

TREKKING IN THE Everest REGION

includes **KATHMANDU CITY GUIDE**

JAMIE McGUINNESS

trailblazer

6th
edition



JAMIE MCGUINNESS has trekked in the Everest region more than 25 times and has summited Everest itself five times. He manages Project Himalaya (project-himalaya.com) and treks and climbs for much of the year, spending the rest of the time planning the next adventure. His favourite pastime is exploring remote corners of the Himalaya with friends and a camera.

In Jamie's words: 'Nepal has given me my greatest adventures, and the Everest region will always be close to my heart. I am filled with memories of contemplating in awe the stupendous views from the tops of the high passes, and of evenings spent in lodge kitchens, enjoying philosophical banter around potbelly stoves. The Everest region is the best teahouse trekking region there is and the lodges give you an unparalleled freedom to explore independently. It is the peace trekking brings that draws me back; an escape from the frenetic modern world'.

Trekking in the Everest Region

First edition: 1993; this sixth edition: 2018

Publisher Trailblazer Publications

☐ trailblazer-guides.com

The Old Manse, Tower Rd, Hindhead, Surrey, GU26 6SU, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-905864-81-2

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Text, maps and photographs (unless otherwise credited)

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Photos – Front cover: Everest (8848m/29,028ft) is the darker peak in the centre; seen from above Gorak Shep. **This page:** Everest from Kala Pattar

Overleaf: Crossing the Tsho/Cho La (5420m/17,782ft)

Print production by D'Print (☎ +65-6581 3832), Singapore; printed in China

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

There are a couple of philosophies that have always guided this book. First, I don't recommend lodges but, instead, I merely list them. Some people judge their accommodation by the cleanliness of the toilet, others by the cosiness of the kitchen but the bottom line is, I know of so few bad lodges that choosing to recommend one over another is both unfair and perhaps unhelpful too.

Second, my goal was to cover virtually every route and track in the region so that you have the choice of where to go, because I feel that the availability of information (or lack of it) should not be a limiting factor. This was partly because I wished to write for everyone, from the first-time visitor to the Nepalophile. (I have constantly been surprised at the number of regulars I meet year after year in the hills). By covering the entire region, it was also my hope to spread trekkers to equally deserving areas. Perhaps, like 90% of trekkers, you'll still stick to the main routes – but at least that choice is yours.

For this edition I spent a refreshing two months trekking and climbing. Every paragraph and every map has been reviewed and the route guide refocused on a set of popular trek itineraries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the people of the Khumbu for two decades of their sincere hospitality and for sharing their considered opinions on so many matters, especially Natang and Pemba of Moonlight Lodge for a home away from home, Mingma Yangjee of Snow Lion, Dingboche, Chindi of Chukhung resort, Pasang of Buddha lodge, Gorak Shep, Kunga and Tsering Lhakpa of Thuklha-Dingboche. For generous trekking peak info, I thank Chewang Palden Sherpa and Lhakpa Dorje Sherpa, and the always passionate Rolwaling guides. Parts 2 and 3 are the combined effort of Anagha Neelakantan, Jamie McGuinness and building on several other authors' work. At Trailblazer, thanks to Nicky Slade, Nick Hill, Daniel McCrohan and, of course, the ever helpful and forgiving Bryn Thomas. Along the trails in the Khumbu there are so many people that I'd like to thank by name but, alas, most are more easily recalled by their smiles and helpfulness.

While I am constantly surprised by the courtesy and warmth of the Nepali people in general, and of the majority of government officials I have met, I can only hope that the more faceless side of the government and bureaucracy doesn't destroy the country before they act on the long-known realisation that politicisation and corruption are the root of Nepal's current problems.

Warning

All outdoor activities involve an element of risk, which could endanger you and those with you. It is impossible for any guidebook to alert you to every possible danger, or to anticipate the limitations of your party. The descriptions of trails, routes and geographical features in this guide are therefore not in any way a guarantee that they will be safe for you or your party. When you follow the advice and/or route information in this book you do so at your own risk and assume responsibility for your own safety.

Ensuring that you are aware of all relevant factors and exercising good field-craft combined with common sense is the best way to enjoy the mountains. If you feel unsure about your skill level, experience or knowledge base you should not assume responsibility for yourself or anyone else. Nepal's political situation is changeable and could affect your plans. Keep abreast of all developments and check government and relevant agency websites. You assume the risk of your travels and the responsibility for those with you. Be safe, be prepared, be informed.

INTRODUCTION

The Solu-Khumbu region of Nepal has been a magnet for mountaineers, adventurers and travellers since its opening to foreigners in the 1950s – and with good reason. While Everest is the draw, even without Everest, the gorgeous peaks and good facilities would still offer some of the best alpine trekking and mountaineering.

Even without Everest, the gorgeous peaks and good facilities would still offer some of the best alpine trekking and mountaineering

Passing through populated areas, a trek in Nepal is very different from a wilderness hike in the USA or New Zealand, or a randonné route in the European Alps. The hills in Nepal are the life and soul of diverse ethnic groups, the most famous of which are the hospitable Sherpa people. What further sets trekking in Nepal apart is the low cost and the ease with which a trek can be arranged. There can be few countries where you can set off to walk for several weeks carrying no food or shelter, yet be 100% sure that every day you will be able to find these essentials, and on a budget of less than US\$40 a day.

Teahouse trekking, trekking from lodge to lodge, is Nepal's speciality

Teahouse trekking, trekking from lodge to lodge, is Nepal's speciality and the main areas of Everest, Annapurna and Langtang have



(Above): Teahouse trekking is hiking from lodge to lodge. They're all independently run and have informal restaurants and simple bedrooms.

been joined by the Manaslu Circuit and Upper Mustang. A couple more, the Kanchenjunga and Makalu regions, are in the developing stage leaving only remote Dolpo without lodges. The Annapurna region, north of Pokhara, offers a greater range of terrain and cultures and treks from a couple of days to a couple of weeks, but is being drastically changed by roads. Reminiscent of the Annapurna Circuit a decade or two ago, the Manaslu Circuit that partly circles

Rediscover simple pleasures like the enduring glow of a sunset, the magic of flickering flames and the bliss of sleep to soothe naturally exercised muscles.

the range has become very popular during peak season. The Langtang region, north of Kathmandu, offers treks of up to two weeks and is slowly recovering from the earthquake of 2015.

The Kanchenjunga and the Makalu regions are now starting to offer teahouse treks, although they are still quite basic.

What sets the Everest region apart from these other areas is the fact that once above Namche and Lukla you are right among the mountains, continuously above 3000m/10,000ft with many chances to ascend above 5000m/16,400ft. The greater Khumbu (Everest) region also has immense scope for mountaineering and fun exploration.

Trekking is one of the best holidays there is; a great way to escape the noisy beeping world and rediscover simple pleasures like the enduring glow of a sunset, the magic of flickering flames and the bliss of sleep to soothe naturally exercised muscles. Rural life, little-changed for centuries, surrounds the trekker; thought-provoking and very different from your life at home. From the alpine valleys above Namche the scenery is awesome: Ama Dablam, Cholatse and numerous other peaks, while the 8000-metre giants – Makalu, Cho Oyu, Lhotse and Everest – command respect for their sheer height.

(Below): Everest (8848m/29,028ft), seen from Kala Pattar.





□ Teahouse trekking options [see p30]

Teahouse trekking is hiking lodge to lodge, eating in the lodge's dining room and sleeping in a basic private room. No tent, stove or food supplies needed. Teahouse trekking options are:

- **Solo trekking** – hiking independently, carrying your own clothing, sleeping bag and gear. This is easy to arrange and cheap.

- **Guided/package trek** – arranged through a trekking company with a local guide and porters to carry your gear, leaving you with a daypack.

- **Porter-guide trek** – a budget version of a guided trek where a porter who speaks some English carries your gear and helps you stay on trail.

Photo: On the Phortse-Pangboche trail, Ama Dablam (6812m) in the background.



❑ Everest Base Camp (EBC) [see p39]

This is the classic trek to Everest Base Camp and Kala Pattar (the best mountains-in-your-face viewpoint, **top**). It's also the most popular route, a reason to be a little wary of it in the peak October season. It goes satisfyingly high so it's vital to plan for acclimatisation to altitude. Most people fly in/out of Lukla (**above right**) but the Phaplu-Taksindu start (p47) adds only 2-3 days.

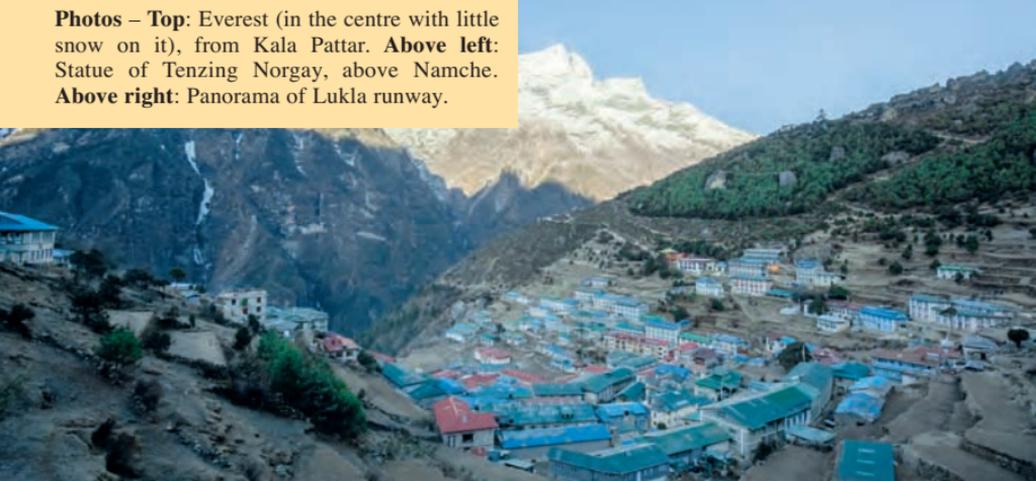
- **Max altitude:** 5600m/18,375ft Kala Pattar
- **Max sleeping alt:** 4940m/16,200ft Lobuche or 5150m/16,700ft Gorak Shep
- **Trek days:** Lukla-Lukla, 14-15 days
- **Total:** Kathmandu-Kathmandu, 16-19 days

Photos – Top: Everest (in the centre with little snow on it), from Kala Pattar. **Above left:** Statue of Tenzing Norgay, above Namche. **Above right:** Panorama of Lukla runway.

❑ Namche based trekking [see p51]

For a more moderate trek, still with glorious mountain views and a peek of Everest, base yourself in Namche (**below**) and day trip the surrounding villages and gompas. The comfortable lodges are a bonus and you can immerse yourself in Sherpa culture.

- **Max altitude:** less than 4000m/13,000ft
- **Max sleeping alt:** 3860m/12,665ft or less
- **Trek days:** Lukla-Lukla: 7-10 days





☐ **Gokyo trek** [see p43]

Also with fantastic Everest and mountain views, the Gokyo trek trades Everest Base Camp for a series of stunning lakes, slightly gentler altitudes and more day trip opportunities.

- **Max altitude:** 5340m/17,520ft Gokyo Ri
- **Max sleeping altitude:** 4750m/15,584ft
- **Trek days:** Lukla-Lukla, 13-14 days
- **Total:** Kathmandu-Kathmandu, 15-17 days

Photos – **Top:** Everest from Gokyo Ri; **above** the Gokyo lodges overlook the lake, **right** Gokyo and Everest from the Renjo La; **below** Gokyo Ri.





☐ **Everest BC & Gokyo trek** [see p44]

If you can't decide between Gokyo and EBC, combine them with the adventurous crossing of the Tsho La mountain pass.

- **Max altitude:** 5600m/18,375ft Kala Pattar
- **Max sleep alt:** 5150m/16,700ft Gorak Shep
- **Passes:** 5420m/17,782ft Tsho La
- **Trek days:** Lukla-Lukla, 17-18 days
- **Total:** Kathmandu-Kathmandu, 19-21 days

Photos –this page: Crossing the Tsho La; the glacier conditions are variable so cross only in good weather and take instep crampons.

Opposite, top: The lodges of Dzonglha, jumping off point for the Tsho La (see p224).

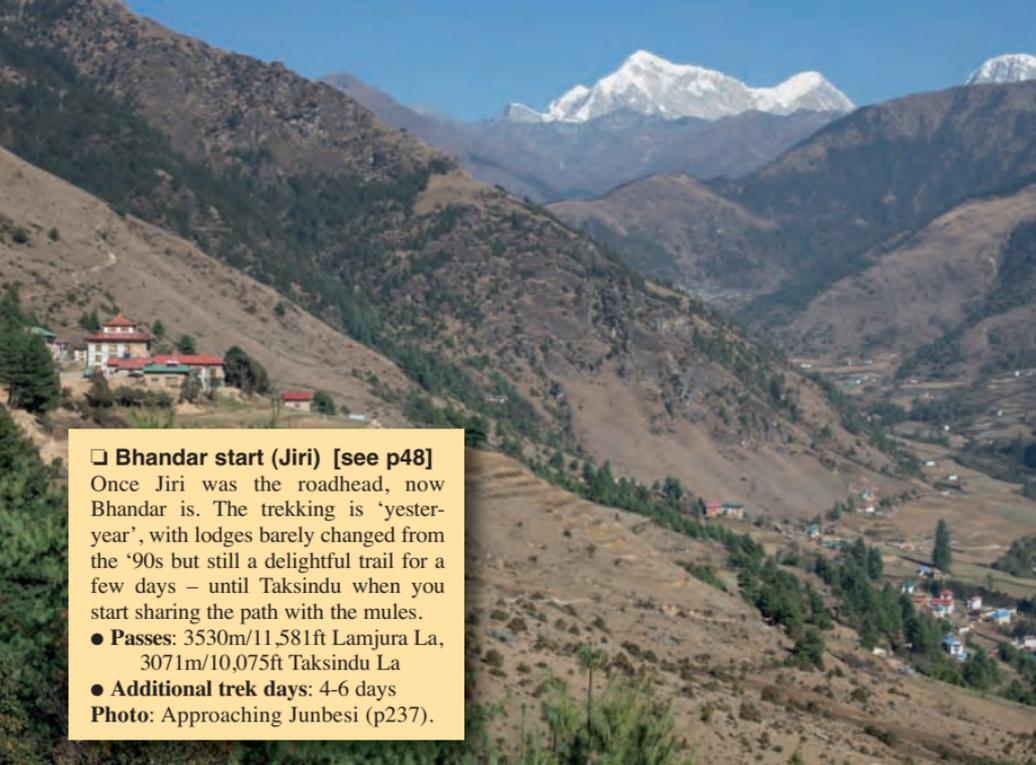
Middle: Going down the rough rubble of the Kongma La (p223), Lobuche in the distance.

Bottom: Steep terrain: Descending the stone stairs of the Renjo La (p228).

☐ **Everest Three Passes** [see p45]

Strenuous; the grand tour of the region, crossing three major mountain passes to visit the four major valleys and their viewpoints, and has become the fit budget backpacker's favourite. Apart from stunning views, each pass features a steep and rough approach, and should only be crossed in good, snow-free conditions.

- **Max altitude:** 5600m/18,375ft Kala Pattar
- **Max sleep alt:** 5150m/16,700ft Gorak Shep
- **Passes:** 5535m/18,160ft Kongma La
5420m/17,782ft Tsho La
5417m/17,772ft Renjo La
- **Trek days:** Lukla-Lukla: 20-24 days
Phaplu-Lukla: 22-25 days
Bhandar-Lukla: 24-26 days
- **Total:** Kathmandu-Kathmandu, 22-28 days



□ **Bhandar start (Jiri)** [see p48]

Once Jiri was the roadhead, now Bhandar is. The trekking is 'yesterday', with lodges barely changed from the '90s but still a delightful trail for a few days – until Taksindu when you start sharing the path with the mules.

● **Passes:** 3530m/11,581ft Lamjura La,
3071m/10,075ft Taksindu La

● **Additional trek days:** 4-6 days

Photo: Approaching Junbesi (p237).



□ **Salpa-Arun trek** [see p50]

Yester-decade; first trekked by Tilman and Shipton in the early 1950s, the whole experience is little changed. It is adventurous 'dal bhaat' trekking (many of the lodges don't even have menus) and, going against the grain of the land, there are some strenuous ascents and descents.

● **Passes:** 3349m/10,987ft Salpa Bhanjyang, 3085m/10,121ft Surkie La
3173m/10,410ft Pangum La

● **Additional trek days:** 5-7 days

Photos – Left: Making momos (p106)

Right: Drinking tongba (hot fermented millet beer). **Below:** Market, Bung (left, see p259); teahouse kitchen (right).





Sleep out under the stars For experienced backpackers, the region offers infinite possibilities. If you're prepared to leave the tent and stove behind, you can travel really light and enjoy nights out under the stars – but you won't go hungry. Since you're rarely far from a lodge you can have a good lunch and order a plate of fried rice to bag up and take away for your dinner, plus some biscuits for breakfast.

With no light pollution the stars put on a dazzling display. **(Photo above:** The night sky over Everest, seen from Kala Pattar). Sleeping out is an unforgettable experience well worth it even for just one night. **(Photo below:** The author on the top of Renjo La).





Trekking peaks

Despite the name, these are real alpine climbs on glaciers and require warm boots, crampons, ice axe and a harness set, all for rent in Kathmandu, Namche, Khare, or the last village before the peak's base camp.

Photo: Climbers ascending **Mera Peak** with the Lhotse-Nuptse wall on the far left, Makalu centre right, and Chamlang (7319m) on the right.

Mera Peak 6476m/21,246ft

Satisfying; this is the highest, least technical and most popular peak with a glorious 360° summit panorama (above), including five out of the six highest mountains on the planet. Although it starts and ends as other treks in the region do, it quickly branches away into a completely different valley, still with lodges although they're not as slick as the main Everest region.

- **Max altitude:** 6461m/21,197ft Mera East Peak
- **Max sleeping altitude:** 5800m/19,029ft Mera High Camp
- **Trek days Lukla-Lukla:** 17-18 days
- **Trek days Salleri-Lukla:** 18-19 days

Island Peak 6173m/20,252ft

Steeper than Mera, and with a thin summit ridge, the climb involves using fixed ropes similar to on Everest, including abseiling, and so is suitable for somebody looking for a more technical introduction. Acclimatising comprehensively via Everest Base Camp makes the most sense, then the side trip only adds a few day onto the trek. From the summit, you are ringed by spectacular mountains, giving a real sense of achievement.

- **Max altitude:** 6173m/20,252ft
- **Passes:** optional 5535m/18,160ft Kongma La
- **Max sleep alt:** 5150m/16,700ft Gorak Shep
- **Trek days:** Lukla-Lukla with Everest Base Camp: 19-21 days
- **Trek days:** Lukla-Lukla without Everest Base Camp: 17 days

Lobuche East Peak 6105m/20,029ft

Convenience; just off the main Everest trail, Lobuche Peak would seem ideal. The panorama is indeed awesome from the top of a ridge that is straightforward to get to, however to get to the false summit requires good balance, traversing a sharp ridge, and the real summit is still a slightly tricky notch away, taking a committed guide and good conditions. If the view is more important than the actual summit, Lobuche works, otherwise perhaps try Island Peak.

- **Max altitude:** 6119m/20,075ft
or 6100m/10,013ft
- **Max sleeping altitude:** 5250m/17,225ft
- **Trek-climb days Lukla-Lukla:** 17-19 days



Trekking styles and agencies

TEAHOUSE TREKKING

Dotted along the main trails are privately owned teahouses, guest houses and lodges (and the terms are used interchangeably). They can provide anything from a cup of tea to a full meal and a bed so, for the entire trek, there's no need to carry food or shelter. Teahouse trekking, as it's usually called, is easy to organise through a company, or independently, just pack and go, and it is also good value.

The lodges are on the basic side, with double rooms nothing more than two beds and a light, and often with thin walls. At lower altitudes there is a choice of a shared toilet or a room with an attached toilet. However, at higher, pipe-freezing elevations, there are only shared toilets.



What to expect in a lodge

Lodges offer an extensive menu based on noodles, rice, flour, potatoes, eggs and the sparing use of vegetables. Breakfast offerings include muesli, a variety of porridges, pancakes and bread with jam or eggs. If you have a large breakfast (fried eggs on toast, yum!) do order at least half an hour prior to when you hope to set off.

For lunch it is worth considering what can be quickly prepared, with veg noodle soup being popular. Pancakes and Tibetan bread are also relatively quick to make. Increasingly, toasted sandwiches are on menus too. A diverse order will take time to make.

Many lodges prefer that you order dinner at least an hour ahead so that they can plan. Popcorn is a good snack, especially accompanied by a beer. Most soups will be from a packet, but few cooks read the instructions for adding milk, so don't expect cream of tomato soup to be that. Chips are a favourite, although the quality of the ketchup is questionable.

Yak steaks are increasingly available although, without exception, are actually buffalo. In some places the pizza and pasta is good, but in less competent lodges, pasta sauce made with ketchup is generally disgusting. The Khumbu version of vegetable spring rolls would be out of place in a Chinese restaurant, but is usually tasty.

Apple pie is usually delicious, often deep fried in the same way as the spring rolls.

Most meal choices are carbohydrate-heavy; exactly what trekkers require. All lodges serve tea, coffee, hot chocolate, hot lemon, soft drinks and beer (check its temperature first) and some places even offer wine.



There are many people in the trekking industry who would consider the above advice over-cautious. However, two American studies found that 9-12% of people who ascend directly to 2800m (ie Lukla's altitude) suffered noticeable AMS, admittedly usually non-life-threatening, but definitely uncomfortable. The AMS tended to resolve itself within two to three days of staying at the same altitude. Arriving directly at 3860m (ie Syangboche) caused AMS in 84% of people.

After spending two to three nights between 2000m (6562ft) and 3000m (9843ft) hikers should, according to the long-established guidelines, sleep on average around 300m (984ft) higher each day, with a rest day every three days (as shown in the table above). The doctors in the region all stress that in every case they treat, the patient has ascended faster than the guidelines in this table.

Yes, it could be argued that a night on a plane with the cabin pressure at the equivalent of more than 2000m (6562ft), could be counted as one of the nights between 2000-3000m.

Sometimes the daily altitude gain is unavoidably greater than 300m. Most people will tolerate up to around a 500m gain. However, the higher the gain the more important it is to have a rest day afterwards. Gains of 800m or more require being properly acclimatised to your starting altitude, and can still cause problems.

In the itineraries tables on p42-3, you end up with a long itinerary if you stick exactly to the guidelines, so the faster-pace itinerary is one that is a day shorter but still altitude-aware, and is one that many people have completed. Although many people do trek the options we label 'unwise' or 'very fast pace', usually at least one person, sometimes several in a group, will have to turn back, and there have been plenty of rescues on these 'unwise' sort of itineraries.

Note that once you have acclimatised, and slept up high, you don't need to acclimatise again on a trek.

☐ ALTITUDE GUIDE

Day	Suggested altitude
0	below 2000m (6561ft)
1	2-3000m (6561-9843ft)
2	2-3000m (6561-9843ft)
3	3000m (9843ft)
4	3300m (10,827ft)
5	3600m (11,811ft)
6	3900m (12,795ft)
7	3900m (12,795ft)
8	4200m (13,780ft)
9	4500m (14,764ft)
10	4800m (15,748ft)
11	4800m (15,748ft)
12	5100m (16,732ft)

Route options

EVEREST BASE CAMP TREK

The panorama from the Kala Pattar viewpoint is stunning with huge, in-your-face mountains, including Everest, peeking over the shoulder of Nuptse. Particularly in the April-May season, trekkers also visit the tent village of Everest Base Camp, although there are no actual views of Everest.

(cont'd on p42)

Throughout the Khumbu, so many villages are delightfully set, but Gokyo takes the prize. With the slightly less extreme altitudes, Gokyo may be a better option for ambitious families, and is indeed popular for an Easter trek.

Gokyo – possible itineraries

RECOMMENDED ALTITUDE	DAY	TO OVERNIGHT STOP (BEST OPTION)	TO OVERNIGHT STOP (COMPROMISE OPTION)
below 2000m	1	arrive Kathmandu (1400m)	arrive Kathmandu (1400m)
2-3000m	2	fly Lukla, trek Phakding (2640m)	Lukla, Phakding (2640m)
2-3000m	3	trek Namche (3450m)	trek Namche (3450m)
3000m	4	Namche rest (3450m)	Namche rest (3450m)
3300m	5	Namche rest (3450m)	trek Kyangjuma (3600m)
3600m	6	trek Khumjung (3790m)	trek Mong/Dole (4000m)
3900m	7	trek Mong/Dole (4000m)	trek Machermo (4410m)
3900m	8	trek Machermo (4410m)	trek Gokyo (4750m)
4200m	9	trek Gokyo (4750m)	Gokyo, via Gokyo Ri
4500m	10	Gokyo, via Gokyo Ri	trek Dole/Mong (4000m)
descending	11	trek Dole/Mong (4000m)	trek Namche (3450m)
...	12	trek Namche (3450m)	trek Lukla (2850m)
...	13	trek Lukla (2850m)	fly Kathmandu (1400m)
...	14	fly Kathmandu (1400m)	afternoon/eve departure
...	15	afternoon/eve departure	alternative departure
...	16	alternative departure	

The trail description starts on p217 and the Namche to Gokyo section continues from p210.

For the compromise itinerary, consider taking Diamox all the way up. If you want to be cautious with this, consider taking it only from Mong/Dole and up.

EVEREST BASE CAMP AND GOKYO

Keen to visit both? If you plan to visit both but not Chukhung, it is slightly more sensible to visit Gokyo first since the initial maximum sleeping altitude there is slightly lower. Crossing the Tsho La (Cho La) between the valleys is definitely adventurous with a steep approach and descent that borders on scrambling and snow conditions need to be reasonable. If there is an untimely fall of snow then the alternative route via Phortse takes an extra day or some hard walking; less alpine terrain but just as rewarding.

Everest BC and Gokyo – itinerary

RECOMMENDED ALTITUDE	DAY	TO OVERNIGHT STOP	ACTUAL ALTITUDE
below 2000m	1	arrive Kathmandu	1400m
2-3000m	2	fly Lukla, trek Phakding	2640m
2-3000m	3	trek Namche	3450m
3000m	4	Namche	3450m
3300m	5	trek Kyangjuma /Phortse Tenga	3610m /3675m
3600m	6	trek Mong /Dole	3793m /4040m



Are trekking peaks crowded?

Island Peak is by far the most popular peak with around 2200 climbers a year (excluding guides). Compare this with Africa's Kilimanjaro at 35,000 or so, and Alaska's Denali at 1100 or so.

With climbers concentrated in the October-November season, this averages to perhaps 25-50 members plus guides a day climbing or descending on the one or sometimes two fixed ropes up the face; a bit of a mess. However, for shoulder seasons and the April-May season, the numbers are more pleasant, although on one fixed rope.

Mera Peak, a far more spacious peak, is the next most popular with around 1200 people in a year, so plenty of room to grow. Lobuche East numbers have grown over the years to around 700, so roughly a third of the numbers compared to Island Peak.

All other trekking peaks throughout the country see less than 100 climbers a year.

reason Island Peak/Imjatse (6173m/20,252ft) and Lobuche Peak (6105m/20,109ft) are popular 'trekking peaks'. That means they are busy during the main October-November season, sometimes chaotically so with dozens of people climbing a day. With ropes fixed along all the tricky sections it is usually a case of clipping on a jumar (a one-way device) plus safety line and climbing, hopefully to the summit.

The better times to climb are mid-March through to late May and the last week of September into early December, by which time it is very cold. It is possible to climb in winter but very cold indeed, especially if windy. Don't climb during the monsoon. Snow conditions are usually dangerously soft.

Permits

The climbing section must be organised by a trekking company and they will handle the permit, guide insurance and rubbish deposit. Realistically, adding a trekking peak to your trek will add a minimum of US\$750 to 1000, including a climbing guide. The guide will normally climb with you unless you are competent alpinists.

New permit fees and rules were introduced in 2016, and now peaks below 5800m don't require a permit, which includes the rock scramble **Pokalde** (5794m/19,009ft) by the Kongma La.

The permit fee is finally **per person**, and now varies with the season:

Spring	1 March to 31 May	US\$250
Summer	1 June to 31 August	US\$70
Autumn	1 September to 30 November	US\$125
Winter	1 December to 28 February	US\$70

Island Peak / Imjatse 6173m/20,252ft

The name was coined by Eric Shipton, who thought this peak looked like 'an island in a sea of ice'. Although a convenient location, the climbing is satisfyingly real, involving a simple scramble on rock to a crevassed glacier, and then ascending a roughly 45-degree steep snow/ice face to the airy summit ridge, sometimes notched with a tricky crevasse or two. The starting point is Chukhung with a somewhat dusty base camp a few hours away.

The climbing description starts on p264.

morning fog pattern sometimes settles on the valley making rising early a challenge. This also disrupts some flights but by 10am or 11am schedules are back to normal. Visiting Kathmandu is pleasant during any of the seasons although spring and autumn are the most popular, and crowded times.

What to take

FOR TEAHOUSE TREKKING

The array of hiking gear available now is staggering, and with a focus on nuances or technical features, choosing can be bewildering. However, whether your gear is the latest or best, or worn-in and comfortable, using it is what really counts. Confident teahouse trekkers can get away with very light backpacks now.

Clothing – for Lukla and above

Flying in, you skip the hotter middle hills country. It can be sunny and fine, almost shorts weather, up to and around Namche; a drizzly afternoon can also be surprisingly cold. Don't be alarmed though; this region often feels as cold as anywhere else on the trek.

Above Namche the days are cooler and a set of interchangeable warm and/or windproof layers is best. These layers will also do for sitting around in the high lodges from late April to October but at other times a toasty insulated (down) jacket for cold mountain tops and evenings in the lodges is essential.

An important key to staying healthy is sleeping well and warmly so that your body doesn't waste energy trying to keep you warm. Most lodges now offer quilts, regularly aired but not regularly cleaned. However, especially during peak season it is wise not to rely on these, and anyway, they are not always quite warm enough. Unless you are particularly hardy and want to travel superlight, consider them only a top up, and still pack a good sleeping bag.

During the main trekking season (Oct to Dec) it is nearly always dry so you'll only need one set of clothes plus perhaps an extra shirt. During late winter to May clothing may get wet so an extra thermal or light fleece might be appreciated.

On domestic flights in Nepal the usual luggage limit is 15kg (34lb) before excess charges apply.

Clothing – for middle hills trekking (below Lukla)

With altitudes ranging from 350m to 3500m (1200-12,000ft) you need a variety of gear to cope. For the most part, no matter what time of year, when the weather is fine it is hot and sweaty while trekking so you'll want mainly cool, loose clothes and sun protection. Pass crossings are often windy and cold, though, so have some warmer layers and a windproof/waterproof jacket: note it can snow on the middle hills passes in late autumn and winter. Being toasty in the evenings is so much more comfortable than skimping, so do bring a light puffy jacket (a fleece jacket just doesn't seem quite enough) and some warm fleece pants or long johns (thermal underwear trousers/base-layer bottoms).

Facts about the country

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Sandwiched between India and China, Nepal is roughly rectangular in shape; 800km long by 200km wide (500 miles by 125 miles). With a total area of 147,181 sq km it's about the same size as England and Wales combined, or Florida, USA. Although Nepal's geographical claim to fame is indeed the Himalaya (eight out of ten of the world's highest peaks are here) there is a tremendous range in elevation across the country. Everest, the top of the world, stands at 8848m/29,028ft while the lowest place in Nepal is a mere 70m/230ft above sea-level.

Nepal's population is estimated at approximately 29 million, with a just-above-average growth rate of 1.35%. However, it is thought that at least a further 10% on top of that 29 million works abroad.

Mountains, valleys and plains

Nepal conveniently divides into three distinct regions, running as east-west bands across the country:

The true Himalayan range stretches around 2400km (1500 miles) in three parallel ranges from Nanga Parbat (8126m/26,660ft) in Pakistan to Namcha Barwa (7782m/ 25,531ft) in Eastern Tibet. The highest is the northernmost and in the Nepalese section includes eight of the world's fourteen 'eight-thousanders' (as mountaineers refer to peaks over 8000m/26,247ft). Some definitions also include the Karakoram, Hindu Kush and Pamirs as part of the Himalayan region. The range is so high it stops the monsoon system from entering Tibet.

Lying between the Himalaya and the southern lowland, the middle hills region comprises mountains and hills, river valleys and basins, including the Kathmandu and Pokhara valleys. It covers about half the country. Running parallel to the Himalaya are the Mahabharat, rising to 4877m/16,000ft and the Siwaliks (or Churia) ranging from about 600m to 1500m (2000ft to 5000ft).

Along the southern border with India is the lowland plain known as the Tarai (Terai), covering a little under a quarter of the country. Once a dense subtropical forest, much has now been cut down to make way for settlers and to provide firewood and building materials for both India and Nepal. Some of the remaining forest areas, such as Chitwan, have been set aside as national parks. Almost 60%





Puja

A puja (act of worship) can be anything from a quick prayer to a festival of several days but offerings of some sort are usually involved. Hindus offer flowers, food and coloured powders and light incense and butter lamps. They receive a tika (a red mark on their forehead) as a blessing from the deity. Hindu pujas to mark the year's most important festivals require animal sacrifices (formerly human sacrifices) and at Dasain thousands of buffalo and goats are beheaded.

Buddhist pujas are rather more humane. Juniper is burnt as incense, mantras (see box p148) are chanted and prayer wheels are spun. Lamas are sponsored to say prayers and invoke the blessing of the gods.

because it was what he desired. He realised that extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence were not the answer; the 'Middle Way' is the path to enlightenment. This involves mastering the four noble truths (that all life is suffering, that desire is the cause of all suffering, that it is possible to escape from this state and achieve nirvana, and that this can be done by following the Eight-Fold Path of right views, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right endeavour, right mindfulness and right concentration).

Buddhist sects Soon after the Buddha's death in 480BC, a schism occurred amongst his disciples that eventually divided Buddhism into two main camps, Theravada and Mahayana; but there are now many sects within these.

● **Theravada Buddhism** ('the tradition of the elders') is closer to the Buddha's original teachings that enlightenment comes through your own endeavours, not through divine interference. Also known as Hinayana (the 'Lesser vehicle'), it's followed in Sri Lanka and the countries of South-East Asia.

● **Mahayana Buddhism** is entirely different. It's much more like a religion with a colourful pantheon of enlightened beings known as bodhisattvas. The Buddha himself is seen as a divine being, just one of a number of Buddhas who've come down to earth (and some who have yet to come) to help everyone achieve nirvana. Buddhism was given a much wider appeal because converts did not have to give up their old gods; they could continue to worship them as bodhisattvas.

● **Tibetan Buddhism** or Lamaism is the main form of Buddhism practised in Nepal. When Mahayana Buddhism reached Tibet in the 7th century, it absorbed the deities of the native religion, Bon. Lamaism emphasises the importance of magic and the reciting of magical phrases from tantras (mantras) to achieve certain ends; it's often referred to as Tantric Buddhism. Tantrism was formerly popular also in Hinduism, and it taught that there are two parts to each deity; male and female. It was thought that a mystical union with one or other part of the deity was possible by mortals through sexual excess. In the 11th century, Tibetan Buddhism was purged of these extreme tantric elements by the monk, Marpa.

In Tibetan Buddhism, spiritual teachers are known as lamas and live in the gompa (monastery) that is usually attached to the temple. In the course of Tibetan history these lamas achieved greater power than the kings.

The city

Nepal's capital city (population around 1.4 million) is a fascinating mélange of mediaeval and modern that combines astounding beauty with appalling squalor and poverty. Time has stood still in parts of Kathmandu Valley. In the narrow alleys, around the numerous temples and shrines and along the banks of the (now filthy) Bagmati River people go about their daily lives in much the same way as their ancestors did hundreds of years ago. Yet, it is a city on the edge of disaster, the traffic is close to gridlock during rush hours and the air and water pollution are major public health hazards. The 2015 earthquake caused considerable damage, particularly in the poorer areas and to the older buildings, some of which have now been restored.

For first-time visitors to Asia, Kathmandu is a chaotic visual feast. There are some great places to stay and budget accommodation can be better value than in the big cities of India.

It's well worth setting aside at least a few days to see something of the city and surrounding area.

HISTORY

Origins

The name Kathmandu is believed to be a corruption of Kasthamandap ('Square house of wood'), the 1000-year-old dharamsala (rest-house) that still stands in Durbar Square.

The first identifiable civilisation in the Kathmandu Valley was that of the Kirats, who occupied a number of sites in the region in the second half of the first millennium BC. They were succeeded by the Licchavi in the 9th century AD and the Malla in the 13th century. The settlements were centred around religious sites known as *piths* or power places, usually on the tops of hills.

Early urban planning

Kathmandu was a town of almost 2000 houses by the beginning of the Malla period (13th century), centred on Pashupatinath. Like the other two large towns in the Valley, Patan and Bhaktapur, it was an independent kingdom. Religion controlled not only the lives of the people but also the layout of these towns. Wandering through the chaotic maze of streets and temples in modern Kathmandu, it's difficult to believe that there has ever been any town planning here; but,



Popular with groups, the Kathmandu Guest House is bursting in the high season. It has a large garden and a variety of comfortable rooms (standard sgl/dbl \$38/48, garden-facing \$57/67, deluxe \$96/106).

Nearby and often recommended is *Ambassador Garden Home* [66] (☎ 470 0724, 📧 aghhotel.com; sgl \$51-87, dbl \$63-105).

In north Thamel *Hotel Manang* [4] (☎ 470 0993, 📧 roomandfood.com; sgl \$75-85, dbl \$85-95, extra bed \$25) is popular with trekking groups. Also good is *Hotel Harati* [102] (☎ 425 7907, 📧 hotelharati.com.np; sgl \$50-60, dbl \$60-80, extra beds \$10-15, suites \$100).

Currently getting great reviews, *Kathmandu Grand Hotel* [16] (☎ 470 0694, 📧 kathmandugrandhotel.com; sgl/dbl standard \$65/75, deluxe \$75/85, suite \$85/9), formerly Hotel Tenki, is a popular place.

Other hotels in this price bracket include:

● **KEYED TO THAMEL MAP, p115**

9 Gaju Suite Hotel (☎ 443 2281, 📧 gajusuite.com) sgl/dbl deluxe \$80/90, apartment \$110/150, extra bed \$20-30

17 Hotel Marshyangdi (☎ 470 0105, 📧 hotelmarshyangdi.com) standard sgl/dbl \$50/60, deluxe \$80/90, extra beds \$20-30, suites \$100-200

24 Kathmandu Eco Hotel (☎ 444 0195, 📧 kathmanduecohotel.com) sgl/dbl standard \$60/68, deluxe \$70/78, suite \$80/90

25 Hotel Buddha (☎ 470 0366, 📧 hotelbuddhakathmandu.com) sgl/dbl standard \$65/75, deluxe \$75/85

32 Hotel Thamel (☎ 442 3968, 📧 hotelthamel.com) sgl \$55-65, dbl \$60-75, extra bed \$10

63 Dalai-la Boutique Hotel (☎ 470 1436, 📧 dalailaboutiquehotel.com) rooms \$80-150, suites \$300-500

97 Thamel Eco Resort (☎ 426 3810, 📧 thamelecoresort.com) sgl/dbl budget \$45/50, standard \$70/80, deluxe \$80/90, extra bed \$20

104 Mandala Boutique Hotel (☎ 425 4511, 📧 mandalaboutiquehotel.com.np) dbl/tpl from \$60/70

● **KEYED TO KATHMANDU MAP, p113**

2 Hotel Manaslu (☎ 441 0071, 📧 hotelmanaslu.com) sgl/dbl/tpl \$81/86/120

4 Hotel Tibet (☎ 442 9085, 📧 hotel-tibet.com.np) sgl/dbl \$60/70

● **MARKED OFF MAP, p113**

Hotel Shambala (☎ 465 0251, 📧 sham balahotel.com) sgl/dbl from \$73/81

Four- and five-star hotels (from \$100/£75) Most of the city's top hotels are much like expensive hotels anywhere in the world.

The oldest of Kathmandu's hotels is the overpriced and under-serviced *Hotel Yak & Yeti* [8; map p113] (☎ 424 8999, 📧 yakandyeti.com; rooms from \$240 to \$750). Centrally located, it has everything you'd expect from a five-star hotel, although the modern wings don't exactly blend with the old Rana palace which forms part of it. Its excellent Chimney Restaurant is a Kathmandu institution that was opened before the hotel itself by Russian ballet dancer Boris Lisanevich, a tourism pioneer in 1950s Nepal.

Yak & Yeti aside, there are some good hotel options for those wanting a less quirky, more genuine four- or five-star experience:

Probably the best hotel in Kathmandu is *Dwarika's Hotel* (☎ 447 9488, 📧 dwarikas.com; sgl/dbl from \$265/280, suites \$400-1900). If Kathmandu is

Mountaineering history

EVEREST

Meantime let us count our blessings – I mean those thousands of peaks, climbed and unclimbed, of every size, shape and order of difficulty, where each of us may find our own Mt Everest. **HW Tilman Mount Everest 1938**

The search for the world's highest mountain

In 1808 the Survey of India began the daunting task of mapping the whole of the subcontinent. One of the goals was to discover if the Himalaya was indeed the highest mountain range in the world, as had previously been suspected. Already challenging, the project was made even more difficult by the fact that Nepal and Tibet, wary of foreign intervention, were closed to outsiders.

By 1830 the survey had reached the border between India and Nepal. Unable to cross into Nepal, surveyors resolved to continue the project from the plains. A baseline the length of the range was marked and in 1847 surveying of the northern peaks began, using trigonometrical calculations based on the heights and distances of known points. Conditions were terrible: malaria was rife and monsoon rain eroded the observation towers each year.

Until the mid-19th century it was thought that Kanchenjunga, in Sikkim, at about 28,000ft (8534m), was the highest peak in the range. In 1856 calculations published by the Survey of India revealed that a mountain on the border between Nepal and Tibet was higher. This mountain was designated 'Peak XV' and its height stated to be 29,002ft (8839m); Kanchenjunga was 28,156ft (8582m).

The accuracy of this first survey is astounding considering the fact that the mountains were measured from survey points between 108 and 150 miles away from the peaks. In their calculations surveyors had to take account of the earth's curvature and the changing air density, which bends light. They also waited 18 months for perfect conditions and good visibility, with the pollution from all the wood fires used in cooking often obscuring the views.

The generally used height of Everest is just 26ft (less than 9m) higher than their estimates, at 8848m/29,028ft, a figure produced by an Indian survey taken in Nepal in the 1950s. It's interesting to note that when National Geographic made their much lauded 1:50,000 map of Everest in 1988, instead of re-measuring the mountain they



‘We knocked the bastard off!’ – success in 1953

The 1953 expedition was an all-out assault. It was decided that oxygen was to be used to the limit of its advantages, for aiding sleep and climbing – anything to conquer. With all this equipment the walk-in was on a grand scale: the first of two groups of porters numbered some 350 people. Since the only currency accepted in the hills at the time was silver coins it took several porters just to carry the wages. There were 13 climbers, with Tenzing Norgay added to the climbing ranks, plus a reporter and cameraman.

The team spent two weeks climbing in the Khumbu area to aid acclimatisation before tackling the Icefall. It was while forging a route through this monstrous obstacle that Hillary and Tenzing first got to know each other and Tenzing demonstrated that he could match the very competitive Hillary. Once the camps in the Western Cwm were established sickness took its toll, setting back the schedules. However, after a 13-day struggle, Camp VIII on the South Col was established.

Charles Evans and Tom Bourdillon made the first summit attempt from this camp although it was clearly too far away to allow a safe return if they did succeed. In the event snow conditions deteriorated and one of the oxygen sets caused problems, so the climbers settled for the south summit. This was less than 100m/328ft below the real summit, but at that altitude, even with oxygen, the climbers estimated it to be three hours away.

The second assault was better planned. A higher camp, Camp IX, was established and Hillary and Tenzing rested here for the night, drinking quantities of hot lemon and even eating a little. At 6.30am on 29 May, they began the climb. They reached the south summit by 9am, and the snow conditions past this first critical point were good. What is now known as the ‘Hillary Step’, a 13m/43ft barrier, was overcome by chimneying up a gap between a cornice and the rock wall, a dangerous but necessary move. The summit, only a short distance away, was reached at 11.30am. In the words of Hillary:

I looked at Tenzing and in spite of the balaclava, goggles and oxygen mask all encrusted with long icicles that concealed his face, there was no disguising his infectious grin of pure delight as he looked all around him. We shook hands and then Tenzing threw his arm around my shoulders and we thumped each other on the back until we were almost breathless. John Hunt *The Ascent of Everest*

By evening they had struggled down to the South Col where Hillary told his team mate: ‘Well, George, we knocked the bastard off’ – though his colourful language wasn’t printed in the press at the time.

Chinese attempts on Everest

The pressure bubble burst with the success of the British expedition. It was some time before further attempts were considered as now the other unclimbed ‘eight-thousanders’ commanded attention. The Swiss climbed Everest after their conquest of Lhotse, the fourth highest) in 1956. In 1960 the Indians came close to success and at the same time the Chinese attempted the pre-war route via Tibet.

The people

THE SHERPAS

Years of living in their villages left me well aware that Sherpas are no more strangers to greed, pride, love of power, jealousy or pettiness than other mortals. They seem still, for all the close familiarity, a singularly appealing people.

Stanley Stevens *Cultural Ecology and History in Highland Nepal* (Univ of California)

The mountaineering exploits of the Sherpas on foreign expeditions since the 1920s brought them clearly into the world spotlight. Tenzing Norgay's conquest, with Hillary, of Everest in 1953 was a fitting tribute to the part played by Sherpas in the history of mountaineering, not just in the Khumbu but in many parts of the Himalaya. Although the lure of Everest has brought crowds of foreigners to their land, they seem to have weathered the cultural invasion surprisingly well. Theirs is an enduring culture which Westerners have learnt to respect, indeed admire, for its tolerance, comradeship and many other positive values.

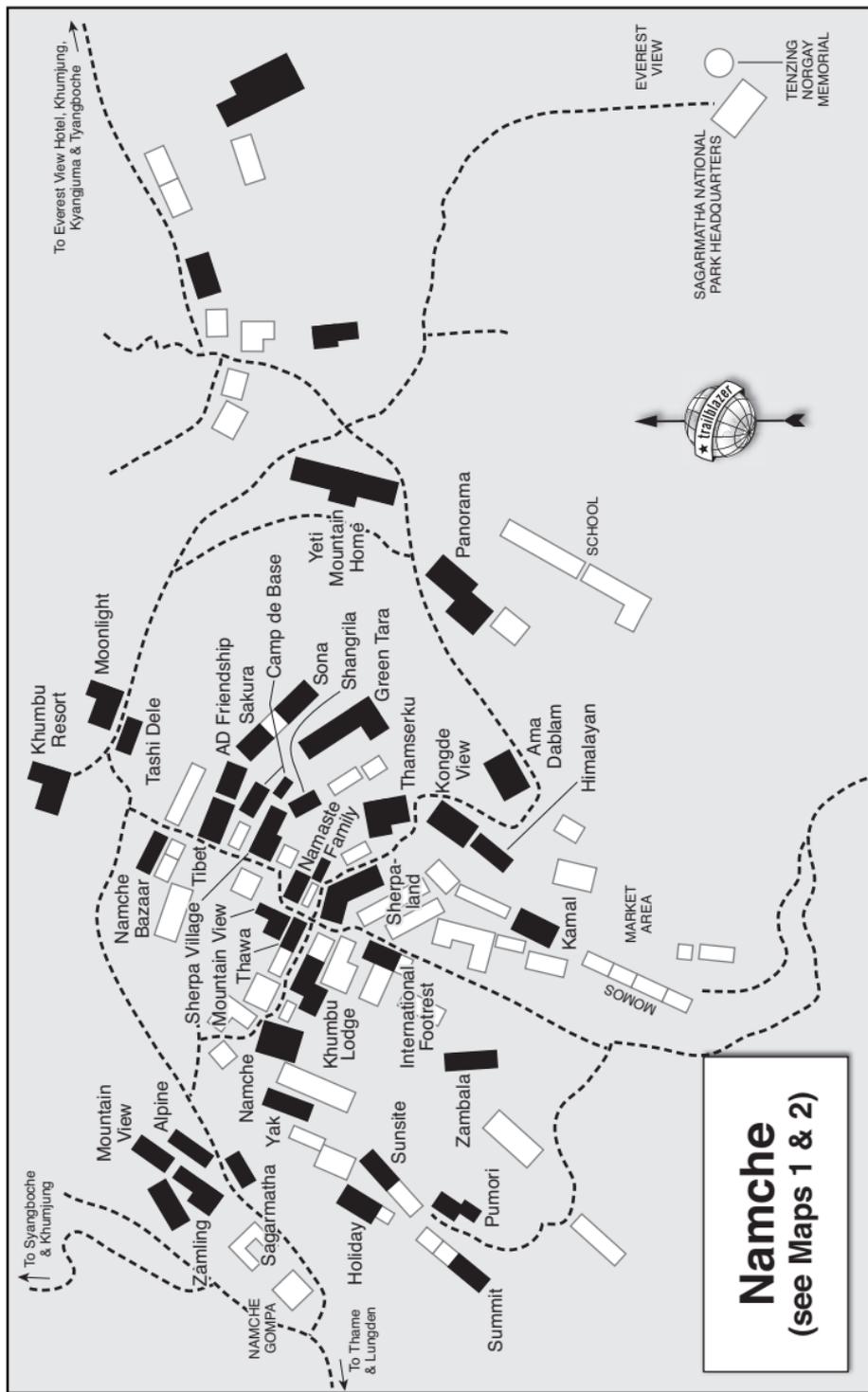
Origins

Shar-pa is Tibetan for 'Eastern People' and the first Sherpas were almost certainly migrants from 1300km away in Kham (north-east Tibet) possibly fleeing from Mongol incursions. It's thought that they tried settling in a number of places en route but were consistently driven on, crossing the Himalaya about 500 years ago over Nangpa La. Migration occurred in several successive waves with large numbers of people arriving in the late 1800s and early 1900s and another major migration in the 1960s after the Chinese invasion of Tibet.

Settlements first appeared in the mid-1500s on both sides of Lamjura La (Junbesi and north of Kenja), where Sherpas still live today. The Thame and Pangboche gompas were established later, possibly during the 1670s, though it's likely that the area had been populated previously. It's thought that the Khumbu was used for pastures by Rai shepherds before the Sherpas arrived; the Dudh Kosi is known as 'Khambu' by Rais today. The Sherpas have always considered the Khumbu a *be-yul* (hidden valley), free from the troubles of the outside world.

Agriculture

The crop with the highest yield in the Khumbu is the humble potato and about 75% of the cultivated area is planted with them. Growing enough, however, is not easy and most families have always supplemented their income, originally by trading with Tibet and now mainly through tourism. Their agricultural methods are quite sophisticated even though their tools may be basic. Land holdings are scattered and several crop varieties are used in order to minimise the risk of blight and other diseases. The soil is not naturally very fertile but large quantities of organic fertiliser (compost, human waste and animal manure) have



Namche
(see Maps 1 & 2)



Summit madness

Trekking companies salivate over this; insurance companies should be crying. Many trekkers have booked itineraries that are simply too quick to altitude for their goals. Instead of being the experience of a lifetime, a trek turns into the journey from hell, relentlessly pushing on through discomforts with the one objective of climbing Kala Pattar, and therefore seeing Everest close up, over-riding all else. Far better to make enjoying the journey your goal, and if you are feeling the altitude, consider switching your trek from Kala Pattar to Gokyo (p215), which is just that bit lower, and a day or two shorter.

by porters (did you pass any?) from villages several days walk away – well aged.

Namche produces several brands of its own **mineral water**. Amazingly enough for people that are used to the perception that even the water in the mountains is dirty in Nepal, Namche's town water supply is the same as the stuff they bottle, and has been tested many times. So consider being more eco-aware by drinking tap or filtered water rather than buying bottles.

For a lunch in town rather than at your lodge, there are half-a-dozen bakeries/coffee shops, most with terraces. The **Everest bakery** has a good 'sticky beak' terrace, and is fine. However, opposite is the **Namche bakery café** (without terrace), which has the best dense apple strudel, and there is a **second branch** with better views and a terrace on the other side of Namche, near the Siddhartha Bank. **Café 8848** plays documentaries, especially good on a cloudy afternoon. **Tawa** overlooks the main intersection and has decent homemade-style apple pie, and opposite, **Sherpa Café** has a particularly good variety and Illy coffee. Under the **Khumbu Lodge**, **Himalayan Java** offers tasty panini sandwiches.

Trekking gear shops

Befitting a mountain resort, trekking gear is readily available with a comprehensive range and real choice. In addition to the usual knockoff gear piled high everywhere, Namche has several specialist gear shops with a huge range of base layer, technical fleeces, primaloft and down jackets, and more, and all take credit cards.

Sherpa Adventure Gear (not to be

confused with local Sherpa gear) has the full range of its namesake and a knowledgeable owner. Long time gear freak Tsedam's **International Mountain Gear** sells RAB and Salomon, and **Mountain Sherpa Gear** stocks La Sportiva boots and shoes, Black Diamond (packs, clothing, climbing gear) and OR clothing.

Going vintage, Namaste lodge shop has old mountaineering gear for sale.

Services

Although Namche feels important it isn't the district headquarters: that is to the south at Salleri. However, with the National Park headquarters and an army post there are still rather too many government officials and the imbalance of income is often a source of low-level conflict.

Namche boasts the only modern **dental clinic** outside of Nepal's cities. For cuts and other minor issues there is a somewhat controversial **government health post**, where the community-provided staff are dedicated, but the government staff less so, and there is a plot to steal the locally donated land. For an English-speaking doctor and/or hospital-style care, Khunde Hospital will be better, see p185.

The region's **electricity** is far more reliable than Kathmandu's, an asset which, when coupled with the benefit of having a good water supply, means you can find plenty of washing machines here. As such this is an easy place to get clothes washed and most lodges offer a **laundry service**.

Lodge wi-fi can be around Rs500-1000 a day, with interruptions, however using a mobile data plan will definitely be

cheaper. There is also Everest Link wi-fi which is Rs150 per 100mb, using a scratch card system. An automatic photo backup to a cloud service will eat into that quickly. Above Namche, the cost is double and the 100mb is valid for 15 hours.

The Saturday market

At this popular weekly gathering, Sherpas meet friends, catch up with the gossip and of course trade supplies. Shopkeepers and throngs of lowland porters offer food and goods arduously carried up to Namche. Some supplies originate from the Taksindu roadhead, others from Lukla by cargo flight, but there are also *suntala* (mandarins) and rice from the Hinku, vegetables from Solu and eggs from Salleri. Lodge owners from up valley exchange wads of rupees for yak-loads of goods.

Although it's less of a tourist highlight than it once was, it still determines some group schedules but it is worth actively avoiding this period because of the trail congestion it causes, especially in peak season. The market now starts on Friday afternoon, running into Saturday, and is a good place to stock up on cheap chocolate bars.

AROUND NAMCHE [map pp182-3]

There are plenty of possible **day trips**. Visits to the picturesque Khumjung and Khunde villages can be combined with the pleasant walk to Everest View Hotel.

A longer scenic trek is to Thame, with

its gomba on the hill. Closer and well-worth visiting is Choi Gang, see below.

Closest is **Namche Gomba/Nauche Gonda** with a small puja service from 6-7am and an evening service. There is also an interesting visitor centre which, for a good value Rs100, offers accurate information about the region and culture assembled by the locals themselves.

Choi Gang and the National Park Headquarters With *choi* (or *cho/tsho*) meaning lake and *gang* meaning hill dropping into a valley or flats, the name commemorates the fact that there was once a lake here. Long ago it was the main trading area before Namche and Thame took over. Deserted until the 1970s, this prime spot is now the **Sagarmatha National Park Headquarters**.

The Information Centre was damaged in the earthquake, though may have reopened by the time you read this. Previously it contained modest displays on the history and points of interest in the park and was open 8am-4pm except Saturdays.

The area is worth visiting for the views alone, of Everest, the Nuptse-Lhotse wall, Tyangboche and Ama Dablam, especially in the clear early morning. With binoculars considerable segments of the route to Dingboche can be seen.

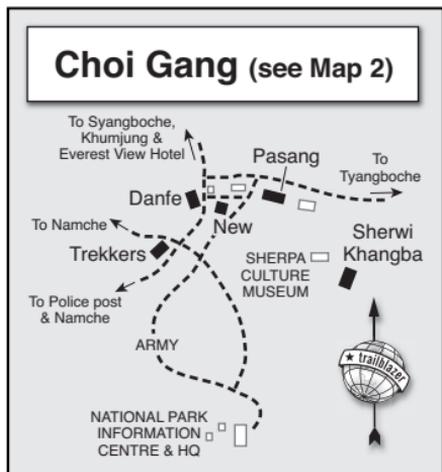
The huge traditional-style building is **Hotel Sherwi Khangba** (Sherpa's Old House), which is popular with expeditions and groups. It is worth checking out for the incredible panoramic photos (for sale) and for the **Sherpa Cultural Museum** alongside, which is being reworked.

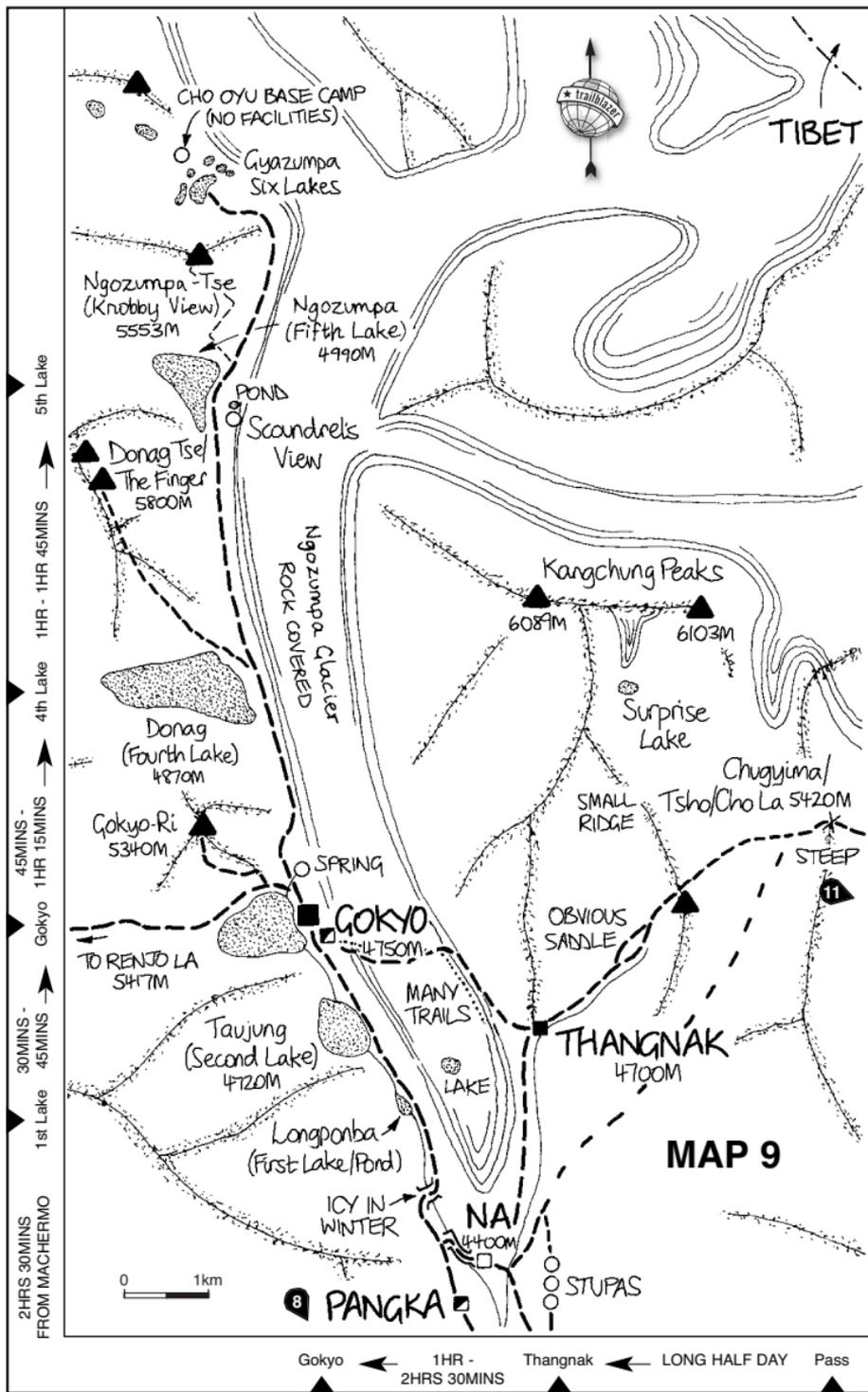
Syangboche (3900m/12,795ft)

Directly above Namche, although out of view, is Syangboche. The short airstrip here is capable of taking only the small single-engined Pilatus Porter planes (of which there are none left in Nepal) and helicopters. There are several **hotels** around here but the pick is the **Panorama**.

Everest View Hotel

This is a small, upmarket hotel situated on top of a hill with a panoramic view from the





ic, they treat sick trekkers and locals and offer paid doctor services, providing all the insurance paperwork as standard. The cost for locals is nominal and it is also combined with a porter shelter. There is a free altitude talk at around 3pm, well worth going along to, and for a small donation, have your oxygen saturation checked. See posters for the location, as the medical clinic needed rebuilding at the time of research.

Most people head directly from here to Gokyo but if acclimatisation is causing problems it might be wiser to stay another night. Na/Nala (4400m/14,436ft, see p215) is the same altitude, if you want to move location.

Exiting Machermo is confusing, as seemingly each lodge has its own trail, without a single obvious main trail and this is one of the places where the otherwise-strong community feel is absent, probably caused mainly by one family. After an initial climb out of Machermo the trail is more or less level to Pangka. Peaks stud the skyline. Cho Oyu dominates the head of the valley but not seeming that big unless using binoculars. On your right, Taboche and Cholatse, look particularly striking, and don't forget to look back, to the ever present Kangtaiga and Thamserku and a bit of Kusum Kangguru. Simply glorious!

Not sure where you are going to stay at Gokyo? Ask returning trekkers.

Pangka (4480m/14,698ft)

There is now just one *lodge* here normally open, and although trekkers mainly stop for a meal, it has a handful of rooms. The lodge is on a ridge, well away from the slope where disaster hit in 1995, when a freak snowstorm resulted in an avalanche burying one of the lodges there at the time, killing thirteen members of a Japanese trekking group and their crew.

Continuing on, the massive slopes on your right (heading up) are the terminal moraine of the Ngozumpa Glacier (see Map 9), and less obvious, on your left, are the remains of a smaller terminal moraine.

You are now entering what is called an ablation valley, an often narrow valley formed when a glacier lifts up moraine at its

edges then retreats slightly, leaving this uplifted moraine to form a grassy valley.

Soon the trail meets the rock wall and traverses the steep side on a reasonable trail, though remember to stay on the inside when meeting yaks. Top up at a clean water spring marked with *katas* (the white scarves). In late winter this area is often quite icy; take particular care.

As you climb on the stone steps notice that there is one clear stream and one milky one. Unusually, the water draining from the glacier breaks through the terminal moraine here, rather than directly above Na. The sparkling stream comes from the first pond and is clear since much of the glacial sediment has settled in the lakes.

Longponba / the first pond A sudden change of scenery and hundreds of petite cairns introduce the first pond; it's really too small to be called a lake. It is beautiful up here, with a sparkling brook and tantalisingly close mountains.

Taujung / Tawujung / the second lake (4720m/15,485ft) *Ta* is the word for horse and *Jung* means a grazing area, although it is now far more common to see yaks grazing here. It is worth soaking up the peaceful spaciousness here.

In winter here I was berated for walking on the frozen lake: a local said I would anger the gods of the area, for the second lake is considered the holiest of the region.

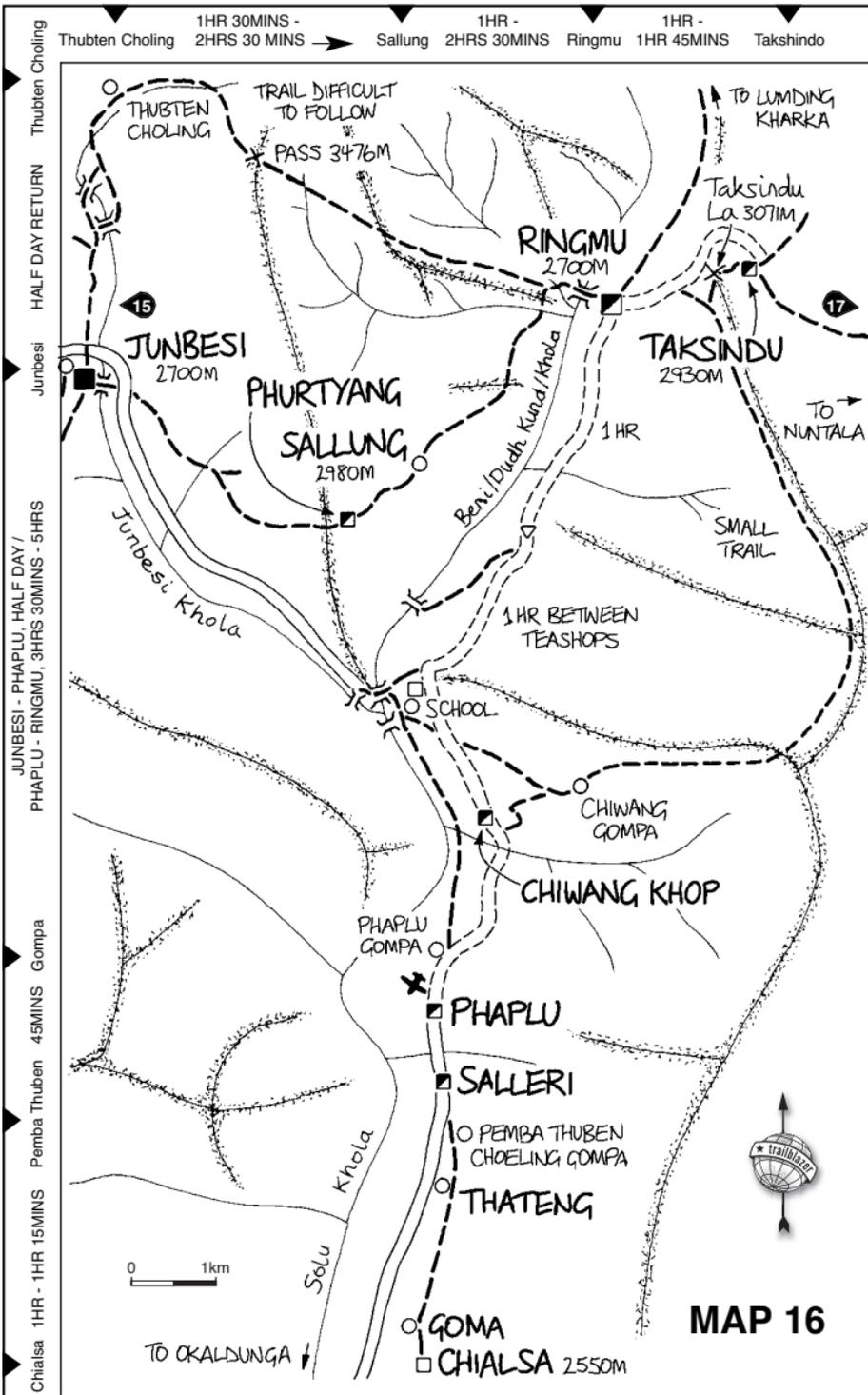
Looking back, the real summit and sheer face of Kangtaiga comes into view, just to the left of the part of the mountain that looks like a horse saddle.

GOKYO

(see map p216; 4750m/15,584ft)

Overlooking the third lake are the layered *lodges* of Gokyo, each offering panoramic dining views. Compared to Lobuche and Gorak Shep, the area is lower, gets longer sun and is significantly more pleasant to hang out at, with friendly lodge owners adding to the energy.

The Everest view from Gokyo Ri is only one of the many reasons for visiting Gokyo. Relaxing on the lodge patios or in



MAP 16

Originally set up in 1981 with 18 peaks, the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) manages 27 peaks as 'trekking peaks', a misleading name because all involve some climbing. Ranging from 5849-6584m (19,185-21,596ft), many of these are challenging technical climbs, but a handful are peaks within the ability of an experienced hill walker or hiker with a guide.

Surrounded by shining peaks, there is elation atop a peak, and a deep satisfaction in overcoming the challenges of a 6000m/20,000ft peak. However, the first challenge is organising a peak climb. This is best arranged through a Nepal trekking company who will take care of the paperwork and provide a guide and porters.

If you want to climb independently then you will still have to work through a local company for the paperwork and it is a hassle. As in so many areas of governance, Nepal's regulations for peak climbing and guiding are long overdue a revamp. The current overly rigid rules seem to be centered around generating direct income for the government and controlling the industry, twisting a rules system to favor trekking companies and their cronies, rather than using their amazing mountain resources to maximise the benefits for local guides, local communities and the country as a whole. So far all grandly publicised changes to this system have only been tinkering around the edges; don't expect real permit change anytime soon.

Alternatively, stick to peaks less than 5800m which no longer require a climbing permit.

Equipment and safety

One man's prudence is another man's poison **HW Tilman**

If climbing as part of a group headed by a climbing guide, **harnesses and ropes** will be used on every one of the following peaks, whether for crevasse danger or steep slopes.

The following descriptions cover the least difficult way up the most popular trekking peaks. For proficient technical alpinists none of the routes are particularly challenging under good conditions. For safety-conscious amateurs, they should provide satisfaction and experience without excessive danger.



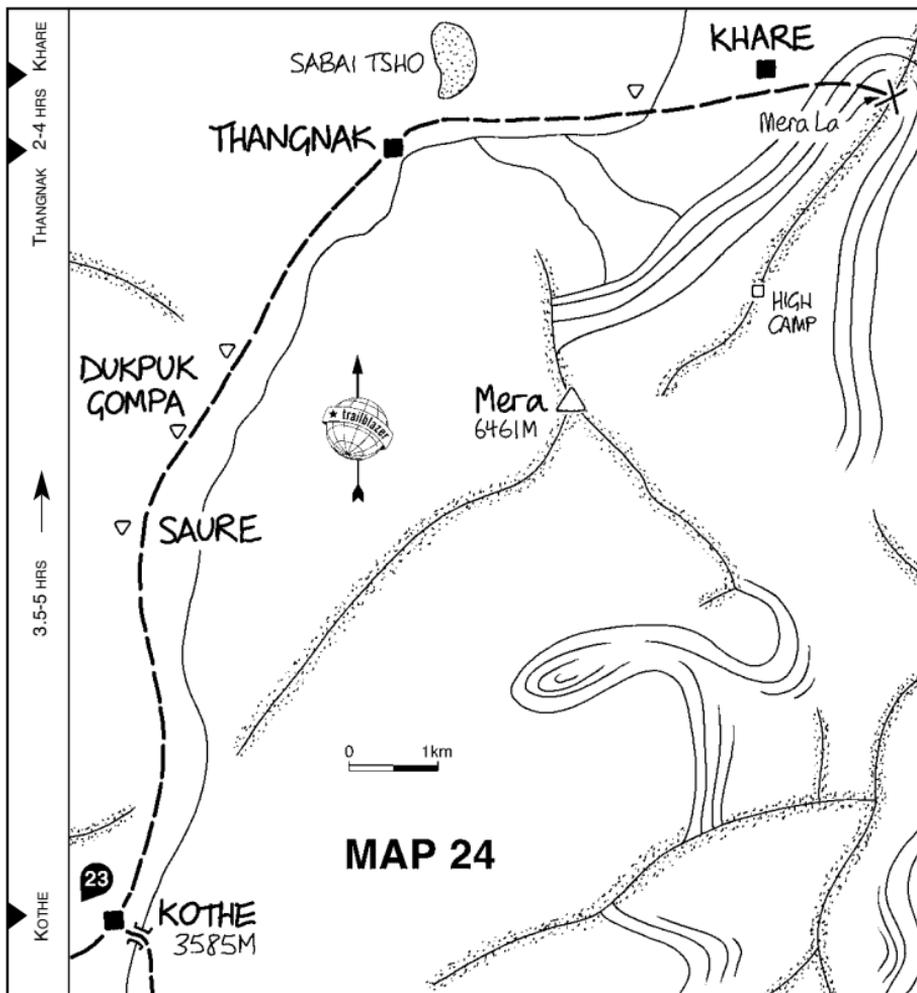
Do you need a permit?

Yes. Don't climb without a permit! The fine for climbing without a permit is double the climbing permit fee, with half of this going to the guide who catches the illegal climbers, so there is a powerful incentive for them to ask to see a permit. For a popular peak like Mera or Lobuche you will stand out from the other teams, being without a guide.

In other areas, if locals see that you are climbing without a permit, that means it is harder for you to complain if gear is stolen.

Ethically, some climbers disagree with a permit system, but you are guests in another country and they, of course, make the rules. And some of the money is put to good use, although sadly not all.





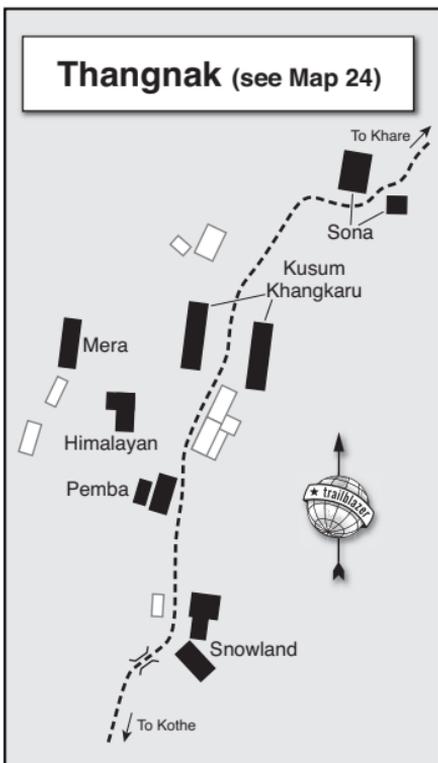
to stay at and are especially convenient for the trail to Pangum, which starts/ends here. Taktor is still not marked on most maps and is not Tashing Dingma, although it is relatively close.

Continuing on the two- to four-hour trail to Kothe, the forest turns from almost pure smooth-barked rhododendron to moss-encrusted mixed forest. The somewhat bitty trail clammers around ridges. This is in fact a temporary trail turned permanent, which was hastily pushed through to avoid the valley base when the glacial lake broke in 1998 (see box opposite). Across the valley, the brutal GLOF scars are still very visible; around 300 vertical meters/1000ft of hill-

side fell in a huge landslide with thousands of trees lost. Passing an abandoned teashop and clumps of bamboo, the trail drops to the eroded valley base and climbs the side a couple of times before finally reaching the lodge village of Kothe, still on the same side of the river. The trail on the opposite side leads to Panch Pokhari.

Kothe (3585m/11,760ft)

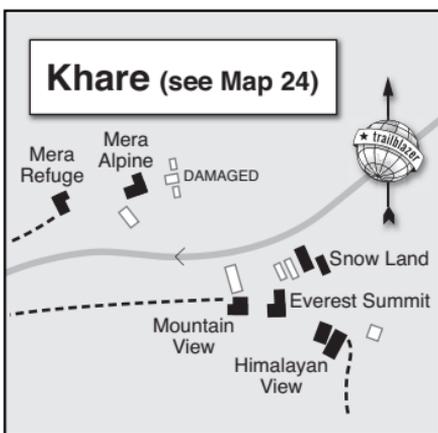
Tucked in by a side stream with a half a dozen lodges, this is the usual overnight stop for most groups. Again, Kothe (pronounced Kotay or Kot-hey), isn't marked on most maps, or is marked wrongly. Tashing Ongma was a large grazing area



rewarding, if the views are not reward enough already. Thangnak means black rock in Sherpa, and indeed there is a huge black rock face above the village.

To Sabai Tsho and Khare

The trail crosses the outlet debris field from



the GLOF, climbing a spur to leave the destruction behind. This is your chance to spy the lake that caused the devastation. The glacier from the back of Charpati that falls into and feeds Sabai Tso comes into view and there is a trail, taking only a few minutes, that leads to a viewpoint with dozens of cairns overlooking the lake. It is a good view and it is easy to visualise how a big serac fell and triggered the GLOF. The lake was, of course, a lot deeper. This point is half an hour to one hour from Thangnak.

After a large flat, the trail meanders along an ablation valley accompanied by the scent of *sunpati*. At the end of this is a strategically placed teahouse, good for a break before the brief hill to Khare.

Khare (5025m/16,486ft)

It's a two- to four-hour slog from Thangnak to Khare, which is tucked into a friendly-sized amphitheatre, the highest possible point for real lodges. The lodge owners are welcoming but the unheated rooms can be very cold; high camp tents might be warmer.

Now above 5000m/16,000ft, everyone stays two nights to acclimatise and prepare. As well as repacking, make sure you practice using ropes with your guide. With all this and not wanting to wear yourself out, few people take strenuous day trips. A short climb on the trail up towards the Mera La is probably the best preparation.

There are two possible strategies for the climb, either cautiously make an intermediate Mera La camp about 400m/13120ft higher so as to continue acclimatising and then the next day move to high camp which is another 400m/1312ft up, or instead simply rush up to high camp in a big 800m/2625ft jump and hope to get down quickly before AMS strikes hard; somewhat risky.

It is also at this point that the number of extra days in hand starts to matter, especially if the conditions are tough and you would rather wait a day or two for better conditions than having to stick to a tight itinerary.

What to do about mild AMS symptoms

There are two basic choices of remedy: natural and medicinal.

● **The natural remedy** If you find mild symptoms developing while walking, stop and relax (with your head out of the sun) and drink some fluids. Drink frequently.

● **The medicinal remedy** If mild symptoms develop while walking, stop have a rest, drink some fluids and take 125-250mg of Diamox. Diamox generally takes one to four hours to begin alleviating symptoms. Drink more water and consider staying close by.

If symptoms develop in the evening take 125-250mg of Diamox and drink plenty of fluids. If you have a headache/nausea perhaps take some Ibuprofen or Paracetamol (but not aspirin). Be prepared to make many toilet journeys or obtain a pee bottle. If symptoms partially go away but are still annoying it is safe to take another 250mg Diamox 6 to 8 hours later. If similar symptoms return consider taking 125-250mg of Diamox every 12 hours until you begin descending in sleeping altitude.

In both cases, if the symptoms (including a headache) do not go away completely, stay at the same altitude. If symptoms get worse, go down. Even a small loss of elevation (100m/328ft or so) can make a big difference to how you feel and how you sleep. You should descend to the last place where you felt fine.

If symptoms develop at night, unless they rapidly get worse, wait them out and see how you feel in the morning. If the symptoms have not gone after breakfast have a rest day or descend. If they have gone, you should still consider having a rest day or at least only an easy day's walking. Continued ascent is likely to bring back the symptoms.

Note that there can be a time lag between arriving at altitude and the onset of symptoms. In fact, statistically it is just as common to suffer mild symptoms on the second night of staying at the same altitude.

Altitude sickness must be reacted to when symptoms are mild: going higher will definitely make it worse. You trek to enjoy, not to feel sick.

Serious AMS symptoms – immediate descent

- Persistent, severe headache
- Persistent vomiting
- Ataxia – loss of co-ordination; an inability to walk in a straight line, making the sufferer look drunk
- Mental confusion and/or hallucinations
- Losing consciousness – inability to stay awake or understand instructions
- Mild symptoms rapidly getting worse
- Difficulty breathing
- Severe lethargy/fatigue
- Marked blueness of face and lips
- Very persistent, sometimes watery, cough
- Rapid breathing or feeling breathless at rest
- Liquid sounds in the lungs
- Coughing clear fluid, pink phlegm or blood (a very bad sign)
- High resting heartbeat; over 130 beats per minute.

Ataxia is the single most important sign for recognising the progression of cerebral AMS from mild to serious. This is easily tested by trying to walk in a straight line, heel to toe and should be compared with somebody who has no symptoms. Twelve hours after the onset of ataxia a coma is possible, followed by death, unless you descend. Take note of the second basic AMS rule: **immediate and fast descent with serious symptoms.**

That is the basic rule but here are more details. Firstly, remain calm. If there is a doctor consult them first. If bottled oxygen is available use it before descending or, if they are unconscious, while descending. If there is a PAC bag (see box p289), use this for at least an hour before descending.

APPENDIX C: NEPALI WORDS AND PHRASES

Many Nepalis, especially those used to dealing with foreigners, can speak some English. It is, however, really worth making the effort to learn a few Nepali phrases since this will positively affect the attitude of the local people towards you and you'll be made all the more welcome.

Derived from Sanskrit, Nepali shares many words with Hindi and is also written in the Devanagari script. For many of the people you speak to (Sherpa, Rai etc) Nepali will, in fact, be their second language. Whilst Nepali is not a particularly difficult language to learn up to a basic level, Sherpa is much harder.

Nepali includes several sounds not used in English. The transliterations given below are therefore only approximate. However, since pronunciation varies across the country your less-than-perfect attempts will probably be understood as just another regional variation.

Namasté

Probably the first word learnt by the newly arrived foreigner in Nepal is this greeting, which is spoken with the hands together as if praying. Its meaning encompasses 'hello' and 'good-bye' as well as 'good morning', 'good afternoon' or 'good evening'. *Namaskar* is the more polite form.

General words

How are you?	<i>Bhaat khanu-boyo?</i> (lit: Have you eaten your dal bhaat?)
Fine thanks	<i>Khai-é</i> (lit: I have eaten)
Please give me <i>di-nus</i>
Do you speak English?	<i>Angrayzi bolnoo-hoon-cha?</i>
Yes/no	(see Questions and answers below)
Thank you	<i>Dhan-yabad</i> (not often used)
Excuse me (sorry)	<i>Maf-garnus</i>
good/bad	<i>ramro/naramro</i>
cheap/expensive	<i>susto/mahongo</i>
Just a minute!	<i>Ek-chin!</i>
brother/sister	<i>eai/didi</i> (used to address anyone of your own age)
Good night	<i>Sooba-ratry</i>
Sweet dreams	<i>Meeto supona</i>

Questions and answers

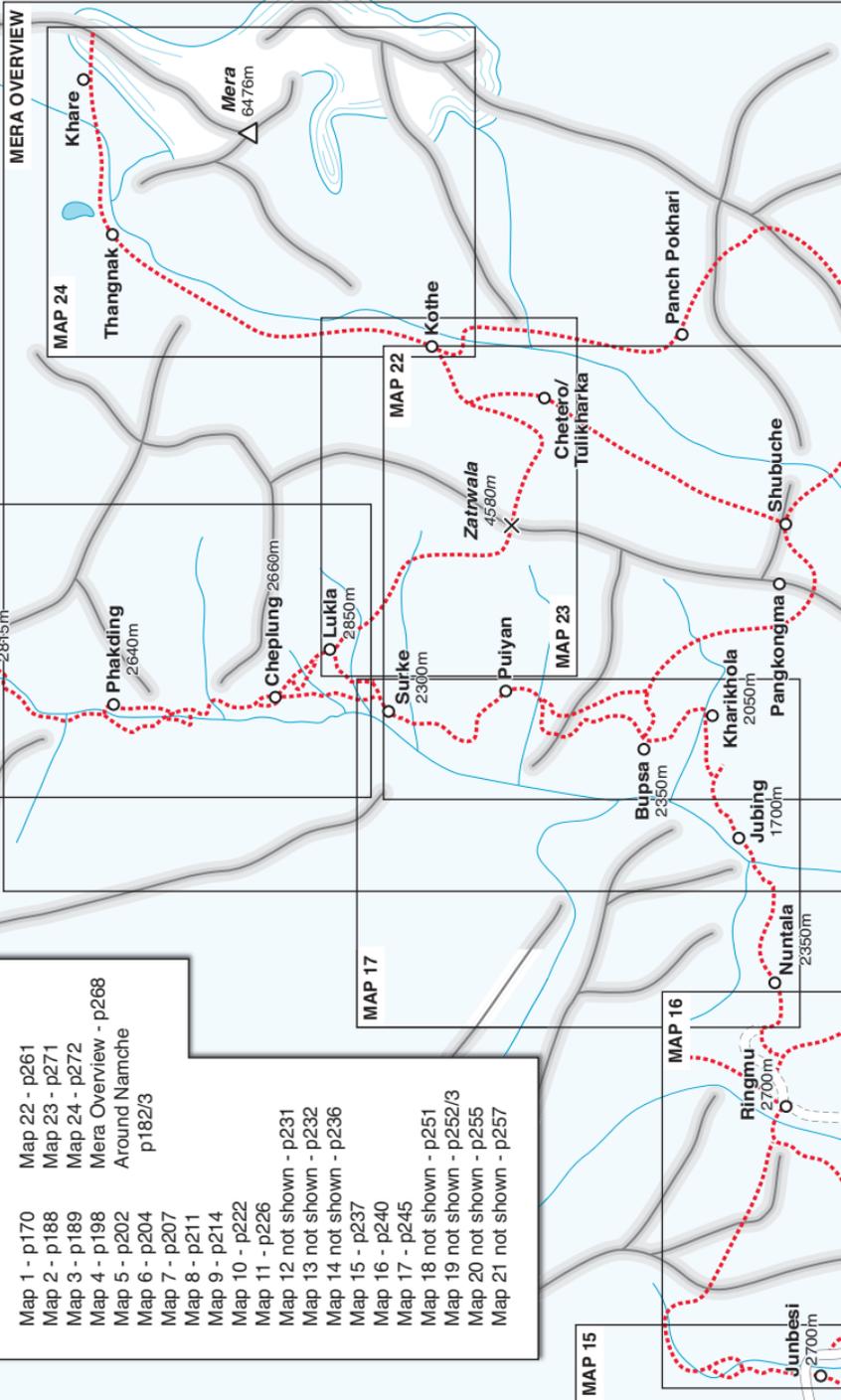
To ask a question, end the phrase with a rising tone. An affirmative answer is given by restating the question without the rising tone. 'No' is translated as *chaina* (there isn't/aren't any) or *hoi-na* (it isn't/they aren't).

What's your name?	<i>Topaiko</i> (to adult)/ <i>timro</i> (child) <i>nam ke ho?</i>
My name is	<i>Mero nam</i> <i>ho</i> .
Where are you from?	<i>Topaiko/timro dess kay ho?</i>
Britain/USA	<i>Belaiyot/Amerika</i>
Australia/New Zealand	<i>Australia/New Zealand</i>
Where are you going?	<i>Kaha janné?</i> I'm going to <i>janné</i>
Are you married?	<i>Bebah bo sokyó?</i>
Have you any children?	<i>Chora chori chon?</i> boy/girl <i>chora/chori</i>
How old are you?	<i>Koti borsa ko boyo?</i>
What is this?	<i>Yo kay ho?</i>

The Khumbu

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