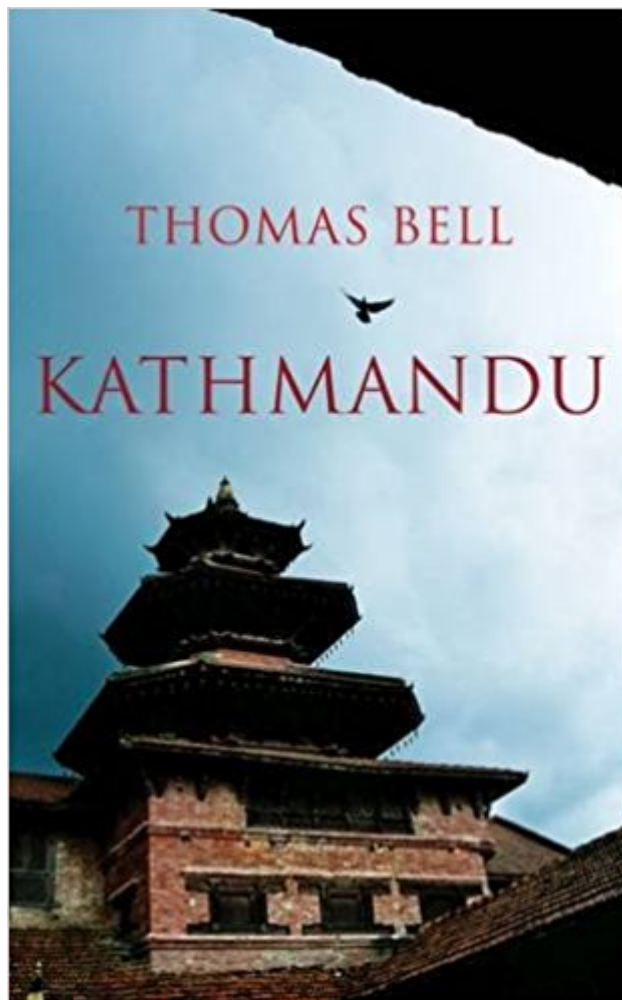


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Kathmandu



Synopsis

One of the greatest cities of the Himalaya, Kathmandu, Nepal, is a unique blend of thousand-year-old cultural practices and accelerated urban development. In this book, Thomas Bell recounts his experiences from his many years in the city—exploring in the process the rich history of Kathmandu and its many instances of self-reinvention. Closed to the outside world until 1951 and trapped in a medieval time warp, Kathmandu is, as Bell argues, a jewel of the art world, a carnival of sexual license, a hotbed of communist revolution, a paradigm of failed democracy, a case study in bungled western intervention, and an environmental catastrophe. The layered development of the city can be seen in the successive generations of its gods and goddesses; its comfort in the caste system and ethos of aristocracy and kingship; and the recent destabilizing effects of consumerist approaches and the push for egalitarianism and democracy. In important ways, Kathmandu's rapid modernization can be seen as an extreme version of what is happening in other traditional societies. Bell also discusses the ramifications of the recent Nepal earthquake. A comprehensive look at a top global destination, Kathmandu is an entertaining and accessible chronicle for anyone eager to learn more about this fascinating city.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"[A] sprawling history and memoir of Nepal and its fast-growing capital." (New York Review of Books)
"Nepal is always at risk of being defined by the tragic and the violent, by dramatic events involving rock, ice or blood. . . . Bell's Kathmandu . . . is therefore to be welcomed as a chance to look beyond such tragedies and learn something of Nepal's complex religious and social history—and the equally complex machinations of politics in the capital

city that has dominated it for centuries. (Financial Times) "In Kathmandu, [Bell] tells the story of the city both before and, to an extent, after the quake. . . . This isn't so much a standard history as an amiable ramble around Nepal's past. . . . Bell's approach isn't entirely orthodox. . . . But it's all the more readable for it. (Guardian)" "With extraordinary candour and courage [Bell] blazes a trail through the backstreets of the city to the hidden places most of us choose not to see, listening to conversations we prefer not to hear when visiting a country as complicated as Nepal. Fault lines affecting the whole country radiate out from the city; to ignore them, this book makes clear, is to be complicit in the myths that continue to bind Nepal in a knot of poverty and injustice. It is not just tourists who can be selectively blind and deaf, but also expats, diplomats, aid agencies and a whole host of foreign NGOs." (Literary Review) "The sheer breadth of subject matter Thomas Bell covers in his book, and the clear affection with which he writes about the city where he is now raising a family, are a remarkable tribute to one of the most entrancing and rapidly evolving capitals of the world. (Times Literary Supplement) "Kathmandu is an extensive, well-researched and multidisciplinary writing on Nepal. Anyone who is interested to know about the art, culture and heritage of Kathmandu should read this book. All the people, including students to scholars, who want to know about Nepal and its political upheavals, would find it enlightening. (Policy Eye) "Explores a city that sits at a crossroads in politics, history, religion and myth • an excellent primer for those visiting post-quake. (Wanderlust) "[A] wide-ranging, deep-delving, clear-headed exposition of all things Kathmandu. (Spectator) "The best bits in Kathmandu are the hour-by-hour accounts of reporting brick-throwing demonstrations, or trudging mountain tracks for days in search of Maoist insurgents to interview. . . . A very enjoyable book. Above all you breathe the atmosphere of Nepal, with its blend of permissiveness and constriction. Nepal is rigid yet oddly adaptive, and resilient. (CapX) "There is fine, unflinching journalism in this book. But there is affection, even love too. It is a powerful, intoxicating mixture. It produces an unsettling, admirable, compelling and deeply unusual narrative that matches the city in both its allure and individuality. (Herald Scotland) "In his impressive debut book Bell traces the layers of Kathmandu's past through to the present." (History Today) "A wonderful book that speaks to a wide audience. Situating the city within its larger political and historical contexts, Thomas Bell has produced a book that comes as close as any to capturing the spirit of the intriguing, dynamic, troubled, and endlessly confounding Kathmandu. (Studies in Nepali History and Society, on the Indian edition) "Kathmandu remains, just like this book, eternally

entertaining and oddly accessible despite the presence of many time warps in a single street and in a single sentence. . . . Bell is impelled by curiosity and an old fashioned, almost naïf spirit of adventure, but Kathmandu, because of his resourcefulness and bravado, deserves its place alongside Richard Burton's "Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah." (Irish Examiner) "A wonderfully discursive account of the personal discovery of a great city. Looping through centuries and slaloming between journalism, history memoir, mythology, and gossip, Tom Bell has written a portrait of Kathmandu like no other, taking us from Manjushree to the Maoists via witches, colonial Orientalists, LSD cults, spies wars, and old Serge Gainsbourg movies. A splendidly eccentric and enjoyable first book." (William Dalrymple, author of *Return of a King*) "A narrative of an enchanting and troubling complexity. Tom Bell has thought through the history and contemporary reality of Kathmandu, and has written a great, subtle book, one as shadowed as Kathmandu's alleys and as brilliant as its midday squares." (Teju Cole, author of *Open City* and *Every Day is for the Thief*) "Kathmandu, like the country of which it is the capital, is much visited but much misunderstood. Few make the effort to look beyond the mountains and stupas, the forests and elephants. In this lucid, clever, thorough and beautifully written book, Tom Bell does this for us, recounting the gripping history of the fascinating city with equal measures of verve and care. Kings, Maoist guerillas, mountaineers, demonstrators, poets, psychopathic princes and politicians all make for a tale as colourful as a local market. A genuine must-read for any visitor to the city, to Nepal, or indeed to the sub-continent." (Jason Burke, Southeast Asia correspondent, *Guardian*) "A wonderful literary journey through the streets and history of Kathmandu." (Sir Ranulph Fiennes)

Thomas Bell, who was born in England and studied at the University of Oxford and the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, is a former South East Asia correspondent for the UK Daily Telegraph. He lives in Kathmandu.

Outstanding read. Bell knows the city and environs. A nice mix of journalism and history

This is a journalistic piece of writing. Disconnected at many places because as the writer confessed in one of the chapters, he wrote this book after picking up pieces from so many books and paper work that contains years of research. Stringing a coherent story from strewn material is never easy. This book, however, has insights and some interesting facts. Good for a one time read though I had

problems in being attentive. The book doesn't grow on you - at least I had to force myself to finish it.

A 101 course for any first time visitor to Kathmandu. Any easy read. Mr. Bell quickly helps the reader understand what she/he sees when walking the street of Kathmandu. I loved the book. One correction though: Page 256 - The author mentions USAID's presence during the 1950s. USAID was founded during the Kennedy administration on November 3, 1961.

TOP OF THE WORLD TO YOU, MR BELL, ON YOUR SPECIAL JOURNEY:AN EXCELLENT TRAVEL BOOK FROM HAUS TO A LAND MOST OF WILL NEVER VISITAn appreciation by Phillip Taylor MBE and Elizabeth Taylor of Richmond Green ChambersSome years ago, we met a man on a train once and he had (almost) got to the top of Everest. He was a big man, and bold and very well known to the public because of his booming voice and some serious acting parts. He was touched by Everest and the surrounding area and it would always affect him and it became apparent quickly that the area has held and will always hold for him and many others that special mystical quality and beauty which the world saw so recently when the area was devastated by disaster. Kathmandu is a special travel book about a special place and lovingly researched by Thomas Bell, and a terrific read.As one of the greatest cities of the Himalaya, Kathmandu, Nepal, has rightly been described as a "unique blend of thousand-year-old cultural practices and accelerated urban development". Haus Publishing have done us proud as travel book readers with such a detailed account of the area and maintain their lead as excellent specialist publishers for this genre.Thomas Bell, as the author of Kathmandu is an expert on Asia and he has brought much detail and expertise to this work. He describes his experiences vividly from his many years in the city exploring in the process the rich history of Kathmandu and, as he says, "its many instances of self-reinvention". Rightly, politics is never very far away because the area was closed to the outside world until 1951. It was literally "trapped in a medieval time warp". The area is described in the book as "a jewel of the art world, a carnival of sexual license, a hotbed of communist revolution, a paradigm of failed democracy, a case study in bungled western intervention, and an environmental catastrophe" in the compelling words of Bell so there is some excitement for all here, then, and it is a great read!Bell describes Kathmandu with an imagery which can never be considered purple patch writing about a place using phrases such as where "the

layered development of the city can be seen in the successive generations of its gods and goddesses. It is with its comfort in the caste system and ethos of aristocracy and kingship and the recent destabilizing effects of consumerist approaches and the push for egalitarianism and democracy. There are always major problems encountered when places such as Kathmandu with all its history are opened to the world and what we call, sometimes ironically, as "progress" although Bell's Kathmandu is a most informative contemporary statement which will be compulsory reading for the potential visitor. In important ways, Kathmandu's quick modernization may well be an extreme version of what has happened to other traditional societies with all the benefits and damages that goes with it. Bell also discusses the ramifications of the recent Nepal earthquake for contemporary detail. It is a lovely, beautifully researched and presented book and most certainly gives us a comprehensive look at "a top global destination" for that is what Kathmandu is- and it's "an entertaining and accessible chronicle for anyone eager to learn more about this fascinating city." We certainly did! The publication date is stated as 2016.

The writer is a friend and former colleague of mine and I've always known his work to be excellent. This book surpassed my expectations. Read it for the magic of Kathmandu's lush and living urban culture and for biting analysis of the inept and corrupt governance that so plagues Nepal. Read it to find inspiration among people who meet adversity with humour, philosophy, their rich culture and desire for change. This is a book for people en route to Nepal and looking for ideas and insight, and it's a book for armchair travelers who want to experience a place like no other. Thomas Bell knows Kathmandu and Nepal thoroughly and his writing is lively, engaged and fluent. His journalism is excellent and the book leaves you with that all too rare feeling of wanting it to go on.....just a little longer. Despite it being a rather lengthy tome to begin with, there's just not enough "Kathmandu". We look forward to a sequel.

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