

# Howl from the heights

Heli-biking brings epic enduro, from snowline to valley bottom, to within a short flight from Kathmandu.

Story & photography by Alex Treadway







**ROCK N' ROLL**  
Below the snow, you hit prime enduro trail, dropping steadily towards the treeline with just enough obstacles to keep things interesting.

WHERE COULD BE BETTER FOR BIG mountain riding than the biggest mountains of all? In the past, an enduro rider craving high adventure in the Nepal Himalayas might head for the badlands of other-worldly Mustang with its endlessly weaving singletrack descents. But now there's an option right out of Kathmandu that has you up-and-back within two days.

That option is Gosainkunda in Langtang National Park, just a short hop from Kathmandu – if you take a helicopter. Heli-biking is common enough with deep-pocketed bikers in places like Europe and New Zealand, but now Nepal is

getting in on the act, opening up access to full-on enduro-style trails.

Emerging above the smog of Kathmandu, your horizons explode outward and dozens of Himalayan giants crowd the windscreen. Just 15 minutes later, you step out onto snow at almost 4,400 metres, surrounded by peaks 3,000 metres higher. There's time for a few selfies, and to grab breakfast in one of the tea houses, before you saddle up. Even for the unacclimatised, it's safe to drop in at this height, as long as you don't hang about too long.

The ride first hugs a dramatic contour trail for



**STEP CHANGE**  
Lower down, the weather and scenery shifts. Mist often hangs in the trees, deadening bikers' shouts as they descend technical sections.





## GIANTS OF THE FOREST

Towering mature trees flank the riders as they hit flatter ground en route to their overnight stop at Thulo Syabru, 2,000 metres below where they started out just a few hours before.

an hour or more to Laurabina. In snow, the pace is more measured, allowing time for views of the Ganesh Himal and Langtang ranges, before the action turns on for real.

Still well above the tree line, the downhill then kicks in with a few stepped sections, fast and fun. The trail is generally pretty quiet with most trekking in the area in the main valleys of neighbouring Langtang, now bouncing back after the devastating earthquake of 2015. Look out for wildlife too: musk deer are common and there's

the goat-like Himalayan tahr, and even red pandas.

The mountainsides get greener as you descend, grassland giving way to rhododendron, pine and maple. After around 3.5 hours riding, you reach Sing Gompa, a pretty cluster of houses unsurprisingly set around a *gompa* (a fortified monastery of sorts) which is the usual lunch stop.

In the afternoon, another three hours or so of riding starts with the trail diving into the forest for a slower section round the hill. Then the descent resumes, first with a demanding rooty, rocky trail,

then you hit switchbacks which finally dump you out on an easy last trail to Thulo Syabru where there's a stop for the night. Having started the ride on an alpine hillside, you end it 2,000 metres lower in a subtropical valley.

Next morning, a jeep awaits to take you back to Kathmandu, a ride of about six hours, with a couple of options to ride quieter sections. If you've time, delay your return to the fug and clamour of the capital, with an overnight in the beautiful old Newari village of Nuwakot. **AA**

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## STUPA-FYING DESCENT

Wheels stilled for a few minutes, riders trade stories of their epic route down from the snows.





**DESTINATION DOWNHILL**  
The flight in quickly swaps the chemical soup of Kathmandu skies (top, far right) for views of Langtang and other Himalayan ranges (above). There, village life continues much as it has for centuries – in places like Cholangpari, where this lady (top right) weaves in the same way generations of her ancestors have; and in Nuwakot (right), where traditional Newari architecture is prized by local and visitors alike.

**PRACTICALITIES**

**When to go**  
Mid April-mid June is great for riding as most of the snow has melted. In the autumn, from late September to early December, it is very cold but the skies are super-clear, giving amazingly sharp mountain views.

**How to get there**  
Various regional carriers fly into Kathmandu. From there, the only way to do this descent without carrying your bike for days uphill is by helicopter from Kathmandu.

**Contacts**  
The trip costs from US\$995 per person for a group of four people with Himalayan Trails, [www.himalayan-trails.com](http://www.himalayan-trails.com)

**Further info**  
General outdoor gear such as sleeping bags and down jackets can be hired in Kathmandu for around US\$1-2 per day. Suitable enduro bikes are available for hire in the city, though as this is a committing ride, it's far better to have a bike you know well.

