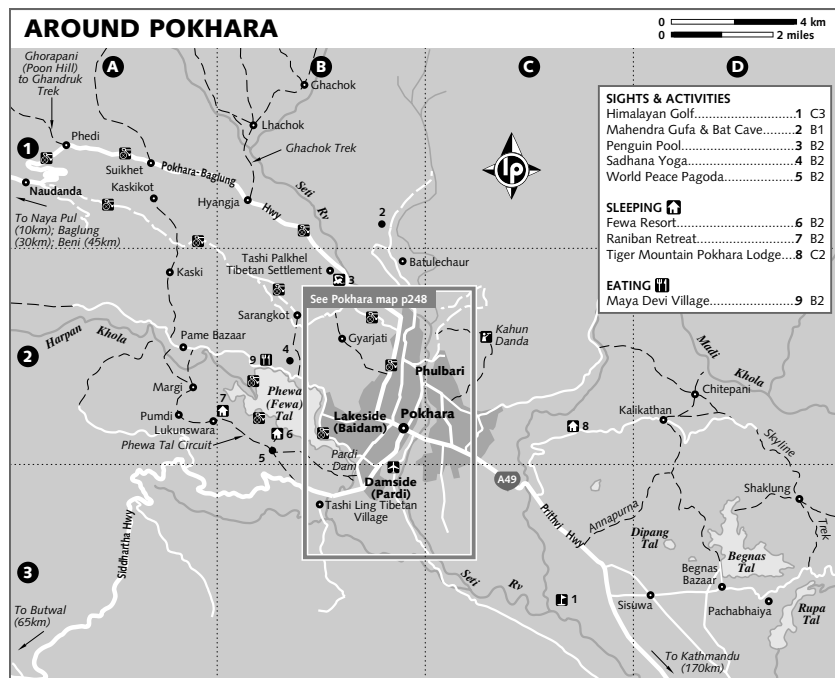
Taxis meet tourist buses at the Mustang Chowk bus stand, but you can expect a hotel tout to come along for the ride. The fare to Lakeside is Rs 80 whether you take the tout's advice or not, so insist on being taken where you want to go. Heading out from Lakeside, you'll pay Rs 100 to the public bus stand, the Baglung bus stand or the airport.

AROUND POKHARA

Trekking in the Annapurna Conservation Area is easily the biggest attraction around Pokhara (see p323 for details) but you don't have to be a seasoned trekker to appreciate the glory of the peaks. There are several dramatic viewpoints on the rim of the Pokhara Valley that can be reached by taxi, mountain bike or rented motorcycle from Pokhara, and gorgeous Begnas Tal and Rupa Tal offer similar lake and mountain vistas to Phewa Tal, but without the crowds.

SARANGKOT

The view of the Annapurna Himalaya from **Sarangkot** (foreigner/Nepali Rs 25/10) is almost a religious experience. From here, you can see a panoramic sweep of Himalayan peaks, from Dhaulagiri (8167m) in the west to the



perfect pyramid that is Machhapuchhare (6997m) and the rounded peak of Annapurna II (7937m) in the east. Most people come here at dawn or dusk, when the sun picks out the peaks in brilliant colours.

The main village is just below the ridge, but a set of steps leads uphill to a dramatic viewpoint in the ruins of an ancient *kot* (hill fort). It is currently occupied by the army, but photography is fine, as long as you don't take pictures of the soldiers.

There's another ruined fort at **Kaskikot** (1788m), a one-hour walk west of Sarangkot along the ridge road, with similarly jaw-dropping views.

Sleeping & Eating

There are loads of places to stay and eat in Sarangkot. The cheapest options are along the concrete steps to the fort.

Lake View Lodge (r with/without bathroom Rs 250/150) The best of the cheapies, Lake View is honest about its assets – some rooms do indeed have lake views.

There are a few upmarket choices just downhill from the village.

Hotel Annapurna & Sherpa (☎ 9851088746; r from Rs 350) This inviting hotel is set in a neat garden and the cosy rooms have hot showers.

Mountain View Lodge (☎ 9846028278; r with/without bathroom Rs 250/250) Nearby, the Mountain View doesn't actually have mountain views, but it's comfortable, quiet and welcoming.

Getting There & Away

Taxi drivers in Lakeside offer dawn rides up to the ridge to catch the morning sunrise for around Rs 500, but you must walk the final 1km along a pitted motorcycle track. The taxi fare is the same whether the driver waits to drive you back or you walk down.

By motorcycle or mountain bike, follow the road that branches off the Baglung Hwy near the Bindhya Basini Temple. When the road levels out below the ridge, look for the Sarangkot turning on the right, opposite a large group of tin-roofed school buildings. For details of the ride out to Sarangkot and on to Naudanda see p88.

A more challenging option is the three- to four-hour walk from Pokhara. The most

popular path begins on the highway opposite the Baglung bus park. The obvious trail runs west across the fields and up the side of Gyarjati Hill, meeting the dirt road at Silangabot, about 1km east of the Sarangkot turning.

There's also a scenic route from Phewa Tal but the trail is hard to follow and there have been muggings along this path. The trail begins near the village of Khapeudi on the road to Pame Bazaar (look for the signpost about 50m after the Green Peace Lodge), meeting the road just west of the turn-off to Sarangkot. It's usually easier to follow this trail on the way down.

MAHENDRA GUFU & BAT CAVE

The limestone bedrock of the Pokhara Valley is perforated by caves and underground streams, several of which can easily be visited from Pokhara on foot, by bike or by taxi. A return taxi to the following sites will cost Rs 500, including waiting time. A return taxi ride to these sites will cost Rs 500 including waiting time. Alternatively, the caves can be reached on foot or by bicycle from Lakeside.

The first large cave to be discovered near Pokhara, **Mahendra Gufa** (Map p266; foreigner/Nepali Rs 10/5; ☎ 7am-6pm) is popular with Indian and Nepali tourists, but the main tunnel is lit by electric bulbs and it doesn't have much atmosphere. Several stalactites are revered as Shiva lingams. The cave is about 6km north of Lakeside in the suburb of Batulechaur.

You won't find Michael Keaton, Val Kilmer or Christian Bale lurking in the dark and spooky **Bat Cave** (Map p266; Chameri Gufa; foreigner/Nepali Rs 10/5; ☎ 6am-6pm). What you will find is thousands of live horseshoe bats, clinging to the ceiling of a damp and slippery chamber and occasionally chirruping into the darkness – claustrophobics beware. A slippery path leads down into the darkness to a low vault where thousands of horseshoe bats cling to the ceiling – claustrophobics beware! Daredevils can continue to the back of the vault and wriggle out through a tiny chute to the surface. Torches can be hired for Rs 15, and guides (no fixed rate) can show you the narrow exit tunnel. Ask about tours to other newly-discovered caves. The cave is a 10-minute walk south from Mahendra Gufa.

BEGNAS TAL & RUPA TAL

About 10km southeast of Pokhara, a road leaves the Prithvi Hwy for Begnas Tal and Rupa Tal, two gloriously serene lakes that see few foreign visitors, despite their proximity to Pokhara. The hiking trail between the lakes forms the final leg of the popular Annapurna Skyline Trek.

Local buses run from the highway opposite the main Pokhara bus stand to Begnas Bazaar on the shore of picturesque Begnas Tal. It's a peaceful spot and the mountains of the Annapurna Range are brilliantly reflected in the rippling waters. If you feel energetic, you can rent boats for leisurely paddles on the lake for Rs 200/150 per hour (foreign/Nepali).

Rupa Tal is via a 3km hike along the trail that winds uphill from the bus stand in Begnas Bazaar. It's much more isolated than Begnas Tal but the surrounding countryside is delightful and you can stay at several laid-back teahouses on the ridge overlooking the lake.

Sleeping & Eating

There are guesthouses in Begnas Tal and along the ridge above Rupa Tal.

Hotel Day Break & Restaurant (☎ 560011; s/d with bathroom Rs 150/200) At the start of the walking trail in Begnas Bazaar, this friendly, family-run place has bright rooms with Formica floors, hot showers and mountain views from the roof.

Annapurna Lake View (r Rs 200) Reached via the path across the Begnas Tal dam, this rustic ridge-top guesthouse has two rudimentary rooms and a café looking out over the lake.

Rupa View Point (d Rs 200) A lovely family-run place above the village of Pachabhaya, overlooking Rupa Tal. There are just two rooms and evening meals are prepared by the farmer's wife. To get here, follow the signposted path off the main trail, then take the steps on the left, then the path on the right.

Getting There & Away

Buses to Begnas Tal (Rs 20, 20 minutes) stop on the highway opposite the main public bus stand in Pokhara. By bike or motorcycle, take the Prithvi Hwy towards Mugling and turn left at the obvious junction in Tal Chowk.

SHORT TREKS AROUND POKHARA

Without the Himalaya, there would be no Pokhara, at least in tourist terms. You'll need at least a week to reach the snowline on the Jomsom or Annapurna Sanctuary Treks (see p323 for details), but there are some fascinating short treks in the lower foothills that afford epic views of the Annapurna Himalaya.

Most villages in the area have basic tea-houses where you can find a meal (almost invariably chow mein or daal bhaat) and a bed for the night, and the only specialist gear required is a sleeping bag and a warm jacket for the evenings. Nevertheless, the usual precautions for safe and responsible trekking apply (see p330 and p330).

Most of the trails are easy to follow, but there have been robberies along a few of the routes, so it makes sense to travel in a group. You should also equip yourself with a suitable map, particularly if you fancy branching off the established tourist route. Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya* has more detail on trekking options around Pokhara.

The Phewa Tal Circuit (One Day)

If you get an early start, it's possible to walk right around the shore of Phewa Tal, beginning on the path to the Peace Pagoda. Starting from the Peace Pagoda, continue along the ridge to the village of Lukunswara and take the right fork where the path divides. Once you reach Pumdi, ask around for the path down to Margi on the edge of the lake. From Margi, you can either cut across the marshes over a series of log bridges or continue around the edge of the valley to the suspension bridge at Pame Bazaar, where a dirt road continues along the northern shore to Pokhara. If you run out of energy, local buses pass by every hour or so.

Ghachok Trek (Two Days)

This interesting two-day trek goes north from Pokhara to the traditional Gurung villages around Ghachok. It starts from Hyangja, near the Tashi Palkhel Tibetan settlement, and crosses the Mardi Khola to Lhachok before ascending to the stone-walled village of Ghachok, where you can stop overnight before turning south and returning to Pokhara via Batulechaur. With

more time, you can extend this walk to visit some even more remote villages in the valley leading north from Ghachok.

Ghorapani (Poon Hill) to Ghandruk Loop (Six Days)

In an area packed with mountain viewpoints, Poon Hill (3210m) stands out. A steep 1.5km walk above Ghorapani, this exposed bluff looks out over an incredible vista of snowy peaks, including Annapurna South (7273m) and Machhapuchhare (6997m). Some people include Poon Hill as a detour on the Annapurna Circuit or Jomsom Treks, but it's also a popular trekking destination in its own right.

Most people include Poon Hill as part of the popular six-day Ghorapani to Ghandruk Loop, which also includes a stop at the Gurung village of Ghandruk. However, there have been robberies on this trail, particularly between Ghorapani and Ghandruk, so travel in a group.

The trail starts at Naya Pul, on the road from Pokhara to Baglung, and follows the Jomsom trail for the first two days, with overnight stops in Tikedhunga and Ghorapani. On day three, most people leave before dawn for the hike to Poon Hill and relax in Ghorapani for the rest of the day.

Day four involves a gentle descent to Tadapani, and day five continues downhill to Ghandruk, a scenic village of stone and slate houses with a colourful Buddhist monastery. The final day is an easy descent back to Naya Pul, where you can pick up buses back to Pokhara. Alternatively, head east across the valley to Landruk and stop overnight at Tolka, before continuing to Phedi on the Baglung hwy.

Tatopani (Hot Spring) Loop (Four Days)

A variation on the same theme, this four-day trek follows the Jomsom trail for three days to the geothermal springs at Tatopani, before turning south along the gorge of the Kali Gandaki River. The most popular route begins at Naya Pul and runs north through Tikedhunga and Ghorapani to Tatopani before turning south to Beni (see p345 for details of the route as far as Ghorapani). An alternative five-day route follows the Annapurna Sanctuary Trek to Landruk before branching west to meet the main trail at Ghorapani.

From Ghorapani, the route follows the Jomsom trail to Tatopani ('hot springs' in Nepali), an attractive village on the Kali Gandaki River. The eponymous hot springs (Rs 10 entry per person) are down on the river bank and you'll need a swimming costume if you want to experience the soothing effect of warm water on tired muscles. The return leg is a long day following the Kali Gandaki down to Beni, where you can pick up a bus back to Pokhara.

ANNAPURNA SKYLINE TREK (ROYAL TREK)

Following a low ridge east of Pokhara, with spine-tingling views of the Annapurna peaks, the four-day Annapurna Skyline Trek (or Royal Trek) was famously walked by Britain's Prince Charles in 1980. It's an ideal walk for families with children as the path is wide and easy to follow and the highest point is less than 2000m. However, because it lies off the main tourist circuit, there is no teahouse accommodation en route, except

at Begnas Tal. Most people bring a stove and camp at basic campsites along the route.

The trail starts near the army camp on the Prithvi Hwy, just east of the Bijayapur Khola, and cross a flat area of rice fields before climbing the ridge to the village of Kalikathan (1370m), which has two basic campsites with fine views. On the second day, the trail follows the forested ridge through Thulokot to Mati Thana, where you can take a teashop lunch, before climbing to Naudanda, Lipini and finally Shalung (1730m) with another simple camping ground.

On day three, the trail descends to the valley floor, then rises to the attractive Gurung village of Chisopani (1629m) – the campsite is a short walk beyond the village near a ridge-top temple and the views are sublime. The final day involves a leisurely stroll along the ridge that separates Rupa Tal and Begnas Tal, emerging on the valley floor at Begnas Bazaar (see p267), where buses leave regularly for Pokhara.

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