

rates over the older *Newari Wing* units. Blending Asian and European styling to international levels, *Club Shangrila* rooms have access to a lounge and 24-hour butler service. The clientele here is an interesting mix of business travelers, upscale individuals, and high-end groups. Far from abominable, this is Kathmandu's finest hotel. 270 rooms. \$165-\$240 single, \$175-\$240 double. Richard Launay, mgr. (C-10) Utell. Phone (1) 248999. Fax (1) 227781. ★★★★★

## POKHARA



**FISH TAIL LODGE**, in a lovely, peaceful garden setting at the foot of a wooded hill, on an island reached by a Tom Sawyer-like raft ride, is convenient to, yet happily removed from, the bustle of Pokhara's tourist district on the opposite shore. This unique lodge is arguably Nepal's best, more than compensating for its paucity of luxuries with a breathtaking location, captivating surroundings, and genial service. The sublime setting, overlooking Phewa Lake with the Annapurna Range and sacred Machhapuchare ("Fish Tail") as a backdrop, has attracted a long list of international luminaries. The resortlike property consists of six circular buildings and one two-story rectangle surrounded by well-kept lawns and gardens. A cramped reception area leads to a bar, a rustic lounge, and a woody restaurant with beamed ceilings and an open fireplace, where excellent mountain and garden vistas add spice to nonsense Nepali, Indian, and Continental meals. For a small fee, guests head to a separate pavilion for nightly, year-round cultural shows. Shaded sitting areas, pavilions, and hammocks invite guests to savor the views, and boats with guides explore Phewa Lake for an hour or a day. Three of the guest-room buildings have been renovated and brightened since last inspection, with the rest due for the scalpel by summer of this year. The wedge-shape rooms now provide charming cushioned window seats and furnished terraces. Earth tones and whites predominate, and beamed ceilings and slate floors maintain the traditional lodge feel. Comfortable furniture, firm beds, air conditioners, tiny TVs, phones, and refrigerators keep guests comfortable, and the revamped tile and marble baths have stall showers, frosted windows, and minimal toiletries. One rectangular building, built in late 1996, offers rooms with a more standard hotel layout, tubs, and connecting room options, and some second-floor units view the mountains. A generator kicks in when local power fails or undergoes scheduled shutdowns, and candles provide a second backup plan. The management and staff here dole out some of Nepal's warmest hospitality. 60 rooms. \$85-\$100 single, \$95-\$110 double. M. R. Rajbhandari, mgr. (C-10) Utell. Phone (61) 221711. Fax (1) 225236 (Kathmandu). ★★★★★

**FULBARI RESORT HOTEL**, dramatically perched on a canyon plateau, on a bumpy dirt road a 15-minute drive S of Pokhara Airport and 20 min SW of Phewa Lake, is a surprisingly opulent, four-story brick structure that is nearing completion, despite Dusit Thani management pulling out days before the grand opening. The public areas show Thai flair, though Nepali elan is now likely to become more pervasive. Guests pass immature gardens and spinning Tibetan prayer wheels on their way to the impressive, imposing marble lobby. A two-ton stone waterspout, a Newari hand-carved palace facade that took two years to finish, and numerous local museum-quality artifacts shimmer under skylights. The main international room with a terrace is it for dining, but a stunning Thai outlet and a Japanese teppan yaki grill in a separate building by the gardens should debut by press time. Combining fine leather chairs and polished hardwood floors, the beautiful bar has window walls facing the Annapurna Himal. Spectacular views are also afforded from the heated vanishing-edge pool, which boasts a swim-up bar, dining area, and plenty of deck space. A Scottish-designed nine-hole golf course adjoins, as do a jogging trail, two clay tennis courts, and a health center with an aerobics studio and a so-so gym. A disco and the area's only casino should also open by press time. A business center supplements conference rooms for between 20 to 250. Halls with windows, museum-quality sculptures, and wood floors line one side of the guest-room building. All rooms face beautiful scenery. Spacious and plush, the lodgings here the most luxurious in Nepal, housing fine custom furniture and expensive fabrics in tones of peach and salmon. Quality dark wood desks and cabinets complement TVs, two phones, barely stocked minibars, safes, double closets with two types of hanger, and an abundance of local art. The glowing marble baths are loaded with mirrors, high-end fixtures, good herbal toiletries, phones, and

hair dryers. Smoke-free rooms are available, and this is the best bet in town for the wheelchair-bound. Room service runs round the clock. Despite its isolation and fresh management team, the *Fulbari* has all the right pieces to form Nepal's finest property. 165 rooms. \$200 single, \$215 double. Jagmag Basnet, mgr. (C-10) Phone (1) 527588 (Kathmandu). Fax (1) 523149 (Kathmandu). ★★★★★

**NEW HOTEL CRYSTAL**, Nagdhunga, on a hilltop across the road from Pokhara's small airport, has seen both its maintenance budget and traditional East Asian business dry up. This is still acceptable for short-stay groups, but discerning travelers are far better off at the new *Shangri-La*. This modern four-story hotel with an annex overlooks overgrown gardens and the mountains beyond. The lounge off reception faces a lawn where meals are sometimes served. The casual bar occupies a dim room devoid of atmosphere, whereas the garden bar atop the newer wing affords stunning mountain panoramas. A plain glassed-in dining room with carved trim serves Chinese and Continental dishes, while another restaurant offers international dishes. A pavilion in back hosts seasonal cultural shows. Half the air-conditioned guest quarters afford mountain views. Older rooms feature basic furniture, rotary phones, bedside controls, good storage space, and fine baths, while the wedge-shape rooms in the annex provide superior value. Newer rooms are plush but small, with nice contemporary decor, carpeting, comfortable sitting areas, small unfurnished balconies, and modest but clean marble and tile combination baths. Carpeting is worn throughout. Room service runs until 10 pm. A generator occasionally sparks into action, but management is wise enough to keep stocks of candles ever at the ready. 99 rooms. \$65-\$75 single or double. Prem Krishna Shrestha, mgr. (C-10) Best Western. Phone (61) 20035. Fax (61) 20234. ★★★★★

**SHANGRI-LA VILLAGE POKHARA**, GHARIPATAN, near the airport, is a stylish new sibling of Kathmandu's *Shangri-La*. Already a popular group stops, this modest but charming offering has a three-story rustic atrium lobby with wood and wicker furniture that encourages guests to linger and sip drinks. Off the lobby is a coffeeshop with buffets, while The Spice Route, one flight up, serves savory Asian delicacies. Both feature a muted, airy decor, which wisely allows the stunning Annapurna Himal to penetrate inward. Lovely gardens, streams, and fountains lead to one of the prettiest pool complexes in the country, with a small outdoor bar, a pavilion for cultural shows and barbecues, and yet more breathtaking scenery. A conference hall seats 100, and a shuttle runs four times daily to the lakeside tourist district. Accommodations are artistic and comfortable, with plenty of sconces casting light on local ethnic art, wicker chairs, platform beds, and rugs on slate tile floors. Amenities include desks, TVs, refrigerators, phones, and well-designed baths. A wall of glass leads to a furnished balcony or terrace, and all rooms overlook the gardens. Choose one that also gazes at the white-capped peaks. While this property cannot match the atmosphere and location of the *Fish Tail Lodge* or the luxury of the *Fulbari*, it is nevertheless delightful and sure to please nearly all who stay here. 65 rooms. \$150 single or double. Daman Pradhan, mgr. (C-10) Phone (61) 22122. Fax (61) 21995. ★★★★★

## ROYAL BARDIA WILDLIFE RESERVE

**TIGER TOPS KARNALI LODGE**, in an isolated wildlife preserve crisscrossed with trails in West Nepal, a 2-1/2-hour drive W of the border town of Nepalganj, strongly appeals to nature-lovers who find Royal Chitwan National Park near Kathmandu too busy. Local materials and regional style mark the lodge, which houses a simple restaurant and bar and an open fire for the colder months. Recreational exploration is the name of the game here, with elephant safaris, wildlife viewing, raft trips on the Karnali River, and short or extended treks through rough, breathtaking terrain all arranged. Solar power provides lighting and hot water, and the nonsense double-bedded guest rooms have private baths. Lanterns are provided in case the sun implodes. Adventurous individuals and tour groups are likely to be in attendance. The management also operates a tented camp on the banks of the river, but these charge similar rates for even less luxury. 12 units. \$200 single, \$400 double all-inclusive plus a \$20 park fee. Charan Rana Thapa, mgr. (C-10) Phone (1) 411225 (Kathmandu). Fax (1) 414075 (Kathmandu). ★

## ROYAL CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK

**TIGER MOUNTAIN THARU VILLAGE**, just outside the park boundary, is a delightful retreat offering more style, creature comforts, and value than its more famous sibling, the *Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge*. This one focuses more on the cultural aspects of the Terai Plains. Terra-cotta roofs top traditional stucco buildings. The rustic restaurant showcases regional fare, and the equally rustic bar does