

Kathmandu Helisigh

By: Rajeev Dangol

I woke up distressed but excited at 7:00 AM on the day of June 30. This day was quite special for me as I was being taken for joy ride on a helicopter for Kathmandu sightseeing. How can I not be overwhelmed after learning this? Distressed in a way that I was not receiving a confirmation call from Pradeep Gautam, the operation manager at Fishtail Air, who was supposed to call me in the morning to inform about my flight time and other needful. Again, I was forced to wag my curtain several times to check the sun (weather condition), which could possibly ruin my trip if it turned bad or for worse could get cancelled.

Thankfully, I received the call from Mr. Gautam at around 10:00 AM. I was informed that my flight had been fixed for 1:00 PM and I had to reach the Fishtail's office at Tinkune by 12:00 PM. I immediately called my photographer, Shankar Pradhananga who was equally excited perhaps more than I was (for the ride), to tell him about the reporting time and the flight.

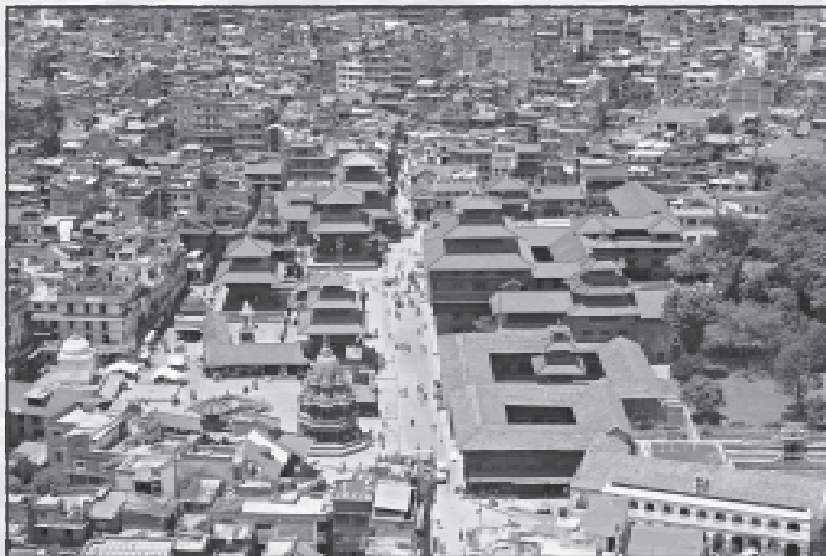
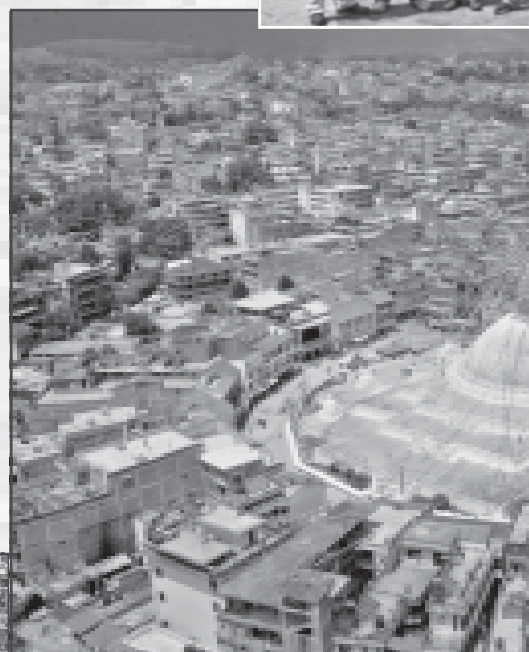
After having lunch, I headed towards the destination with a hope of my lifetime experience. As I reached Tinkune, I gave a deep look at the

office premises to search if anybody were waiting for me. Soon I received a call again from Mr. Gautam, telling that he had been waiting for me at his office. Having met Mr. Gautam and after some formalities completed, we got down for a little tidbits. It was already 12:15 PM but there were nobody to be seen - must be encouraged by 'reaching late' tradition of ours, I thought. After having to wait for another 15 minutes, my photographer showed up followed by Govinda Acharya, a television reporter. Still two more to wait for and it was already 12:30 outside the office.

Finally, four of us gathered and deciding to meet the two other members at the airport gate, we left the office, still checking at the weather. Luckily it was only getting better, brighter and sunny. We became more hopeful then.

We reached the airport in next 10 minutes, our watch struck near to 12:40. The only next reason preventing us towards the flight was the other two members who were late by another 10 minutes. Upon their arrival, finally we were out of the terminal building at the flattened side where eventually many small and big planes were landing and

leaving the ground, tempting Shankar to take pictures as they come closer and pass by. Suddenly a gentleman approached him and asked him not to take any pictures saying that it was prohibited. Similar instruction was made inside the terminal building as well. I saw a



grumped change immediately on his face while he was sliding his Cannon inside the pack.

We approached to the helicopter on a small ferrying vehicle, still excited for a journey. Captain, Deepak Rana was waiting for us beside his flying machine. His welcome smile made us think that he was confident enough to fly and we would return to land safely. After a short introduction, Captain Rana briefed about the security measures to be taken by us during the flight and asked us not to change the

Helisightseeing with Fishtail

seat while on board. For the convenience of the photojournalists (three of them including Shankar) to take pictures and to shoot for the telecast of the event, a door and a window to the left of the helicopter were removed. Shortly, seats led to little



Swoyambhunath stupa. This part of the helisightseeing was even more exciting. We could see the children waving their hands at us as we circled the Stupa in the anti-clockwise direction from the height as low as 5,000 ft from the ground. We even stopped for a while to have a greater view of the Stupa and to capture it in our cameras. Shankar was seen busiest of all with his camera work. He was also the winner of the scuffle for seat and was sitting at the edge (the winning seat) where he was only away by inches from the deck to the emptiness. The only fastened seat belt around his waist was the harness to his body. However, he did a good job very boldly, though he was scared to death at one of the sites as the helicopter tilted for changing of direction from right to the left.

After an enchanting tour of Shoyambhunath stupa, we headed towards Patan Durbar Square, yet another WHS in Kathmandu. Here we were little disheartened by the uncontrolled urbanization, which surrounded the monuments from all sides, totally distorting its beauty and essence as the WHS. "This could be one of the reasons why Kathmandu Valley

was once placed at the endangered list by UNESCO," I thought.

The most interesting part of the flying was when I saw a big snake like thing down the road. Later I realized that it was the figure created by the lined up vehicles and motorcycles at one of the petrol stations, which left me stunned for a while.

The buildings of every shape, size and color, smoothly running streams, widespread and colorful carpet like farmlands and pheasants planting paddy were some of the eye-catching scenes, which could be seen from the air. The other World Heritage Sites that we observed and enjoyed the bird's eye view were Kathmandu Durbar Square, Changu Narayan Temple, Boudhanath Stupa and Bhaktapur Durbar Square Area.

I must say that the overall trip was worth mentioning and written for. It was certainly a lifetime experience, which I could have never (possibly) planned on my own. Therefore, I must thank Fishtail for the opportunity provided.

The "Joy ride" of Kathmandu Helisightseeing is available for every individual (INR 5000) or a group of five (INR 25,000) and is conducted by Fishtail Air on every Saturdays.

scuffle between the photographers, as each of them wanted to secure the best seat (to the opened side of the chopper) for best possible shots. In no time, it got settled and we were ready for our dream flight.

Exactly at 1:05, the Fishtail, 350 Escorial left the ground with a loud buzz and headed towards the Pashupatinath temple, the most revered god of Hindus and a World Heritage Site (WHS). After we flew above the temple of lord Pashupatinath, our next destination became the