

# NEPAL 1 YEAR ON

## Part 2, Baktapur

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Baktapur side street

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Baktapur is a city like no other, to preserve the unique medieval atmosphere they banned cars and lorries, not just one or two streets but the entire city. It's not just a gimmick for tourists either as soon as the last tourist bus has gone the city comes to life street vendors and farmers line the streets while children play football and old people sit and chatter. The people love their city just the way it is medieval cheek by jowl housing, the queues to draw water from the ancient wells dotted around the city are more of a social event than a daily chore.

Walking into the city at first the damage didn't seem too bad the temples and palaces of Durbar square, just as in Kathmandu Durbar were damaged but like an old war veteran, dignified as they leant on their crutches. Then I walked round to Pottery Square again at first things looked fine until I realised the daily bustle had gone, people were still making pots, just not very many of them. I turned off down a side street away from the tourists, to where the potters lived, beyond the reach of the sun to an area normally smoky from kiln fires. Through a tunnel under a house into a courtyard, through an archway to another courtyard with another tunnel, on and on through the labyrinth, houses so tightly packed they feel like one enormous building. A year after the earthquakes it was quiet the paths under the houses were still there, someone had cleared them, but above ground floor every house had either collapsed or was on the verge of collapse. The smell of animals, people and kilns replaced by a musty damp earth odour, the one you notice when you visit a castle dungeon, reminding you something very bad happened here.



The Potters Labyrinth

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a residential side street

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Then perched on a pile of rubble above the remains of a house I spotted a washing line with washing on it, a window with curtains and a bike parked neatly to one side of the path, unbelievably someone was living there.

The damage to the residential area was the worst I'd seen anywhere with whole blocks of houses down, it was suddenly very apparent why the highest death toll in the earthquake was here.

Once the fear of further aftershocks had subsided people started moving back into what was left of their homes, every side street I walked down I found houses with tin or bits of tarpaulin replacing walls. The conditions in the camps had been so bad that those that could left, preferring to live in the ruins.

Just around the corner and as I walked through the main Bazar it was as though nothing had happened, the shops were all open. Tibukche Tol one of Baktapur's least visited treasures, had survived virtually untouched, as though protected by some unseen force. Old men and goats warming themselves in the sun, children playing while their mothers pull water from the well and pigeons, there's always lots of pigeons.



Early morning in Tibukche Tol

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