

Organic Market Kathmandu | Organic Restaurant Kathmandu

7-8 minutes

| Healthy, Organic Nepal |



I won't go into all the reasons that seeking out organic food while traveling—and even paying a premium for it—is totally worth it. But here are three. Reason #1: your body's natural defenses are already on high alert, overburdened with the inevitable stresses and assaults that come with foreign territory—so why add

pesticide-laden food to the challenges? Reason #2: the chemicals used in non-organic farming wreak havoc on the land, water and on the farmers themselves. Reason #3: buying organic is a great way to help preserve the beautiful environment of the countries we visit.

And so here I am, prowling the streets of hectic Kathmandu, looking for the Big O.

A Kathmandu first



Kheti Bazaar: organic beans

In the courtyard immediately outside [Bhojan Griha](#) restaurant, a former residence of the priest to the Nepalese royal court, I find the [Kheti Bazaar](#), Kathmandu's first fully organic retail store and café.

It's run by a remarkable Nepalese woman named **Subechhya Basnet**, a dynamic innovator and vocal proponent of organic agriculture. Her father, **Bharat**, owns Bhojan Griha, the eco-friendly hotel [Kantipur Temple House](#) and is a visionary of sustainable tourism. With a B.A. and M.B.A. from Purdue under her belt, she opened Kheti Bazaar in the fall of 2010 to local acclaim, including a huge feature in the [Kathmandu Post](#), one of

Nepal's leading English-language newspapers.

The Bazaar offers the largest and most diverse selection of organic products in Nepal. While not every product is certified—certification is still relatively new and expensive in Nepal—Basnet interviews with every grower and producer to ensure organic growing standards are met.

The purest form of food

She personally classifies her local products for sale as **OP** (organic in process, meaning the farm has stopped the use of chemical fertilizers for less than three years), **O** (organic, meaning farmed without chemical fertilizers and in an organic manner for more than three years) and **DO** (default organic, meaning these products are from the faraway hills of Nepal with no road access, where chemical fertilizers and other contaminants were never introduced).

This final category, which Basnet calls “the purest form of food,” is especially interesting. I’ve met countless travelers in developing countries who assume *everything* must qualify as “DO,” that is, that traditional methods of farming are still prevalent. That, unfortunately, is far, far from the truth. If anything, it is more likely in these poorer, less regulated nations that the *worst* chemicals are heavily promoted and sold—even those long since banned in the so-called First World.

Brava to Basnet for giving Kathmandu access to traditional agriculture it can trust.

No plastic, ever



Kheti Bazaar: organic, local

In addition to staples such as white rice, lentils and fresh vegetables, shoppers at Kheti Bazaar can find rare brown rice, certified organic coffees and tea, artisan cheeses, fresh pesto, fresh and dried spices, fresh-baked organic croissants and breads on Saturday mornings. She also sells Nepal's only certified organic apples, which come from the far west of the country.

Basnet has also committed to making the retail experience as eco as her products, replacing plastic grocery bags with hand-made bags made from stitched newspapers and not using any plastics in her product displays.

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. One of the many environmental accomplishment's of Subechhya's father was his successful campaign to completely ban plastic bags from the city of **Ilam**—a first for Nepal, and a rare accomplishment anywhere in the world.

Inspired entrepreneurialism

Part of Basnet's inspiration comes from her experience in the U.S. ... but not in the way you might expect.

“When I was in the States, I missed the freshness and quality of the produce that I grew up with in Nepal,” she says as we sip an organic coffee at the Bazaar one morning.

Nepal's organic food and agricultural movement will get a huge boost from Basnet's inspired entrepreneurialism. Already she's providing access to the marketplace (when none existed before) for more than a dozen organic farmers and artisan producers. I believe that Kheti Bazaar will be, in short order, much more than a café and retail shop—it'll serve as a primary hub for Nepal's fledgling but growing organic community.

1905 Restaurant farmers' market

A few days later, on a lazy Saturday morning, I wander into the gardens of [1905 Restaurant](#). Only a few minutes' walk from the former **Royal Palace**, this is a rather grand place. It once feted England's **Queen Elizabeth** and today boasts an American chef who focuses on food from farmers around the valley.

To my amazement, I meet some of these same farmers in the

restaurant's gardens. 1905 Restaurant hosts a weekly farmer's market, one that greets curious customers like me with a delectable array of organic and artisan foods reminiscent of California cuisine. The participants include:

Veggies and cheese

[Himalayan French Cheese](#): **Francois Driard**, a young Frenchman who was first to introduce artisan cheeses to Nepal, currently produces a trio of exquisite cow's milk cheeses—Tomme, St. Marcellin and ricotta. He's also the founder and manager of the farmers' market.

Fresh Organic Farms: Nepal's first organic farm, started in the 1970s by an American, sells a broad selection of organic fruits and vegetables.

[Himal Farm](#): **Sandro Serafini**, an Italian from Rome who has opened a small dairy on the outskirts of **Lalitpur**, produces artisan cows' milk cheeses that include Nepal's only fresh-milk mozzarella. He also does a smoked and a soft fresh cheese, as well as charcuterie, fresh sausages and a selection of boar's meat steaks and burger patties.

Polish poultry pioneers



1905 Restaurant farmers' market: weekly bounty

Kathmandu Turbo Chicken: Ironically, the young Polish poultry

pioneers behind this venture are both vegetarians. As backpackers who got hooked by Nepal, they were looking for ways to generate income and stumbled upon the idea of rotisserie chicken, which they introduced to the Nepali cuisine. But their real passion lies in making a special line of vegetarian pates available exclusively at the farmers' market.

And the abundance continues, with fresh salsas being made by an American businessman whose hankering for a taste from home led to a sideline career; Himalayan-grown organic coffee; and a variety of fresh-baked croissants and pastries (don't miss the unbelievably decadent chocolate cake)!

The emerging expat influence on the Nepali food scene is both palpable and palatable.—**Michael Straus, contributing editor**

Like what Michael has to say? You can learn more about him and his vast experience in the world of organic food [here](#). You can read more from Michael by typing in his name into the Search field on the right margin of this web page.