



**ROBIN BOUSTEAD** (far right) first fell in love with the Himalaya in 1993 and has returned every year since. With a group of friends he conceived the idea of the most challenging trek in the world along a route encompassing the entire Himalaya from end to end. This became known as the Great Himalaya Trail (GHT).

Robin began researching new trekking routes that link each of the *himals* in 2002. On his first full traverse of the GHT, an epic journey of six months over two seasons, he lost over 20% of his body weight.

He has now completed high traverses of the Indian, Bhutanese and Nepal Himalayan ranges as well as dozens of shorter treks.



## **Nepal Trekking & The Great Himalaya Trail**

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**Photos – Front cover and opposite this page:** Thyangbo Kharka above Thame.

**Previous page:** The impressive kani gateway of Samdo village.

**Overleaf:** West Barun Glacier © Robert Rosenbaum

### **WARNING: mountain walking can be dangerous**

Please read the notes on risks (p6), when to go (pp29-35), trekking grades (p47), safety (p77-8 & pp81-2) and health (pp84-8). Every effort has been made by the authors and publisher to ensure that the information contained herein is as accurate and up to date as possible. However, they are unable to accept responsibility for any inconvenience, loss or injury sustained by anyone as a result of the advice and information given in this guide.

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# **Nepal Trekking**

## **AND THE GREAT HIMALAYA TRAIL**

**A ROUTE & PLANNING GUIDE**

**ROBIN BOUSTEAD**

**TRAILBLAZER PUBLICATIONS**

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### ⚠ 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 hazard, or to anticipate the limitations of your party. The descriptions of trails, passes, 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 a party.

The political situation in Nepal will change and could affect your plans. It is wise to keep abreast of all developments and check government and relevant agency websites for your own safety. You assume the risk of your travels and the responsibility for those with you. Be safe, be prepared, be informed.

# INTRODUCTION

The Nepal Himalaya is amazing; a place where you can immerse yourself in authentic cultures and be inspired by the greatest mountain scenery on the planet.

Since the early 1950s, tourists have been exploring the countless valleys and peaks of the *pahar* (mid-hills) and *himal* (high ranges). Recent democratic elections and relative political stability have led to a surge in visitors to Nepal as the mountains again offer unhindered trails for anyone to explore.

**You can immerse yourself in cultures little changed by the modern world and be inspired by the greatest mountain scenery on the planet.**

The three main trekking regions, Everest, Annapurna and Langtang, attract tens of thousands of trekkers every year. Facilities have never been better and easily rival those found in Europe or elsewhere; there are even some luxury lodges in the Everest and Annapurna regions should you want a touch of comfort! Trails are well maintained and safe, and the locals will welcome you with genuine friendliness that will make your heart melt.

The other three-quarters of Nepal's mountain terrain is normally considered 'off-the-beaten-track' and counts visitors in mere hundreds. From the lush rhododendron forests of the east to the dense



**Above:** 'Namaste!' Children in the Phu region greeting trekkers in the traditional way.

woodlands in the west, the Nepal Himalaya is predominantly wilderness dotted with remote communities that have remained relatively untouched. In these regions, a small trekking group can make a real difference to lives that are barely subsistence.

Although the mountains are beyond compare, it is the people you meet along the trail that linger in your memory. You can't help but admire their indefatigable

**Although the mountains are beyond compare, it is the people you meet who will linger in your memory.**

boldness and energy, their independence, strength and resilience when times are bad, and their fun, openhearted, generous nature towards strangers who may never return. It's impossible

to make a comparison, but surely the people of the high himal are the very best of mankind?

In 2002, the Nepali government reconciled all border disputes with its northern neighbour China thus de-militarising seven border areas and for the first-time tourists were allowed to explore them. All of these areas offer unique trekking opportunities, and tend to be next to the major trekking routes, so it's

**Below:** Kopra Ridge with Dhaulagiri (8167m/26,795ft) looming in the background.



possible to design itineraries combining old and new routes, which makes your journey a more 'complete' Nepali experience.

For many years, one of the great trekking 'holy grails' has been a route through the remotest peaks of the entire Himalaya, linking all the main trekking regions. The author is the first person to survey, plot and describe such a route: the Great Himalaya Trail (GHT). The Nepal section of the GHT can take 90 to 150 days of walking, so for convenience it is broken into sections, all of which have easy access and lower route alternatives through the pahar.

**The Nepal section of the Great Himalayan Trail (GHT) can take 90 to 150 days of walking**

The introduction of new trekking routes through remote communities will encourage micro-tourism businesses in places that are too remote for intensive infrastructure development. By creating value in regions that previously had little to offer for tourism, it is hoped that the relevant government departments will establish a comprehensive network of National Parks and Conservation Areas that form a continuous corridor for animal migration, which could reduce illegal hunting and help save many endangered species. The snow-covered crown of Asia may then become one of its greatest assets.



## Background to the GHT

The Great Himalaya Trail runs through regions and countries that have cultures dating back thousands of years, and for much of the time they have been trading with each other across the mountains. Salt, wood, grains, wool and livestock, gold and gems are just a few of the products that helped to establish a network of trails from Indochina to Afghanistan, including sections of the famous Silk Route.

It is easy to imagine local traders plying trails with their yak or donkey trains throughout the region. Over centuries, they explored remote valleys trying to find the easiest trails over the never ending ‘Abode of Snow’, the Himalaya. In the larger valleys small communities sprang up and developed their own unique languages and traditions. For over a thousand years the people of the Himalaya were cut off from the rest of the world as Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet all kept their borders closed from prying colonial eyes.

**Jesuit missionaries were the first Europeans to penetrate deep into the Himalaya, in the early seventeenth century.**

Jesuit missionaries were the first Europeans to penetrate deep into the Himalaya in the early seventeenth century. The first was Father Antonio Andrade, in 1626, who crossed from

India to western Tibet and then enjoyed the local Tibetans’ open-minded hospitality that still exists today. However, it was William Moorcroft who is considered the father of modern Himalayan exploration. His first trip, in 1812, was in search of Tibetan goats to trade cashmere; another followed this in 1819-25, when he disappeared without a trace. In his wake came a long succession of missionaries, botanists, geographers and traders who criss-crossed the mountain ranges from east to west and began mapping the himals. Exploration activity increased from the 1850s with the Great Game, a period when the British Raj, Russian Tsar and Chinese Qing empires all vied for ascendancy in the region.

The then new sport of mountain-climbing arrived in the Himalaya in the 1880s with WW Graham, Sir Martin Conway and Douglas William Freshfield who pushed deep into the unexplored valleys of Sikkim and the Karakorum. However, most of the Himalayan Kingdoms still discouraged visitors, leaving

**It was the mysterious disappearance of Mallory and Irvine on Mt Everest in 1924 that really ignited the world’s imagination for Himalayan exploration.**

many areas ‘blanks on the map’. After the First World War, a number of expeditions were organised to reconnoitre and climb significant peaks. However, it was the mysterious disappearance of Mallory and Irvine on Mt Everest in

1924 that really ignited the world’s imagination for Himalayan exploration, and was a precursor to the successful expedition led by Lord Hunt that placed Sir

Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay on the summit on the 29th May 1953.

It was the research expeditions to identify new peaks and climbing routes that began what we now call 'trekking'. In 1949, Bill Tilman visited the Helambu, Langtang, Everest and Kali Gandaki valley regions intent on walking through valleys rather than climbing any specific peak, and so became the first Himalayan 'trekker'. In 1965, Colonel Jimmy Roberts introduced the world to organised trekking holidays and began a revolution in adventure holidays that made regions of the Himalaya accessible to anyone.

**In 1949, Bill Tilman visited ... intent on walking through valleys rather than climbing any specific peak and so became the first Himalayan 'trekker'.**

All of the activity to date was largely north to south across the Himalayan ranges, so when an east to west route along the entire range was suggested in the 1970s it was considered a radical idea. Yet the challenge had been set: who could be the first to traverse the entire range?

At the time, the eastern ranges through Bhutan and Tibet were closed, so attempts could only start in Sikkim, an autonomous region of India. In 1980, Harish Kohli lead an Indian Army team who operated in relay, traversed an undocumented route from Sikkim to Ladakh. However, the first unbroken Himalayan traverse was by Peter Hillary (son of Sir Edmund), Graeme Dingle and SP Chamoli in 1981, which was fully documented in *First Across the Roof of the World*. Their story is a true mountain epic that began at Kanchenjunga, on

**Below:** Beautiful Phoksumdo Tal, in the centre of the Dolpo region.





**Above:** Nepal's many rivers are sometimes crossed by suspension bridges, some in better condition than others. (Photo © Sandra Butler & Tim Reynolds).

the border of Nepal and Sikkim and ended in Concordia at the base camp of K2.

A nine-month trek over 1981-82 saw Hugh Swift and Arlene Blum complete a traverse from Bhutan to Ladakh in India (Blum documented her story in *Breaking Trail*). In 1983, the Crane brothers (Adrian and Richard) ran 3200km (2000 miles) from Darjeeling (Sikkim) to Pakistan, thus setting a record, which has yet to be broken (the Crane's story is told in *Running the Himalayas*). This was to remain the longest attempt until 1990, when Sorrell Wilby and her husband Chris Ciantar, made a traverse from Pakistan to Arunchal Pradesh (northern Assam in India), which included nearly every Himalayan region (documented in Wilby's book, *Across the Top*). In 1994, the French duo of Paul-Eric Bonneau and Bruno Poirier crossed the Nepal Himalaya in 42 days (October 21 to December 1, 1994) from Pashupatinagar to Mahakali (see their book,

*Trans-Nepal-Himalaya*). Then in 1997, two Frenchmen, Alexandre Poussin and Sylvain Tesson, embarked on an epic adventure along the Himalaya (Bhutan to Tajikistan) that involved getting arrested in three countries – Tibet, Pakistan and Tajikistan. Their journey, published as *La Marche dans le Ciel*, really pushed the boundaries of what was considered to be 'Himalayan'.

From 1997 there were many attempts to traverse the Himalaya by walking, running and biking, but all of these expeditions suffered from restrictions on where they could visit. Closed and restricted areas meant trekkers often had to detour to the pahar, away from the Great Himalaya Range. Even Nepal, perhaps

the most accessible of the countries, had strict 'no-go' areas along the border with Tibet. In 2002, things changed and Nepal opened every one of her himals to permit-based trekking. Along with new trekking areas in Bhutan and India, the Great Himalaya Range was completely opened to trekkers for the first time in history.

The first person to take advantage of the newly opening regions of Nepal was Rosie Swale-Pope, who ran the length of Nepal in 2003. Her 1700km mid-hills route



**Above:** An upmarket version of dhal bhat, the national dish of rice, lentils and vegetables. Note that what you'll generally be served on your trek will be a much more basic version of what's shown in this photo – but no less filling.

from Taplejung to Simikot was an early precursor to the current Great Himalaya Trail concept. Dr Gillian Holdsworth walked a similar route in 2007, which is documented on the British Nepal Medical Trust website. From early 2004, Robin Boustead (the author) systematically researched and documented each of the newly opened trekking regions over four years, culminating in a 162-day high traverse of Nepal's himals from September 2008 to July 2009. His trek was the first crossing to link every himal and thus created the GHT as it is known today. Between 2008 and 2011, Jean-Claude Latombe walked across Nepal in two sections of 56 and 53 days and his website has a wonderful collage of images of the people and landscapes he encountered. From then until 2018, there have been nearly one hundred documented high traverses of the Nepal Himalaya and many hundreds of trekkers have completed regional sections.

Each of these journeys was different, a clear example of how the Great Himalaya Trail is a personal challenge along a trail system that allows you to develop your own route priorities and set your own goals. Treks can be as short as just 5 or 6 days at low elevation through to extreme journeys of months at high altitude. For some, the ultimate Great Himalaya Trail challenge follows a trail network that links the 'highest feasible route' along the length of the various himals. However, weather and time restrictions mean that trekkers often choose sections that by-pass technical passes or navigation problem areas. So, linking village trails with higher routes has become the accepted norm when designing itineraries.

The GHT has become a way to immerse yourself in Himalayan cultures and challenge your boundaries – there truly is a trail for everyone!

**Below:** Cooking vegetables in a teahouse kitchen for the twice daily meal of dhal bhat.





**Nepal trekking – highlights**



Kyangjin Ri



West Col (looking west)



Nyingma Gyanzen La



#### ❑ Important notes

● **Walking times**, both the total trek duration and daily walking times are for the average trekker of good fitness and you will probably not walk exactly the same time. Measure your walking pace against those stated and you should find that it is consistently different. You can then calculate your relative walking time for each day.

Note that the walking times quoted **do not include** any rest breaks.

- **Total trek durations** are for itineraries that begin and end in Kathmandu or Pokhara.
- **Quoted altitudes** have an average accuracy of + or -15m; however, considering trail and demographic changes, it is wise to assume a general accuracy of + or -50m.
- **Place names** are given in their most common form but pronunciation may vary considerably.
- **Directions** are given as you look ahead, or in the direction of movement along the trail. When referenced to a water course, directions are given as the 'true' direction (facing downstream) so, 'true left' is the left bank of a river while facing downstream.
- **Make sure you are not over committing yourself.** Your mental and physical health combined with environmental factors can affect your trekking speed on a daily basis.

(Photos above): **Top:** Tilicho Lake. **Middle:** Bhairav Kund looking NE.

# PLANNING YOUR TREK

# 1

## First decisions

Nepal has become one of the world's best trekking destinations with thousands of trails and endless mountain views. Choosing the right trek to suit your holiday has become a challenge in itself as the Nepal Himalaya offers a path for everyone, regardless of fitness level, experience or time available. This book is designed to help you first identify when to trek and what style of trek best suits your needs, and then which destination matches your expectations of the Himalaya. In taking the time to carefully consider these things there is a much greater chance of returning home having had a memorable experience. You never know, you may end up wanting to trek every region by doing the Great Himalaya Trail (about 150 days) and immersing yourself entirely in the various cultures of the high Himalaya!

### WHEN TO TREK?

The most important factor in deciding when to trek in Nepal is the weather (see pp30-1). Nepal has a monsoonal climate; heavy rains driven north from the Bay of Bengal engulf the country from June/July to September/October. This means that regions in the east, like Kanchenjunga and Makalu, receive heavier amounts of rain than in the west. The result is that the eastern ranges of Kanchenjunga and Makalu tend to have slightly shorter trekking seasons than the west of Nepal, which is drier. However, Far West Nepal tends to have longer, more severe winters due to its more northerly latitude.

The monsoon season is not a very popular time for general trekking as the valleys that approach the mountains suffer from sporadic and sometimes intense rainfall, leeches along the trail, transport delays and limited views. However, the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri massifs block the northerly push of the monsoon clouds and create a partial 'rain-shadow' along the border with Tibet. So Naar, Phu, Mustang and Dolpo only receive brief showers each day during the rainy season which transforms their arid landscapes into fields of wildflowers and the locals get busy planting crops.

After the monsoon has finished, stable dry conditions predominate throughout the Himalaya for two or three weeks (*cont'd on p32*)

## ▣ TREKKING AS A SINGLE FEMALE

The first decision when deciding to trek in Nepal is whether you prefer to walk solo, to have a local (a guide and/or porter) accompany you along the way, or whether to join a group.

The Annapurna and Solo-Khumbu (Everest) regions are ideal areas to embark upon a solo-trekking trip for a number of reasons. Firstly, they are used to catering to solo trekkers and are therefore safer and easier to navigate. Secondly, there are many family-owned teahouses where you will often find women-friendly environments. Thirdly, there will likely be other women to meet along the trail. Other trekking regions will probably have a few negatives that you should consider before heading off. One of the most important is your personal security. The popular Langtang trail has seen solo women attacked, and even killed, in past years, so security is a very serious issue. To explore remote or less popular trails, you should have an excellent level of Nepali and a thorough understanding of social and cultural traditions.

### Using a female guide

One of the most popular ways to explore Nepal as a single female trekker is to go with a local female guide and/or porter. You retain the experience of a solo trekker in many respects, even carrying your own things should you wish, but you have the major added benefit of local knowledge and the ability to communicate effectively with anyone you meet. A female trekking guide will also choose family-run guest houses more than those run by men only, and this is safer for sole trekkers. Another added benefit is female solo travellers are welcomed into Nepali family lives more so than men.

**Example 1** When I came to Nepal for the first time, trekking with a female guide gave me so much insight into the culture and the role of women in society. My guide could connect more easily with women and girls in the villages along the trail and they were happy to share their personal life stories which were fascinating. I not only enjoyed her company but also all the advice she provided on the trail. Most of all, she was my liaison/intermediator whenever necessary and also helped to keep the curious, annoying types away.

**Example 2** Trekking with a female guide has a lot of advantages especially on busy trails during high trekking season where there can be a lot of groups led by men. In comparison, there are few female guides on the trails and the tea shop owners are more courteous and sympathetic to the female guides and their clients.

### Joining a female group

Female group journeys add a level of companionship and camaraderie that are unlikely with a local guide, but they are less flexible in terms of route and timings and, of course, that all-important ‘my trail’ feeling.

### Social issues to consider

Sexual and gender-based violence occurs throughout the world and, unfortunately, Nepal is no exception. To help minimise personal risk and so that you can relate to local women’s issues, here are some tips and ideas for you to consider:

**Role of women in Nepali society** The majority of communities in Nepal are patriarchal and women and girls face discrimination in every aspect of society. The socio-economic situation of women in Nepal is very poor, they have less access to education than men and are mostly reduced to their roles as wives and mothers and limited to domestic and household chores. Despite efforts by the government and

make sense and the number of rescue helicopters taking overstressed or injured bodies back to Kathmandu grows each year. However, it is easy to understand that trekkers want to tackle a route that leaves them feeling they have achieved the most from their holiday. Perhaps the most important things you need to consider before choosing a trek are:

- **Fitness level** Join a walking club or a gym to get a comparative assessment of your fitness level. How long does it take you to climb 500 metres? Test your stamina: can you walk for four or five hours a day? Try to find people who have done the trek before and ask them what it was like and how fit they were.

- **Walking experience** How easily and confidently can you cross rough trails? Do you have a good sense of balance? Can you cope with slippery surfaces or exposed trails? Try to find some walks near to your home with steep up and down sections. Does the trek operator offer training walks or suggested programmes?

- **Have you been to altitude before?** If not, then choosing an extreme altitude trek (over 5500m), or a trek that stays at high altitude for long periods may not be a good idea. Why some people and not others suffer from altitude sickness

#### ☐ SUMMARY OF TREKKING STYLES

A summary of the three trekking styles and most common decision factors:

	INDEPENDENT TREKKING WITHOUT A GUIDE	TEAHOUSE TREKKING WITH A GUIDE	TREKKING WITH A CAMPING CREW
<b>IDEAL DESTINATION</b>	Everest, Annapurna, Langtang	Everest, Annapurna Kanchenjunga, Langtang, Makalu, Manaslu, Mustang, Rolwaling and Tamang Heritage Trail	Anywhere in Nepal
<b>AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS ON THE TRAIL</b>	5 to 10 days	5 to 20 days	10 to 30 days
<b>LEVEL OF FLEXIBILITY IN YOUR ITINERARY</b>	Good, you dictate your own pace	Generally poor, but depends on arrangements	Generally poor, but depends on group arrangements
<b>COST LEVEL</b>	Low to medium	Medium to high	Medium to high
<b>FITNESS &amp; EXPERIENCE LEVEL</b>	Need to be strong and fit to carry all your gear. Prior experience advisable	Training advisable but not with a heavy pack. Prior experience sometimes necessary	Training and experience advisable depending on trek
<b>AMOUNT OF TIME TO ORGANISE THE TREK IN KATHMANDU</b>	Short (a few hours to one day)	Medium (a couple of days)	Long (at least three days)

## Where to trek?

From the landscaped, broad walking tracks of the classic trekking routes, to remote craggy trails occasionally used by locals, or high alpine passes that will challenge the most experienced, there is a path somewhere that will feel almost tailor-made for you. There is an enormous disparity in the number of visitors to various regions of Nepal. By far the most popular trekking region is the Annapurna, where tens of thousands of visitors flock to destinations such as Poon Hill, the Annapurna Sanctuary and Circuit trails. However, you only need to walk a few hours away from the main route and you'll find yourself immersed in Nepali hill culture with rarely another tourist in sight. This is even more true for the remoter trekking regions to the extreme of the Api Nampa Conservation Area in Far West Nepal which receives a trekking group every few years.

### SUMMARY OF THE MAIN TREKKING AREAS

#### Kanchenjunga

[see pp155-64]

Kanchenjunga is the most easterly of the Nepal Himalas and forms a natural border with the Indian state of Sikkim. The mountain's south-west face, south ridge and west ridge form a massive and rarely visited horseshoe-shaped valley system around Yalung and includes sections of the Singalilla National Park. Village-to-village trekking routes connect Singalilla with Taplejung and numerous trails towards Makalu and the Solu-Khumbu (Everest) regions.

The main Kanchenjunga Base Camp trekking route heads to the mountain's north face and stone huts at Pangpema. The isolated communities of Olangchun Gola and Yangma are adventurous side trips that can be used as bases to visit some of the most far-flung corners of Nepal. There are many ethnic groups in the region, including Limbu, Rai, Sherpa, Lhomi as well as Tibetan nomads who cross the border to trade.

#### Makalu

[see pp165-76]

Makalu is sandwiched between Kanchenjunga and the Solu-Khumbu (Everest Region), but that doesn't mean to say it's any half measure! This is perhaps the most stunning and challenging of Nepal's wilderness trekking areas. The standard route to the base camp of the fifth highest mountain in the world, Mt Makalu, is reached after an arduous trek over the Khongma Danda to the incomparable beauty of the Barun Nadi valley.

For those who want to immerse themselves in Nepal, the wilderness and community-based trails that criss-cross the buffer zone to the south of Makalu-Barun National Park are one of Nepal's best-kept secrets. Both the park and buffer zone are also home to Rai, Lhomi and Sherpa people, making this perhaps the most comprehensive trekking region in the Himalaya.

*(cont'd on p53)*

## TREK SUMMARIES – WEST NEPAL

TREK, GRADE AND DURATION	HIGHLIGHTS	SEASONS	ACCOMMODATION
 <b>Mustang Circuit</b> (pp249-57) About 12 days	Like nowhere else does today collide so obviously with the Middle Ages!	Mar-Nov	Basic teahouse and/or camping
 <b>Chhosar &amp; Thinggar valleys</b> (p257-8) 2-3 days	Add the valleys and gompas along an ancient trade route to Tibet	Apr-Nov	Camping
 <b>Mustang, Luri Cave, Damodar Himal to Phu</b> (p258) About 20 days	The remote Damodar Kund and trails to Phu via Saribung La	Apr-Nov	Camping
 <b>Upper Dolpo Circuit</b> (pp261-8) About 20 days	Mysterious, spectacular, rarely visited and authentic cultures	Apr-Nov	Camping
 <b>Dhorpatan to Jumla via Dunai</b> (pp269) About 16 days	An enticing blend of wilderness and lower Dolpo cultures	Apr-May/ Oct-Dec	Camping
 <b>Lower Dolpo Circuit</b> (p269) About 12 days	Amazing variety in the Trans-Himalayan biodiversity area	Apr-Nov	Camping
 <b>Kagbeni to Chharka Bhot</b> (pp270-1) About 14 days	Wonderful remote wilderness and ancient communities in a trans-Himalayan odyssey	Apr-Nov	Camping
 <b>Kagbeni to Gamgadhi – high route via Chharka Bhot &amp; Pho</b> (pp275-8) About 20 days	Nine 5000m+ passes and authentic cultures make this beyond compare	Apr-Nov	Camping
 <b>Rara Lake Circuit</b> (pp283-288) About 13 days	Sublime beauty, old-growth forests and ancient history all in one trek	Apr-May/ Oct-Dec	Basic teahouse and/or camping
 <b>Khaptad National Park</b> (pp288-92) About 9 days	Where the Gods choose to honeymoon away from the crowds...	Mar-May/ Oct-Dec	Camping
 <b>Karnali Corridor: Rara to Simikot</b> (pp292-6) About 12 days	A trans-Himalayan delight and a wonderful insight to far west Nepal	Apr-May/ Oct-Dec	Camping
 <b>Limi Valley Trek via Hilsa (Yulsa)</b> (pp296-302) About 17 days	Fascinating local history and cultures, dramatic trans-Himalayan scenery	Apr-May/ Sep-Nov	Camping
 <b>Far west discovery: Darchula to Rara Lake</b> (pp302-10) About 20 days	An amazing adventure with unbelievable hospitality and gorgeous landscapes	Mar-June/ Sep-Dec	Camping

For notes about the various grades see p47-8.

## Before departure

Life in Nepal is more ‘fluid’ than the life you might be used to, which makes working with the locals’ concept of time and efficiency a potential source of frustration for many tourists. If you are planning and organising an independent trip make sure you pack some patience and a smile – anger achieves only negative results. If you are on a packaged trip let your tour leader do the worrying and just go with the flow. Whatever your plans, once you have decided to visit Nepal the first thing to do is book your flight as most airlines run at full capacity in peak season.

### VISAS AND PERMITS

Barely a year goes by without a change to the **entry visa regulations** to Nepal. You can check arrangements with one of the Nepali embassies or consular offices, but the most reliable source of information is currently the Nepal Department of Immigration website ([☐ nepalimmigration.gov.np](http://nepalimmigration.gov.np)).

Many tourists organise a **visa prior to arrival** in Nepal by applying through the Department of Immigration website (see [☐ online.nepalimmigration.gov.np/tourist-visa](http://online.nepalimmigration.gov.np/tourist-visa)), but it is also possible to apply for a **visa on arrival** in Kathmandu at Tribhuvan International Airport (currently US\$125 for 90 days, US\$50 for 30 days, US\$30 for 15 days, payable in a range of major currencies or Visa or MasterCard; see *Getting though Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) in Kathmandu*, p92). The visa available on arrival tends to be cheaper than applying for one from an embassy or consular office. Other entry points are Kodari (on the Tibet border and normally only open for groups), and nine overland borders with India. For current details see the immigration website above.

Similarly, the **trekking permit system** undergoes almost constant change. Currently most trekking itineraries require: (1) a National Park or a Conservation Area Permit, and (2) TIMS (Trekking Information Management System) permit. You may also require a Controlled Area Permit and/or a special trekking permit depending on the region. It is essential that you organise Controlled Area Permits through a registered trekking company, and if this is all you do the company will charge you a processing fee. You should always carry a photocopy of your passport when trekking, and be prepared to register at police check posts whenever requested to do so.

A final formality is to register online, or in Kathmandu, with your embassy or consulate or register at the Himalayan Rescue Association (see box p114). If there is no consulate, find out which, if any, country represents your country in Nepal. This can be determined from your Foreign Affairs Department, or corresponding office, in your country.

stove as it will clog and require cleaning on a regular, almost daily, basis.

### Miscellaneous

A **first-aid kit** is essential – see p66, p67, p84 and p87.

Perhaps the most useful item you will need is a **head torch**: for reading in bed, finding gear in the bottom of bags and to be hands free in the toilet. An essential piece of equipment is a **water bottle** or bladder, which should ideally have the capacity to carry a minimum of two litres. You also need to pack biodegradable **soap**, a travel **towel**, and general toiletries in a waterproof bag.

Instead of cotton hankies, which can become quite unpleasant, it is a good idea to use lightweight **kitchen cloths** (for example Chux, Super Wipes, J-Cloths); these are very easy to clean, dry incredibly fast and weigh very little. Use different colours for hankies and washing yourself as it's a good idea to know which is which!

A **GPS device** can be invaluable when used as a backup to a map and compass (declination in most of Nepal is a marginal 2 or 3°) but make sure you carry enough batteries that will continue to work in cold conditions.

### TYPICAL GEAR LISTS FOR CLIMBERS AND CAMPERS

**Hardwear** (for group of eight including clients). Note that this is a general indication of the sort of equipment you might need and not a definitive list – you **must** consult with trained and experienced experts before embarking on any technical trek or climb.

- Crampons for each group member
- Harness for each group member
- Helmet for treks with rockfall hazard
- Ice axe for each group member (or trekking pole if non-technical)
- 2 large slings >2m
- 2 medium slings 1.5-2m
- Medium to large ice screw
- 60m static rope 8-9mm
- 2 screwgate karabiners for each group member
- 2 single prussiks for each group member
- Snowstake/medium to large deadman
- 4 spare screwgate karabiners

**Kitchen** (minimum for group of eight including clients)

- 2 medium-sized bowls for food preparation and washing
- Frying pan

**Kitchen (cont'd)**

- 2 medium-sized saucepans for cooking vegetables
- Pressure cooker
- Kettle
- 4-8 plates depending on weight considerations
- 4-8 soup bowls depending on weight considerations
- 4-8 cutlery sets depending on weight considerations
- 8 cups
- Roti cooking plate
- 2 plastic jugs
- Peeler
- Small chopping knife
- Large knife or cleaver
- Ladle
- Egg lift
- Water jerry approx 20Lt
- Kerosene jerry approx 20Lt
- 3 small towels
- 2 tea strainers
- Chopping board for meat
- Chopping board for vegetables
- 3 MSR stoves (EX model is best)
- 3m x 5m tarp
- Kitchen tent or similar

● **Don't rush** There are no prizes for coming first on the trail and rushing will probably over-stress your body and may increase your chances of suffering from altitude sickness. Frequent stops to drink water and rest often become photo opportunities and a chance to chat with locals.

● **Trekking poles** That more people aren't impaled by absent-minded trekkers swinging their poles is amazing. Be aware of the pole tips, especially when crossing bridges or negotiating narrow or steep trails.

● **Beware of yaks** Many portage animals you meet along the trail are yaks or hybrids of yaks and cattle, and all of them can be dangerous. Every season at least one tourist will die because they got too close to the large horns or were knocked from a bridge. If you see any pack animals (even donkeys cause accidents) coming along the trail you should scramble up the hillside of the trail and wait until they pass.

● **Listening to music** Rather than listening to the noise of life along the trail some people prefer to plug themselves into their favourite playlist. Doing so puts you at greater risk from animals and rockfall.

● **Common courtesy** The trail is often busy, especially at steep or difficult sections. A common courtesy is to give way to people walking uphill, or to those who are obviously struggling or carrying a very large load.

## TEMPLE AND SHRINE ETIQUETTE

Many temples are closed for periods throughout the year and you should check if the 'key-holder' is nearby otherwise you might have a pointless walk. Personal contact is frowned upon, so you should avoid touching monks or nuns at all times. You should ask if it is necessary to remove your footwear when entering any religious building. Both men and women should have their chests and shoulders covered at all times, whereas your head should be uncovered.

Remain quiet and avoid speaking loudly. Also turn off your phone. Many Buddhists make prostrations when they enter a temple. If you do not wish to do the same, either bow your head slightly with the palms of your hands together at the chest or simply stand quietly until others have finished.

If you enter a monastery or shrine you may be led to the main statue where you can pay respect to the Buddha or deity by laying down a *khadag* (aka *khata*; ceremonial scarf) in front of the Buddha in the same way as you would present it to a *lama* (Buddhist priest) – folded correctly and with your palms facing towards the sky. Lighting a candle is another way of paying respect; this should be done facing towards the central Buddha or deity statue. Do not touch the Buddha statues, or any of the ritual objects around the temple.

When teachers, monks and nuns enter and leave the main shrine room, visitors should stand to show respect. Otherwise, it is good manners to bow down low when walking directly in front of people, in particular monks, who may be sitting against the walls of the temple.

Sit with your feet folded cross-legged or folded under yourself. If you feel the need to stretch your legs while in a temple, do so in such a way so as not to point your feet directly at the teacher or altar.

## Health and well-being

Trekking is good for you! The daily exercise, consumption of significant volumes of water and controlled exposure to sunlight all combine to make many feel healthier than they ever have before. However, there are occasions when this is not the case, and being aware of your health and that of your group is critical to safe trekking.

This chapter is not an exhaustive review of health, first-aid and rescue issues; it is merely a guide to help you understand what information and experience you need to have to trek safely. It is essential that somebody in your party has up-to-date first-aid knowledge, that everyone has a clear idea of general health problems and their prevention, and that your party and guide understand what to do in an emergency situation.

An excellent resource for anyone trekking into mountainous regions is *Pocket First Aid and Wilderness Medicine* by Drs Jim Duff and Ross Anderson (Cicerone Press). Every group should carry at least one copy.

### GENERAL HEALTH ISSUES

All trekking companies and medical staff recommend a regular exercise programme of increasing difficulty some months prior to embarking on your trek. If you arrive in Nepal in an unfit state you will find trekking tough on both your body and mind.

Regular aerobic exercise for a couple of hours at a time is the least you should be able to achieve. It is also wise to take at least one long walk a week, for up to five or six hours (of walking time), so that your body is not unfamiliar with sustained exercise. The fitter you are before you arrive the faster your body will adapt to the rigours of walking all day on sometimes rough and difficult trails. It is often hard for people to imagine that you can spend days walking up just one hill and that a climb of 100m or 200m is considered flat by most Nepalese. Aerobic fitness will also make acclimatisation easier for you as your body will begin to adapt to, rather than just cope with, reduced levels of oxygen.

You must visit your doctor at home and check your immunisations and any general health requirements or issues. It is also a good idea to get some recommendations about specific medications for your trip and research potential health issues. Whenever you prepare a field first-aid kit there is one major consideration: only pack what you know how to use. Any items or medications that you are not familiar with will at best be a waste of time. At worst, they could cause a serious problem. You should also include enough supplies to cover your crew as well as group members.

When you are trekking you will come across health posts in some villages. If you have additional medical supplies these could be a good place to leave

# KATHMANDU

# 2

The Kathmandu Valley is enigmatic and unique. For almost two millennia people from across the Himalaya, and now the world, have been drawn to this broad and fertile valley and its three cities of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur.

The colour, chaos and complexity of life in Nepal's capital will fill your days with wonder and amazement. It's said that if you belong nowhere else on earth, this is your home.

## HISTORY

### Origins

According to legend, the Kathmandu Valley was once a snake-infested lake upon which a beautiful lotus grew surrounded by light. The Buddhist deity Manjushri (Buddha of Transcendent Wisdom) drained the lake by cutting a gorge at Chobar so he could examine this lotus. The flower settled on a hill now called Swayambhunath and the retreating waters left rich soil in the Valley that was ideal for grazing cattle and buffalo. The snakes turned into Nagas (serpent-like spirits) that are said to control the weather and are represented on almost every religious shrine or building in some form. The founder of the first dynasty here was a sage known as Ne and in ancient chronicles the area became known as Ne-pāla, literally 'the land protected by Ne'.

By the second half of the first millennium BC the invading Kiratas, who are distantly related to the Limbu (p155) and Rai (p168) people, had occupied a number of sites in the region. They were succeeded by the Lichhavi in the 9th century AD. The settlements were centred around religious sites known as piths or power places, usually on the tops of hills. The Lichhavis worshipped the sun and the moon, which are two symbols that appear on Nepal's uniquely shaped flag, and they are responsible for many of the oldest religious sites in the Valley, although none of their architecture remains.

A transitional period, also called the 'dark period' of the Valley's history, began with the disintegration of the Lichhavi empire towards the end of the 9th century. A series of shadowy kings ruled a Valley that was rarely at peace, but the period is notable for the founding of Kathmandu city at some point between AD980 and 998. The towns of Patan and Bhaktapur were already established by then. 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.

**Indigo House II** (☎ 9831402928; sgl \$8, dbl \$12) is a colourful, friendly place.

**The Kitchen Travels Home** (☎ 984-3624361; dorm beds from \$4.50) has a nice rooftop terrace.

**The Nepali Hive** (☎ 980-8121243; dorm from \$4.25, dbl \$10) has a funky feel.

**Hostel Funny Monkey** (☎ 4248346; dorm beds from \$3.50, dbl \$6) is perhaps the cheapest acceptable place around.

**Zostel Kathmandu** (☎ 981-3495707, ☐ [zostel.com](http://zostel.com); dorm \$7, dbl \$20) has some pretty stunning frescos.

**Rest Up Kathmandu Hostel** (☎ 4251693, ☐ [restupkathmandu.com](http://restupkathmandu.com); dorm \$5, sgl \$15, dbl \$18) has some rooms with psychedelic artwork and a cool communal chill-out area.

**Hotel Lily** (☎ 4701264, ☐ [hoteltamellily.com](http://hoteltamellily.com); sgl \$13, dbl \$15) is cheap and cheerful, if a little noisy.

**Flying Yak Kathmandu** (☎ 4437606, ☐ [flyingyakkathmandu.com](http://flyingyakkathmandu.com); dorm \$8, sgl \$35, dbl \$45) is a new, chic backpackers' place in a good location.

**Sakura Boutique Hotel** (☎ 4424101, ☐ [sakuraboutiquehotel.com](http://sakuraboutiquehotel.com); dorm \$7, sgl

\$25, dbl \$30) is about as budget as a 'boutique' hotel can get, but the location is good.

**Andes House** (☎ 4418579, dorm \$12, sgl \$18, dbl \$20) is clean and simple with a very friendly atmosphere and quiet garden.

**Thamel Hostel** (☎ 4434341, [thamel-hostel.com](http://thamel-hostel.com); dorm \$3.50, sgl/dbl \$12) has female-only dorms and is next door to Astrek Park (climbing centre) and opposite LOD nightclub.

**Alobar 1000 Hostel** (☎ 4410576, [alobar1000.com](http://alobar1000.com); dorm \$4, sgl/dbl \$16) has an old-style backpackers' feel and friendly atmosphere, with women-only dorms and a rooftop terrace.

**Yakety Yak** (☎ 4266216, ☐ [yaketyyakhospital.com](http://yaketyyakhospital.com); dorm \$10, dbl \$40) is my best pick for hostels, for its funky décor, large communal spaces, designated women's areas, excellent room and bathroom set-ups and overall good-vibe.

**The Glass House** (☎ 9857040826, ☎ 4258672, ☐ [the-glasshouse-np.book.direct](http://the-glasshouse-np.book.direct); dorm \$9, dbl \$30) is a little out of the main tourist action, but worth the extra walk.

**Hotel Wanderlust** (☎ 4242283, [hotel-wanderlust.hotels-kathmandu.com](http://hotel-wanderlust.hotels-kathmandu.com); dorm

### ☐ Rates

Many hotel owners quote their rates in US dollars (\$); you pay in rupees, though. Given the changing rate of inflation in the country, this is a sensible idea so US dollars are also used here.

Intense competition means you can find bargain accommodation in all price brackets. Although it is still possible to get a dorm bed for as little as US\$3.50, cheap accommodation with a communal bathroom is more usually around the US\$8-15 a night mark for a double room. Most accommodation, though, now comes with an attached bathroom. However, don't expect much if you are only paying US\$10; for a nicer room expect to pay around US\$20-25, and up to US\$50-60 to get more services and facilities. Four-star hotels range from \$50 to \$150 depending on location and the top-end five-star hotels start at about \$150-200 but can cost much more.

Accommodation tariffs can vary enormously between low season and peak season. In the low season many hotels cut their prices or offer significant discounts – sometimes 50% or more for stays of more than one night. Since there is plenty of choice it is worth looking around. Discounts are often available on many hotel websites for advance bookings so it's worth booking as soon as you can.

Rates quoted are for the cheapest single (sgl) or double (dbl) rooms (often the beds in double rooms can be separated to make a twin room); and most places also offer to put an extra bed in a room for a charge.

Note that most hotels add a 13% government tax to the bill as well as a 10% service charge; you should check if these are included in your room rate.

### ❑ Momo tour of Kathmandu

The local snack, momo (south Asian dumpling), has risen to international fame in recent years and Kathmandu has some of the very best. **Momo Hut** [No 65 on map p96-7] (☑ facebook.com/thamelmomohut) in the center of Thamel has 21 varieties on the menu, including dessert momos. **Momo-Star** [No 33 on map p96-7] (☑ facebook.com/pages/category/Restaurant/Momo-Star-Restaurant-1341830559203419) is another good option that also offers dhal bhat (Nepal's national dish of rice, veg curry, lentil soup and some pickle) at a reasonable price.

If you get the momo-bug, then you could try searching out some of the following places too; it's a great way to get to know Kathmandu. Try **Momo Magic** [map p94-5] (Maharajgunj), **Le Trio**, with branches in Pulchowk [map p94-5] and Durbur Marg [map p96-7], **Momo Mantra**, with branches in Baneshwor [map p94-5] and Kamaladi [map p96-7], **Ghangri Momo** [map p94-5] (Pulchowk) or **Dharahara Momo** [map p94-5], next to the site of the old Dharahara/Bhimsen Tower.

level of faecal matter alone. The better restaurants are serious about hygiene but don't believe all restaurants that tell you their salads are washed in iodine. In most restaurants filtered water is reliably clean but many tourists prefer to stick to bottled water or hot drinks.

There are too many restaurants to mention them all in this guidebook, but some good new places, and old favourites, are reviewed here and are included on the relevant maps.

**Note; nearly all restaurant kitchens close at or before 9:30pm**, although they may be happy for you to stay a bit longer to finish your meal.

## WHERE TO EAT AROUND THAMEL [map, p96-7 unless stated]

### CHEAP EATS

Aside from momo-joints, good quality cheap eats are getting harder to find in Thamel, but there are still one or two good options that are worth seeking out: Try **Fusion Himalaya Restaurant** (☑ fusion-hr.business.site), which also offers cooking classes, or **B.K.'s Place** (☑ facebook.com/pages/BKS-Place-Thamel/288680001205918) for the best chips and *samosa* (triangular-shaped fried pastry with a savoury filling) in town. Locals who work in Thamel say that **Himali Kitchen**, behind KC's, has the best dhal bhat (veg Rs350, non-veg Rs450) and another popular place is **Thakali Bhanchha Ghar**.

### CHILLED-OUT DINING

One of the most innovative, best value and chilled out places for a meal or just a coffee is **Karma Coffee** (☑ madeinnepal.com/

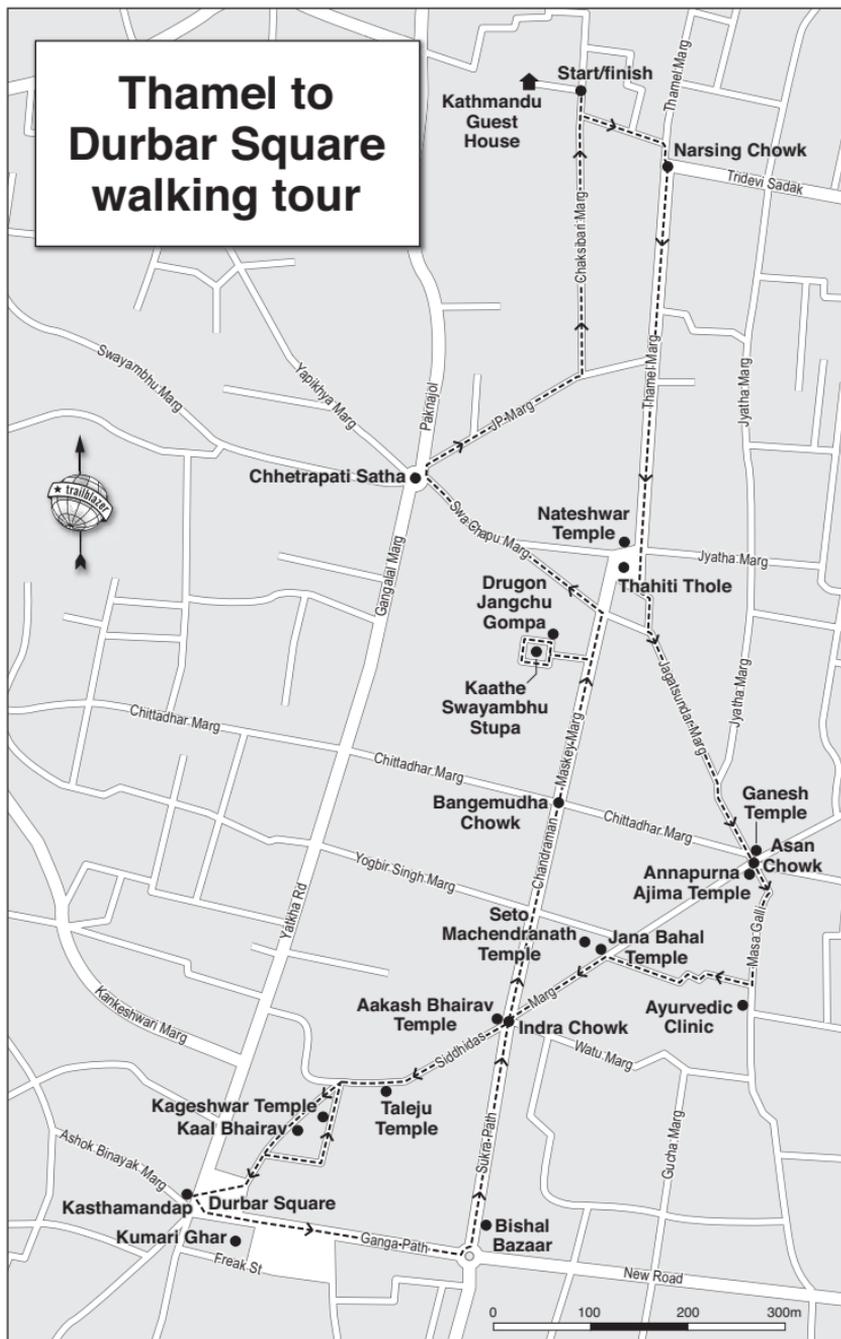
karma-coffee), with a branch in Thamel and another in Sanepa [map p94-5], and where you can also find out about a range of social-advocacy programs. Both locations also offer a range of interesting and fun activities from slideshows to cooking lessons.

Another very popular place to chill any time of day is **Gaia Café** (☑ gaia-restaurant.com), and the KEEP information centre (see p114) is upstairs so you can plan your trek and have a decent coffee at the same time!

**Café Mitra** is a two-floor resto-bar with terrace, lounge seating, a private dining room, art on the walls and excellent daily specials.

**Zibro Resto & Bar** (☑ facebook.com/zibro.restaurant) is also more of a bar with food, and a place to chill out, than somewhere to go for dinner. There's often

# Thamel to Durbar Square walking tour



might have been like, especially the snake-decorated royal bath. Note that non-Hindus are not permitted inside the Taleju Temple (dedicated to two female deities, Taleju Bhawani and Kumari).

When you come back out through the Golden Gate there is the Bell of Barking Dogs in front of you. It was used to sound curfews and when the Goddess Taleju was being worshipped in the morning. It is also said to drive dogs mad, making them bark. Behind the bell is the ornate stone-carved Vatsala Devi Temple (dedicated to Durga). Just beyond is the Chyasin Mandap, a pavilion thought to be for the royal family to view festivals and processions. Behind these temples is Bhaktapur's Pashupatinath Temple, complete with erotic carvings.

Continuing past the 55-Window Palace, you now enter an area of major reconstruction works from the 2015 earthquake. Most of the work is funded by locals, which is impressive considering how much they have to rebuild. Turn right here and walk down a street busy with souvenir shops and at the end turn right again, heading to **Taumadhi Square**.

Perhaps the most famous temple in Bhaktapur is the 30m-tall, five-tiered **Nyatapola Temple** (dedicated to Siddhi Laxmi, a form of Parvati, the goddess



entry fee Rs350), 32km from the city on the road that passes Bhaktapur. Since the view, which includes Everest and four of the other 10 highest peaks in the world, is best in the early morning, most people spend the night here. There are, however, tours that leave Kathmandu before dawn to catch the sunrise. You can also get here by taxi (Rs2500), bus from Bhaktapur (2hrs), on foot or by mountain-bike.

### Changu Narayan Temple

[map p130-1]

Tucked away in the eastern corner of the Kathmandu Valley, beyond Bhaktapur, is the oldest continually used temple in Nepal. It is dedicated to Vishnu in the form of Narayan, the creator of life, and is a UNESCO World Heritage site, but it was badly affected by the 2015 earthquakes and is undergoing substantial renovation. If you have the time, it's worth a visit just to get a feel for the place and you can combine a visit with a walk to or from Bhaktapur.

Around the temple are some notable carvings including a Garuda facing the western entrance said to date from the 5th century, and a nearby stone pillar with an inscription dated AD464 – the oldest in Nepal. Around the temple are 5th-, 6th- and 7th-century carvings depicting Vishnu in his 10 incarnations – try to spot Narsingha (the man-lion), Vikrantha (the six-armed dwarf who transformed himself into a giant to cross the universe in three steps) and Vishnu sitting astride a Garuda, which is on the 10-rupee bank note.

### Chandragiri Cable Car

[map p130-1]

Just on the western edge of the Kathmandu Valley is the sacred hill of Chandragiri (2551m), which now boasts a cable car, children's playground and resort hotel. On a clear day, the view of the Langtang and adjoining ranges is fantastic and a visit can be combined with a day walk ([chandragirihills.com](http://chandragirihills.com), entry US\$13 one-way and US\$22 return).



## DAY WALKS IN THE KATHMANDU VALLEY

Map p130-1

Duration of each walk: approx 4-8hrs

There is a potential walking route all the way around the Kathmandu Valley rim, but some sections are tricky to navigate and/or are much longer than the average day hike. There are some sections, though, that make excellent day walks; six of the best have been reviewed here for us by Siling Ghale. It is strongly recommended that you take a guide or someone who knows the way for all of them.

See the Kathmandu Valley map p130-1 for an idea of where they are.

### Walk 1 – Shivapuri Summit Walk (7hrs)

● **Permits Required** The daily entry fee into the National Park is Rs1000, Rs600 for SAARC nationals and Rs100 for Nepali.

● **Drive time** Kathmandu/Thamel to Mul Pani – 20 minutes, Mul Pani to Kathmandu/Thamel – 20 minutes

Shivapuri Peak is the highest point around the Kathmandu Valley rim and is the centrepiece for Nepal's most visited National Park. The Park is home to a

huge variety of mammals including the common leopard, Himalayan Black Bear, wild boar and barking deers among the larger species, and 318 species of birds including the Eurasia Eagle Owl.

After the National park entry gate, follow the trail right on jeep track that heads uphill for about a 1½hrs to Nagi Gomba. Then take the foot path up through the forest and to reach the ridge (1hr) and have a rest break to enjoy the views the valley and northwards to Nuwakot as well as the entire range of Langtang and Jugal Himals. Continue climbing, passing a hermitage retreat and the spring spout of Bag Dwaar, and then finally to the summit (1½hrs, 2732m).

The return trek is a more direct route straight down stone steps to finish at the Park entrance gate at Mul Pani (2½hrs).

### **Walk 2 – Overnight Chisapani to Nagarkot (8hrs)**

● **Permits Required** The daily entry fee into the National Park is Rs1000, Rs600 for SAARC nationals and Rs100 for Nepali.

● **Drive time** Kathmandu/Thamel to Sundarjial – 45mins, Nagarkot to Kathmandu/Thamel – 1½hrs

This is a short overnight trek starting at the Sundarjial, then taking you through the Shivaluri National Park to Chisapani where there are fantastic panoramas of the Langtang and Jugal Himals. An overnight stay provides sunset and sunrise views, as well as the chance to see some wilderness and authentic Nepali rural life.

It takes about 45 minutes to drive to the National Park gate at Sundarjial from the city center. Climb a trail beside a large water pipe to the National Park entry post (30mins) and continue to the reservoir. You then exit the forest and pass through Tamang villages, and then re-enter forest over Borle Bhanjyang (2½hrs). The trail descends to the ridge-top community of Chisapani (see Kathmandu to Gosainkund Trek p195-8 for more information).

The following day, trek eastward following the dirt road that mostly follows the valley rim ridge and has fantastic view of the mountains to Nagarkot (3½hrs). From here, you can take a bus or taxi back to Kathmandu.

The route can also be linked with trails to Shivapuri Summit, Dhulikhel or Namobuddha to make 3- or 4-day treks.

### **Walk 3 – Nagarkot to Ichangu Narayan (4hrs)**

● **Permits Required** None

● **Drive time** Kathmandu/Thamel to Nagarkot – 1½hrs, Changu Narayan to Kathmandu/Thamel – 45 minutes

This is one of the most convenient day walks, which can include a sunrise view of the Himalayas, and then be back in Kathmandu for lunch.

It's a good idea to drive to Nagarkot the previous afternoon, possibly after a tour of Bhaktapur, and spend the night there or drive early morning to Nagarkot for sunrise. Following breakfast, take a trail that runs parallel to the road to Kathmandu and then descends through Tamang and Newar villages. After about 2hrs the trail climbs on to the ridge and you pass through patches of forest. In another 2hrs you will reach Changu Narayan Temple (see p128), a UNESCO World Heritage Site that dates from the Lecchavi era of 2nd century BC. The stone stile at the west entrance of the temple dates back to the 5th century.

*(cont'd on p132)*

# POKHARA

3

*In all my travels in the Himalaya I saw no scenery so enchanting as that which enraptured me at Pokhara.* **Ekai Kawaguchi** *Three Years in Tibet*

Pokhara's superb mountain scenery has been captivating travelers since Ekai Kawaguchi, the town's first foreign visitor, came this way in 1899. Modern tourists are no less impressed; there can be few other towns that are so close to such high mountains. Pokhara (pronounced 'POKE-rah') lies at 850m/2789ft yet peaks of over 8000m/26,267ft rise above it in a breathtaking panorama.

Two hundred kilometres (125 miles) west of Kathmandu, Pokhara is the starting and ending point for most of the treks in the Annapurna region, except the Annapurna Circuit (usually started from Besisahar). It's also the perfect place to rest weary limbs after a trek and the town's relaxed atmosphere causes many travellers to stay rather longer than they'd originally planned. Along the eastern shore of Phewa Tal a waterside version of Thamel in Kathmandu offers accommodation to suit every budget.

The joy of Pokhara is that there really is very little to do here except laze around by the lake and over-indulge in those culinary delights you may have been pining for while away on your trek.

## HISTORY

### Origins

Probably at the same time that the Kathmandu Valley was a lake (about 200,000 years ago) the Pokhara Valley was also under water. Now just a few lakes (*tals*) remain: Phewa Tal in Pokhara, and Begnas Tal and Rupa Tal 10km to the east are the largest.

Very little is known about the early history of this area but Pokhara's location between the mountain passes and the plains has made it a focal point for peoples from both sides of the Himalaya for centuries. The area was controlled by numerous small kingdoms, usually situated on hilltops around the valley, populated by people who had migrated from Tibet. They were the ancestors of the Gurung who now live in Pokhara and the surrounding hills.

In the 14th century, Moghul persecution of Hindus in India forced refugee communities north into Nepal and some settled in the Pokhara area. Rajput princes from Rajasthan brought their entire courts and armies with them to carve out their own principalities. These Indo-Aryans developed the agriculture of the Pokhara Valley and whilst the high-caste Brahmins and Chhetris remained

## Hotel areas

Although there is some basic accommodation near the tourist bus station and in the centre of Pokhara, everyone heads for the lake area. Not surprisingly, therefore, Lakeside has the greatest choice of places to stay and almost all the restaurants and shops. Damside is a bit quieter and has better views of the mountains; many of the guest houses here also have dining rooms so you don't have to go to Lakeside to eat.

The north-side of the lake is establishing itself as a healthy eco-style region for hotels and restaurants. It's the quietest area to stay in and almost everywhere offers fishing, horse riding and day walks direct from the hotel, although there are no mountain views from here.

Wherever you are it is worth paying a little bit extra to have a room with a view over the lake and the mountains; if your budget doesn't stretch to this look for places with a rooftop garden.

All hotels reviewed here are on **map p142-3**, unless stated otherwise.

## Rates

See the box text on p100 for an overview of hotel rates in Nepal.

### CHEAP HOTELS (up to US\$20)

Most of the cheaper places to stay lie on the fringes of Lakeside, either to the north, or in the labyrinth of roads towards downtown. There are a number of OYO options in this category

**Zostel Pokhara** [map p136-7] (☎ 9869273860, 🌐 [zostel.com/zostel/pokhara](http://zostel.com/zostel/pokhara)), dorm \$7, dbl \$18) is the best hostel in Pokhara, with comfy communal areas, and activities on offer.

**Lake Boutique Hotel** [map p136-7] (☎ 9803596117, 🌐 [lakeboutiquehotel.com](http://lakeboutiquehotel.com)), sgl \$9, dbl \$12) is listed mostly because of the Healthy Options restaurant on the ground floor but it also has comfy rooms and plenty of lake-view terrace seating.

**Lakeside Backpackers Hostel** (☎ 466049, dorm \$4.50) is the cheapest good quality hostel I could find. There is a good restaurant on the ground floor and very friendly staff.

**Garden Homestay** (☎ 9846030275; sgl \$11, dbl \$15) is in a lovely garden and has an old-style charm missing from almost every other location in Pokhara.

**Hotel The Cherry Garden** (☎ 466924, ☎ 9846056656, 🌐 [cherrygarden.namaste.jp](http://cherrygarden.namaste.jp); sgl \$15, dbl \$20) could do with upgrading some of the room furniture, but the garden is magic, and enjoy the hammocks!

**Hotel Blossom** (☎ 9856039543, 🌐 [hotelblossom.com.np](http://hotelblossom.com.np); sgl \$13, dbl \$16) has a European-touch to its décor, is in an excellent location and has great reviews.

**Nepali Cottage Guest House** (☎ 9856031094; sgl \$8, dbl \$10) is family run, clean and basic but also tries to be sustainable and eco-friendly. It's also part of Wendy's Juice Shop and centrally located on Lakeside.

**Hotel Travel Inn** (☎ 462631, 🌐 [hotel-travelin.com](http://hotel-travelin.com); sgl \$13, dbl \$18) is good value for the location, although the décor is a bit intense in some rooms.

**Harvest Moon Guest House** (☎ 9856021586, 🌐 [harvest-moon.com.np](http://harvest-moon.com.np); sgl \$10, dbl \$12) is run by a very friendly family. All rooms have private bathrooms and are very clean. It's also in a good location.

**Hotel Love and Light** (☎ 464090, 🌐 [hotelloveandlight.com](http://hotelloveandlight.com); dorm \$5, sgl \$15,

The **Pokhara area code** is 061. If phoning from outside Nepal dial ☎ +977-61.

Note that mobiles begin with '9' and do not require an area code.

byanjan.com) has been a quality restaurant with nice lake views for many years. You will need to book in season. **Moondance** (☎ 461835, 📧 moondancepokhara.com) is an old favourite and has a special menu featuring stinging nettle. All the dishes here are excellent. **Café Concerto** (☎ 463529, 📧 coffeconcertonepal.com) is a dedicated Italian eatery with a quality menu and atmosphere. **Med5 Restaurant** (☎ 467796, 📧 med5restaurant.com) is an impressive and well decorated Mediterranean-styled place, but don't expect tapas.

### ASIAN CUISINE

In the summer months, when India is boiling hot, Pokhara is jammed with folks getting away from the heat of the plains. Then, in monsoon, Chinese tourists arrive in numbers, so there are some authentic and reliable Asian-cuisine restaurants around town.

**Pho 99** (☎ 9802743330, 📧 facebook.com/pho99pokhara) is perhaps the only genuine Vietnamese eatery in Pokhara and it does a fine job; sometimes has live music. **AoZoRa Japanese Restaurant** (☎ 9841972511, 461707 📧 facebook.com/Aozora-Japanese-Restaurant-584739451609196) offers an excellent range of good quality Japanese favourites, including some excellent *donburi* (Japanese rice bowl dish). **Bodhi Suites restaurant** (☎ 467657, 📧 bodhisuites.com) is the very impressive rooftop Chinese restaurant at Bodhi Suites hotel. It also has general Asian and European menus. **Almonds** (☎ 527157, 📧 facebook.com/AlmondsCafePokhara) has a reputation for good Indian dining, and is certainly much better than anything else on Lakeside. **Utopia Garden** (☎ 9846114408, 📧 utopiagarden-snacks-bar.business.site) is a good spot for an Indian or Nepali dinner right by the lake and sometimes has live music. **Natssul** (☎ 9806743394, 📧 natssul.modoo.at) is the best Korean restaurant

here and has an excellent BBQ pork.

### FOR MEAT LOVERS

It's become harder to find real steaks in Pokhara as the number of vegetarian and vegan places has mushroomed (excuse the pun). Almost all the general restaurants will offer buffalo meat and call it steak, but here are a few choices for the real thing.

**Everest Steak House Pokhara** (☎ 466828, 📧 evereststeakhouse.com.np) is in a much more convenient location than the Kathmandu branch, and has an impressive range of steaks. **Hungry Eye Restaurant and Bar** (☎ 462908) has some acceptable steak and burgers, but be clear about happy-hour prices before you order. **Olive Café** (☎ 462575, 📧 facebook.com/olivecafe.pokhara) is another old favourite that claims to have the best burgers in Pokhara.

### VEGETARIAN

It seems like every-other restaurant in Lakeside has now gone vegetarian and/or vegan in the last few years, and that's excellent if you want some healthy eats!

**Healthy Options** [map 148-9] (☎ 462911, 9803596117) is on the northern side of the lake and has some imaginative and tasty vegetarian and vegan options – try the Greens Detox Salad or the Dr Green Love Smoothie! **Ayurvedico Café** (☎ 9818703081, 📧 facebook.com/ayurvedico.cafe) is a macrobiotic and probiotic specialist that makes you feel healthy just by walking into the place. **OR2K** (☎ 467114, 📧 or2knepal.com) is the sister of OR2K Kathmandu, and has a very similar menu of Israeli and Middle eastern vegetarian dishes. **Wendy's Juice Shop** (☎ 9856031094), at the front of Nepali Cottage Guest House, is clean and unashamedly focused on fruit and vegetables. It's cheap and delicious! **Tara's Restaurant Vegetarian** (☎ 9813258296) specialises in Nepali and Asian veg dishes and is exceptional value.

### NIGHTLIFE

Many Lakeside bars have live music and are open to 11pm, although some stay open until 2am, and there is a plan to formalise late opening under license in early 2020. All those listed overleaf are found on **map p142-3**.



## POKHARA DAY WALK

Map p136-7

Duration: approx 2-3hrs

There are many walks to viewpoints and lakes around Pokhara from a few hours to multiple days. The easiest to access begins from a landing stage on the southern shore, behind the Barahi Temple island. Head up hill to the **Peace Pagoda**, then descend the road to the first left turn on a small dirt road, which you follow as it descends and rounds a forested hillside (always on your left). Cross a small bridge and follow the road on the far bank to **Damside**. Shortly after the Nepal Tourism Board office, turn left into Komagne Park and then cross into Basundhara Park and arrive on the southern end of **Lakeside**. You can also combine the walk with a visit to **Davis Falls**.

### Temples

The most important Hindu temple here is **Bindyabasini Temple** [map p136-7], just above the old bazaar. It's dedicated to Durga, the goddess of death and manifestation of Parvati, Shiva's consort. She is appeased by the sacrificing of goats, cocks and buffaloes and, especially during festivals such as Dasain, the streets flow red around this temple. South of Bindyabasini is the smaller **Bhimsen Temple** [map p136-7]. You can visit **Barahi Temple** [map p136-7], on an island in Phewa Tal, by boat.

There are modern Buddhist temples at the two Tibetan villages (see below) and a *gompa* a kilometre east of the telecommunications centre. The energetic could try climbing to **World Peace Pagoda** [map p136-7] on a ridge to the south of Lakeside. It's visible from Lakeside, and the views of Pokhara and the mountains from there are awesome.

### Cinema

**The Movie Garden** [map p136-7] (☎ 9801022828, 🌐 facebook.com/moviegar denpokhara) on north Lakeside is an open-air movie amphitheatre, which shows a mix of new releases and classics every night. Movies are screened daily at 7pm and cost Rs300 to watch. There are snacks, a bar and blankets if you feel chilly.

### Bicycle excursions

Pokhara's other sights make pleasant bicycle excursions; see p151 for details about renting a bicycle.

In the south there's **Davis Falls/Devi's Fall** [map p136-7] (Rs50). The origins for its name get more confused with each guidebook that's published. A tourist named David, Davy, Devi or Miss Davis is said to have been swimming here when the sluice-gates on Pardi Dam, a couple of kilometres upstream, were opened. He (or she) drowned. The falls are quite impressive after the monsoon; much less so in the winter and spring.

Nearby you can visit the **Tashiling Tibetan Village** [map p136-7], where there's a carpet factory. Tibetan trinket sellers will soon home in on you here and you'll also meet them in Lakeside. To the north of Pokhara you could visit **Tashipakhel Tibetan Village** [map p136-7], which has a restaurant, guest house, *gompa* and carpet factory. Follow the Pokhara–Beni Highway for 3km to reach it.

The route to, and over, Amphu Labsta (5845m) to Chukhung is now popular with groups who have climbed Mera Peak. However, this is still probably the most dangerous pass in Nepal and care needs to be taken on both the ascent and descent.

Most groups that attempt the pass camp beside one of the Panch Pokhari lakes and get an early start. A collection of *cairns* are reached after about an hour, which mark the point where you have to choose one of two routes to the pass: the more popular is up a series of ice cliffs, while the other climbs an exposed, steep rocky and snow-covered section direct to the pass. Full climbing equipment is required for either route and it is wise to fix any ropes in the afternoon prior to crossing. The descent is a bottleneck as there is a short abseil (30m) to a ledge, which then leads down steep rocky ground to the Amphu Labsta Glacier and the trail to Chukung (4730m, 11-15hrs from West Col base depending on group size).

## Solu-Khumbu (Everest) region

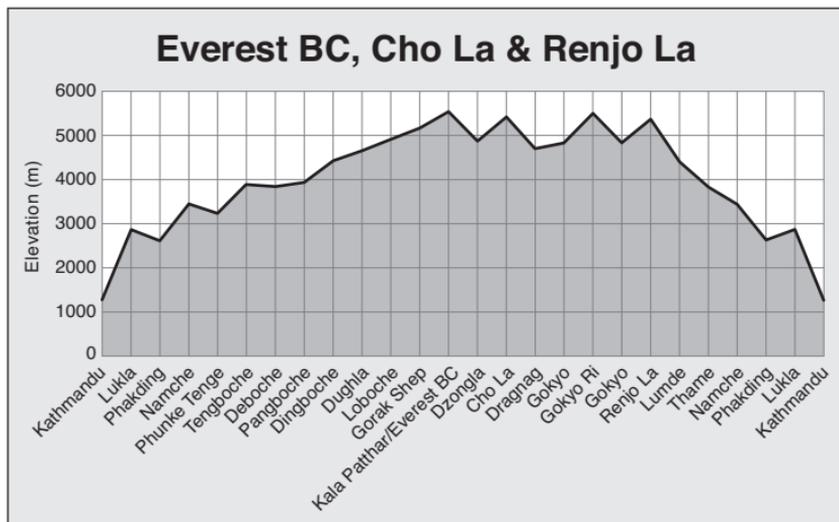
Mt Everest, known as Sagarmatha to most Nepalese and Chomolungma to the local Sherpas, has become one of Nepal's premier trekking destinations. The proliferation of comfortable teahouses (many with en suite rooms) and well-maintained trails accommodates tens of thousands of tourists each season. The region is popular for good reason; some of the most spectacular and beautiful mountain scenery in the world combines with the famous friendliness and hospitality of the Sherpa people to make a visit a must for any walker.

The Everest Region, known locally as the Solu-Khumbu, fans out into a series of impressive glacier-filled valleys above the main trading centre of Namche. The eastern side of the fan includes the main trail route to Everest Base Camp (EBC) and the viewpoint of Kala Patthar, along with the Chukhung valley that leads to Amphu Labsta (see *Sherpani Col, West Col & Amphu Labsta*, pp174-6) and the popular trekking peak of Imja Tse (Island Peak). The centre of the fan is the Gokyo valley, which contains a series of turquoise

### The Hillary Himalayan Trust

Schools and programmes operated by the Hillary Himalayan Trust – started by Sir Edmund Hillary – are famous for kick-starting the economy of the Solu-Khumbu region. The key to the success of its projects is the involvement of locals. Sir Edmund believed locals could help themselves if given sufficient opportunity and resources.

The Trust mostly provides funds and the villagers provide land, materials and labour. This approach means that the villagers 'adopt' the projects and take pride in maintaining and further developing schools, hospitals and bridges all over the Solu-Khumbu. For more information see,  [himalayantrust.co.nz](http://himalayantrust.co.nz).



convenient place to experience the immensity of the Himalaya in Nepal and in less than three weeks!

There is almost no bad time of year to visit the Solu-Khumbu as there is always something going on. A major re-forestation programme in the 1980s and 1990s has once again given a bloom of colour to the lower slopes in the pre-monsoon. The most popular season is October to December, when the air is clear and offers the best shots of the highest mountain in the world. The popular passes of Cho La and Renjo La are open for most of the year except for a brief period from mid-February to March. All the main routes in the valleys are open year-round.

The region used to have a reputation for tough trekking but a significant increase in teahouses and trail maintenance has made it an option for novices and experienced trekkers alike. Access is very easy with multiple daily flights to Lukla year-round; just remember to reconfirm the day before you fly as waiting lists can be long in peak season.

For comprehensive trail, accommodation and local information see Jamie McGuinness's *Trekking in the Everest Region*, also published by Trailblazer.

#### **DAY 1: KATHMANDU-LUKLA-PHAKDING/BENKAR ALL DAY**

The 200km flight to Lukla (2840m) has great views of the eastern Himalaya; sit on the left-hand side of the plane for the best views. Many guides like to meet your crew and purchase supplies in Lukla, so do not be surprised if you are delayed before heading out of town. From the airport head north along the main paved trail crowded with

shops to a *kani*, where you then head downhill. After 45 minutes you should reach Chheplung (2660m), the first of many collections of teahouses and the carved mani stones, prayer wheels and chortens built by all Buddhist communities throughout the Himalaya.

The trail now undulates through Nurning and Ghat, punctuated by short sections of scrubby pine forest and painted



## RUBY VALLEY TREK

Ruby Valley provides a true gem of a trek in more ways than one! Some terrific views combine with authentic mountain hospitality to form one of the best low-altitude treks in Nepal. Add some intriguing history about a deserted gem mine and it's time to go!



GRADE 4

- **Duration & distance:** About 8 days total; days not more than 20km per day
- **Gradient:** Short steep sections
- **Quality of path:** Formed track, some obstacles
- **Quality of markings:** Limited signage
- **Experience required:** Experienced walkers require navigation skills
- **Walking times:** Less than 7½ hours per day
- **Steps:** Steps not included in grade
- **Highest point:** 3830m
- **Best season:** Oct-May
- **Accommodation:** Camping
- **Recommended maps:** NP106 GHT Series Manaslu & Ganesh Himals and NP105 GHT Series Langtang & Helambu, Himalayan Map House, 2017

Local communities are working hard to develop more accommodation options, but for now, you will have to take a tent or expect some outdoor nights.

**NOTE: Both times I have trekked this route the accompanying maps for Arughat have not been available, so I have quoted GPS waypoints between Lapagaon and Machhakhola.**

### DAY 1: KATHMANDU–SYABRU BESI 8HRS DRIVE

[See map p194] The drive from Kathmandu offers good views of Manaslu, Ganesh and Langtang Himals as well as brief glimpses of village life in the Himalaya.

The first section is a sealed road to Trisuli before the precipitous dirt road to Dhunche, where there is a National Park and police checkpost. Continue to Syabru BESI (1503m), where there are many teahouses and a campsite. As most of the day's drive is on dirt roads, a light scarf to protect your face against dust may be useful.

### DAY 2: SYABRU BESI–GATLANG 5¾HRS

[See map p194] There are two trails to Gatlang (2300m) from Syabru BESI: The first option follows the new valley road to the Chilime Khola valley into which you turn west (left) and follow a good trail to Thambuchet and then to Gatlang (see

*Tamang Heritage Trail*, day 8, opposite).

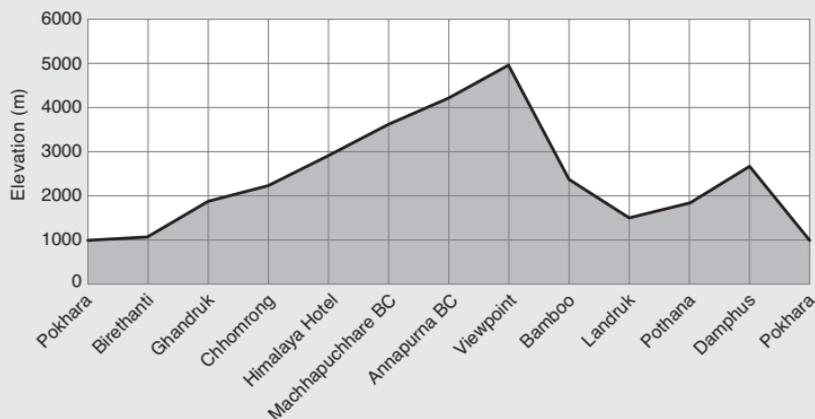
The second, faster option from Syabru BESI is to climb a trail that begins beside Buddha Guest House. This is a direct route to the Rongga Bhanjyang (2187m, 2hrs) above Syabru BESI, and also sometimes coincides with the route of an old road to Somdang. From the pass it is an easy 2 hours and 20 minutes along the road to Gatlang (2238m).

### DAY 3: GATLANG–SOMDANG 6HRS

[See maps p194 & p208] From Gatlang the road is rarely used by vehicles as landslides and fallen trees often block it. Follow a large track from Gatlang school up to Parvati Kund (45 mins). From the lake the trail intermittently cuts across the road as it winds through pine and rhododendron forest.

At 3100m (1¾hrs) you come to a large kharka where you can camp. Not far above you re-join the road and follow it as it traverses a steep rocky hillside to another smaller kharka where the road does a U-

## Annapurna Sanctuary



### DAY 3: CHHOMRONG–HIMALAYA 4¾HRS

Descend a stone stairway and cross a bridge to the true left bank of the Chhomrong Khola and then climb through some small terraces to Tilche (2010m, 40 mins). Beyond the village, enter a bamboo forest and traverse above Bhanuwa and enter the Modhi Khola valley, which forms a striking V shape ahead. The trail climbs to the last permanent settlement of Sinuwa (2360m, 35 mins) and continues through oak and rhododendron forest interspersed with large stands of bamboo.

After another 45 minutes you should reach Kuldhigar (2540m), where there are a few teahouses and an ACAP post. From here onwards, sections of the valley are affected by avalanche debris falling from the flanks of Hiun Chuli; you should check with ACAP staff if the trail is clear and safe. A short climb is followed by a steep descent on a well-prepared paved track to Bamboo (2310m, 30 mins), where the trail now deteriorates with many tree roots and slippery sections forcing your pace to slow. Three small bridges cross tributaries en route to Dobhan (2600m, 1¼hrs), where there are a few teahouses.

From Dobhan the forest becomes more impressive with large rhododendrons cov-

ered in Spanish moss and pockets of orchids. The locals believe that the god Baraha protects the Sanctuary. Accidents are frequently explained as the unfortunate outcome of upsetting him by taking meat or eggs beyond a small shrine you'll find opposite a pretty 'weeping waterfall'. In an hour you reach the village of Himalaya (2920m), so named because there was initially a single teahouse here, called Himalaya, and the village sprang up around it once the trek became popular.

### DAY 4: HIMALAYA– MACHHAPUCHHARE BASE CAMP (MBC) 3¼HRS

Continue to climb through dense forest to a large rock overhang, called Hinku Cave (3170m, less than 1hr), once the site of a teahouse. Deurali (3230m, 45 mins) can be seen ahead, beyond another avalanche-prone area. The valley broadens and a fine birch forest fills the far bank before you pass a small snow cave that has been slowly melting for years. Two obvious rock pillars mark the 'gateway' to the Sanctuary, which suddenly opens out to broad grassy slopes and a series of teahouses at MBC (3700m, 1½hrs).

The last expedition to climb this sacred mountain was in 1957; out of respect, it

### ☐ Teeji festival

The Teeji (comes from the words 'ten che', meaning the hope of Buddha Dharma) festival is a three-day ritual known as 'The Chasing of the Demons', which centres on a local myth that tells of a deity named Dorje Jono, who must battle against his demon father (Dorje Sonnu) to save the Kingdom of Mustang from destruction. The demon father wreaked havoc on the Kingdom by creating a shortage of water (a precious resource in this very dry land), which caused all sorts of disasters including famine and animal loss. Dorje Jono eventually beats the demon and banishes him from the land, and the community is saved from a plague of misfortunes. Of course, the local population celebrates their salvation, as water will be plentiful again, and the balance and harmony of day-to-day life is restored.

Over three days in April/May, the lamas from Chhoede Gompa enact battles and folklore scenes through intricate mask-dances, which culminate in a fireworks and musket-firing *melée* outside the main gate of the city. On each of the three evenings there is a cultural programme in the centre of the city, where young and old come to enjoy dance and singing performances. Teeji is a lively, vivid and amusing celebration and reaffirmation of a myth said to have been brought to Mustang by Padmasambhava in the 8th century. Apart from the symbolic ritual of cleansing the Kingdom, Teeji coincides with the end of the dry winter/spring season and ushers in the wetter monsoon season (the growing season in Mustang). So for everyone in Mustang, it is a 'must-see' event, where locals dress up in their finery and have a good time.

## DAY 4: GELING–GHEMI–TSARANG

6½–7¼HRS

There are two trail options from Geling; the fastest route climbs a steep hillside above the two gompas before heading due north along a shallow valley to a pass (4025m, 2hrs) with excellent views back towards the Annapurnas. Then descend to the main road route and on to Ghemi (3520m, 1¼hrs). The second, slower road route takes an easier gradient climb up the main Geling valley to the Nyi La (4010m, 2½hrs), which also offers some great views. A long but easy descent brings you to Ghemi (3520m, 1hr), where there are a couple of teahouses.

Again, there are two options from Ghemi. The road route over the Tsarang La (3870m, 2hrs) is the fastest but dustiest way to reach Tsarang (Charang, 3560m, 1½hrs) where there are many teahouses. A longer trekking-only route first follows the trail to Drakmar (note there are two trails, both of a similar duration) that reach a junction before the main village (3740m, 1¼hrs). If you have time, it is worth walking through Drakmar, as there are two paths that climb up through the dramatic multi-coloured

cliffs (both before and after the village). Both trails converge on the broad, flat plateau above the cliffs (4000m, 1hr) from where you follow a very easy descending trail down the shallow valley to Tsarang (Charang, 3560m, 1½hrs)

Tsarang is the old capital of Mustang and is dominated by a huge crumbling fort that used to be the royal residence. The extensive gompa and library here has similar but larger frescos and statues to those in Geling's gompa.

## DAY 5: TSARANG–LO MANTHANG

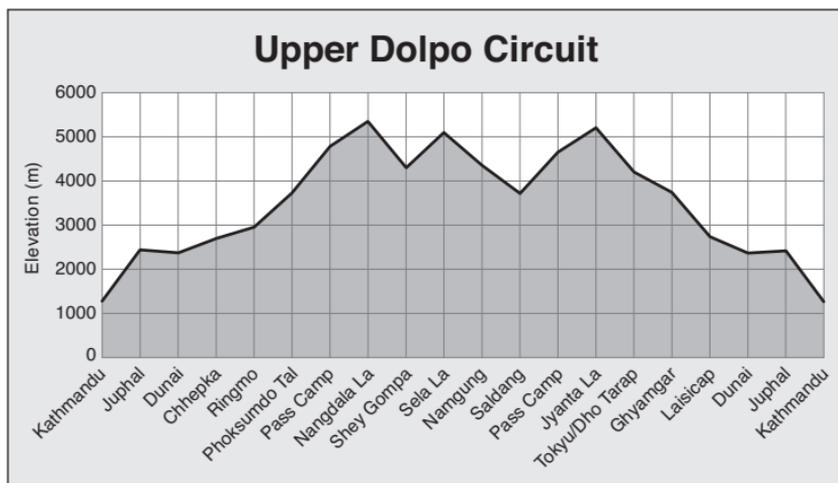
4½HRS

The trail from Tsarang drops into the Tsarang Khola ravine to the north of the town; you will need to duck under a metal water pipe as you descend. Cross the bridge and climb the far bank, and ascend to the mouth of the Thulung Khola and the dirt road, which you follow for 2½hrs, past a large stupa, to a broad plateau where there is a lone teashop. In the cliff-face above the teashop you can see more cave dwellings. Continue to follow the road to Lo La (3950m, 1¼hrs), where there are fine views

## UPPER DOLPO CIRCUIT

There are many trails to and from Upper Dolpo, including the traditional salt-trade route through Dhorpatan to the south of Dunai and Tarakot, from Pokhara and/or Tansen. A less-used route is via Chharka Bhot in eastern Dolpo (see map p248) from Kagbeni in the Annapurna region.

For the really adventurous there are two wild linking trails to Mugu from Pho, in north-west Dolpo, that climb through the Mugu Karnali Nadi valley system to Jumla. Within the region there are several loops that link Upper and Lower Dolpo, but any itinerary should include the stunningly beautiful Phoksumdo Tal (Phoksumdo Lake).



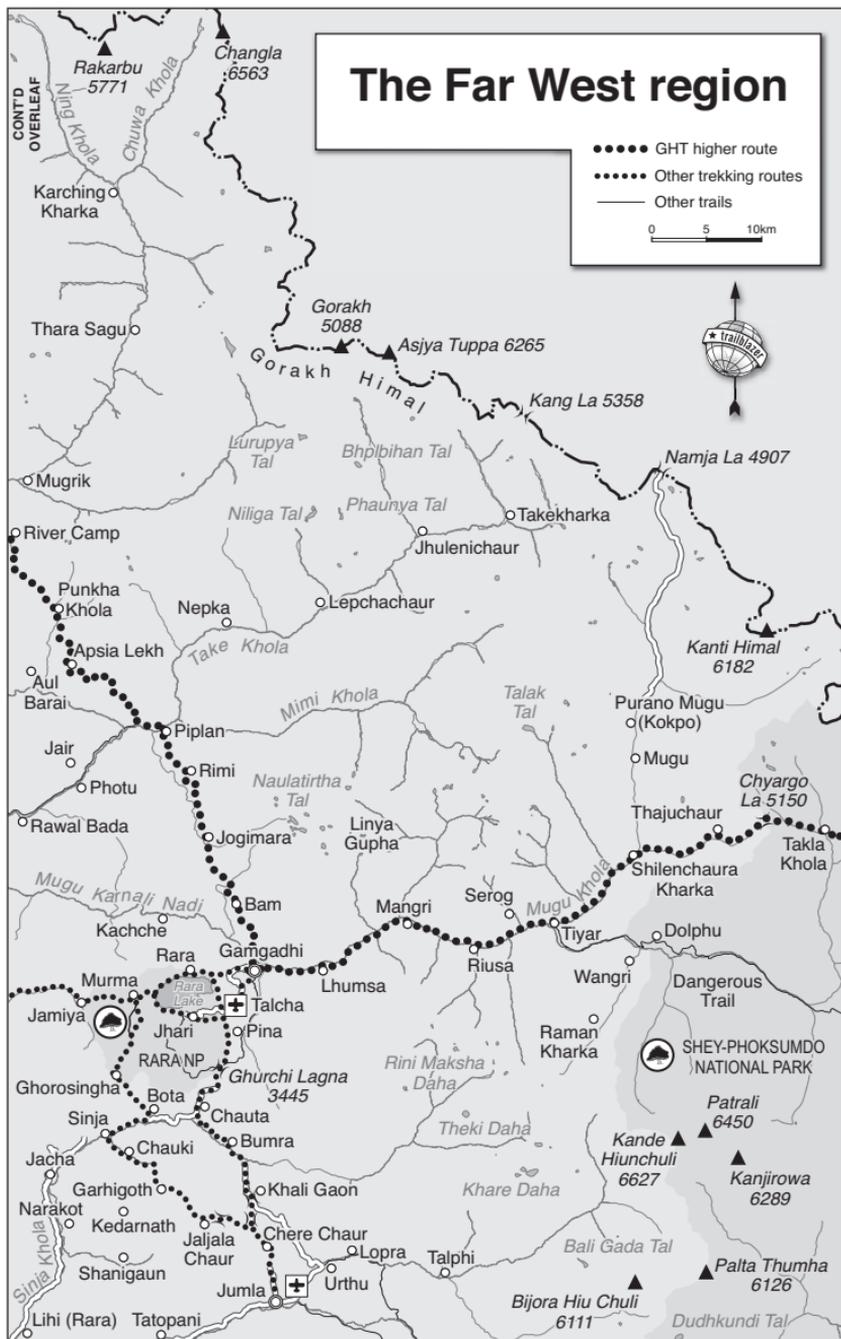
## UPPER DOLPO CIRCUIT

Mysterious and spectacular, Dolpo is one of the last genuine examples of traditional Tibetan culture. Add the stunning beauty of Phoksumdo Tal and amazing ecological diversity, and this trek reveals the very best of the Himalaya.



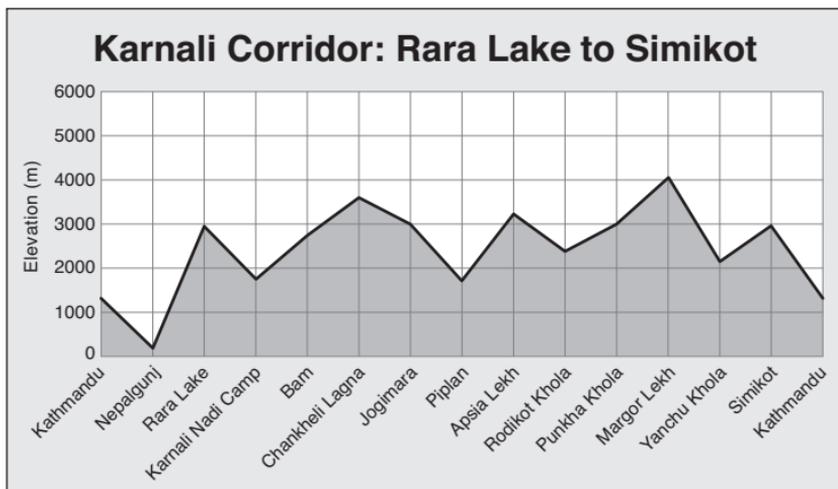
GRADE 4

- **Duration & distance:** About 20 days total; distance per day is not important
- **Gradient:** Very steep with some arduous climbs
- **Quality of path:** Formed and rough track with some obstacles
- **Quality of markings:** Limited signage with occasional markers
- **Experience required:** Experienced walkers require navigation skills
- **Walking times:** Less than 7 hours per day
- **Steps:** Occasional steps on some days
- **Highest point:** 5220m
- **Best season:** Apr-Oct
- **Accommodation:** Camping
- **Recommended map:** NP109 GHT Series Dolpo & Mugu, Himalayan Map House, 2017



This trek can be walked in either direction, although your choice of campsite will vary. If you start in Simikot there are lots of supplies in the bazaar but they are expensive. Alternatively, beginning in Rara means doing some shopping in the nearby town of Gamgadhi where there is a range of supplies. Your group should therefore be self-sufficient, which probably means bringing supplies from Nepalgunj to either Simikot (daily flights) or Talcha (near Gamgadhi, daily flights).

It is possible to connect this route with other treks in the region. Add 4 days to start from Jumla, see *Rara Lake Circuit*, p284-5, or you can connect with the *Limi Valley Trek via Hilsa (Yulsa)*, see pp296-302, and you could connect with *Darchula to Rara Lake*, see pp302-10.



## KARNALI CORRIDOR TREK: RARA LAKE TO SIMIKOT

A wonderful insight to the beauty and cultures of Far West Nepal. From Rara Lake you pass through forests, over passes, enjoy great mountain views and end at Simikot, a gateway to Tibet.



**GRADE 4**

- **Duration & distance:** About 12 days total; days not more than 20km per day
- **Gradient:** Very steep sections with some arduous days
- **Quality of path:** Formed and rough track with some obstacles
- **Quality of markings:** Limited signage
- **Experience required:** Experienced walkers; requires navigation skills
- **Walking times:** Less than 6¾ hours per day
- **Steps:** Occasional steps on some days
- **Highest point:** 4037m
- **Best season:** Apr-May/Oct-Dec
- **Accommodation:** Camping
- **Recommended map:** NP110 GHT Series Far-West, Himalayan Map House, 2017

## LIMI VALLEY TREK VIA HILSA (YULSA)

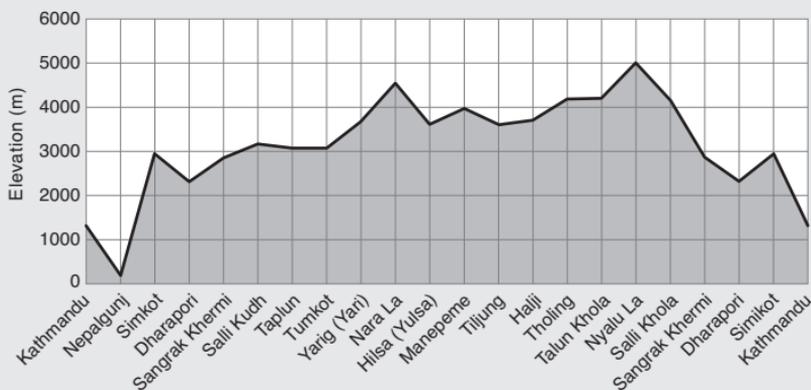
Fascinating local history and cultures, dramatic trans-Himalayan scenery, and an ancient monastery at Halji all combine to make this a great Himalayan trek.



GRADE 3

- **Duration & distance:** About 17 days total; days not more than 20km per day
- **Gradient:** Short steep sections
- **Quality of path:** Formed and rough track with some obstacles
- **Quality of markings:** Signposted at beginning, end and major intersections
- **Experience required:** Some walking experience required
- **Walking times:** Less than 6 hours per day
- **Steps:** Occasional steps on some days
- **Highest point:** 5001m
- **Best season:** Apr-May/Sep-Nov
- **Accommodation:** Camping
- **Recommended map:** NP110 GHT Series Far-West, Himalayan Map House, 2017

## Limi Valley Trek via Hilsa (Yulsa)


**DAY 1: KATHMANDU–NEPALGUNJ  
ALL DAY**

As the flight from Nepalgunj (150m) to Simikot (2985m) leaves before any flights from Kathmandu arrive, you will have to overnight in Nepalgunj. There are some hotels in town and a few, more basic places to stay near the airport. Whichever option you choose it is advisable to book in advance, as they are frequently busy.

There isn't much to see or do in Nepalgunj so most airlines recommend that you book a mid-afternoon flight.

**DAY 2: NEPALGUNJ–SIMIKOT  
ALL DAY**

The flight to Simikot (2985m) offers some great views of the Kanjiroba and Saipal Himals as you follow the Karnali valley north. The airstrip in Simikot has a new surface so the landing is not as bumpy as it used to be. Many groups decide to spend a night in Simikot both to aid acclimatisation and to organise supplies and/or crew. There are many teahouses in and around the town and an extensive bazaar area that attracts locals from all over the region.

hillside and has many small ups and downs. There is a short final climb of about 100m to Sipti (1842m, 1¼hrs) where there is a basic hotel with accommodation; ask the hotel owner if he can make his excellent smoked fish curry!

### DAY 5: SIPTI–SERI 3¾HRS

To make the day more interesting it's a good idea to wake early and climb to the viewpoint above Sipti, where you can see a building on top of a hill to the east of the village.

Walk through the village to the police post and shortly after take a left-hand fork that climbs past some houses and then through forest. After 40 minutes the trail forks again; take the left trail, which heads north towards a saddle.

In 15 minutes reach the saddle and then follow small tracks up the ridge to your right. Sometimes you have to push

through scrubby bushes but it only takes 20 minutes or so to reach the telephone repeater tower on top of the hill (2232m, 1¼hrs from Sipti). From here, there are good views of Api and Nampa Himals, although not a full panorama.

Leave the summit on an obvious track that leads down the southern ridge to another saddle and the main trail to Seri. It's a long descent and there are many shortcuts, some of which are very steep, so choose your trail carefully! On your descent take a little time to identify a suspension bridge below, and perhaps stop for a cup of tea at the hamlet of Ninta (1730m, 45 mins).

Once at the bottom of the climb turn downstream (right, on the true right bank) to a hamlet where you then have to wind between paddies to the suspension bridge. Cross the bridge and turn upstream (on the true left bank) and walk along the newly built road to Seri (939m, 1¾hrs from Ninta)

#### ❑ Optional side trip from Seri

The following is a 2- to 3-day side trip from Seri to Khandeshwari and back; note that from Lama Bagar to Khandeshwari is a long and tiring day.

Alternatively, from Khandeshwari, you could attempt a high route that heads north-west back to the Mahakali river, or head east over a high route towards Chainpur. Both of the high routes are open from May to October only.

#### To Markarkot Temple, before Khandeshwari Bazaar 1 to 2 days

Remain on the road to Lattenatia (1054m, 1¼hrs), and then register at the police checkpost at Lama Bagar in another 20 minutes. About 5 minutes beyond the checkpost is a stone-walled campsite (1066m) on your right.

Continue following the new road to Dharamgaon (1hr) where it ends at the base of a rock-face. As the valley narrows there are plenty of ups and downs, some up to 200m, which can be tiring. There is very little drinking water beside the trail, so the *dhaba* at Chauki Bagar (1210m, 1¾hrs) is a welcome sight. The trail is easier from here but still up and down to Makari Gad (1479m, 1½hrs). From the collection of *dhabas* you look straight up a steep rock- and grass-covered face to a ridge where two pine trees stand against the skyline, 1000m above – they mark Makarkot Temple! The switchbacks are mostly on an easy gradient but there are steeper turns closer to the top.

Once you crest the ridge there is a small teashop and a little higher above the teashop is a small campsite (2222m, 2hrs). Further up this ridge are excellent views of Api and Nampa Himals and in the shallow basin below is the large trading village of Khandeshwari. If you have the time, continue to Khandeshwari, where there is a basic teahouse and campsite. There are fine views of Api from above the village and there is plenty of local life to see!

Retrace your steps the following day; because much of it is downhill it is an easier 6½ hours to Lama Bagar.

## APPENDIX E: HEAT INDEX CHART

Temperature versus Relative Humidity

	90%	80%	70%	60%	50%	40%	30%	20%	10%
18°C	19	18	18	17	17	16	16	15	15
21°C	22	22	21	20	20	19	19	18	18
24°C	27	25	24	24	23	23	22	22	21
27°C	31	30	29	28	28	27	26	25	25
29°C	39	36	34	32	31	30	29	28	26
32°C	49	44	41	38	36	34	32	30	29
35°C	61	55	50	45	42	38	36	33	32
38°C	76	68	61	54	49	44	40	37	35
41°C	93	83	73	65	57	51	45	41	38
43°C	113	100	87	76	67	58	51	45	41
46°C	135	119	103	90	77	67	58	50	44
49°C	160	140	121	104	89	76	65	55	48

Source: [www.ch.noaa.gov/pub/heat.htm](http://www.ch.noaa.gov/pub/heat.htm)

Note: Exposure to direct sunlight can increase the HI by up to 9°C

27°C – 32°C Fatigue possible with prolonged exposure and physical activity

32°C – 41°C Sunstroke, heat cramps and heat exhaustion possible

41°C – 54°C Sunstroke, heat cramps and heat exhaustion likely; heat stroke likely

54°C or more Heat stroke highly likely with continued exposure

## APPENDIX F: SAMPLE GHT HIGHER ROUTE ITINERARY

DAY	HOURS	PLACE	HEIGHT (METRES)	SECTION
<b>Eastern Himalaya</b>				
1		Kathmandu (KTM)	1300	<b>Kanchenjunga</b>
2	flight	KTM–Biratnagar (BIR)	2420	
3	flight	BIR–Suketar/Taplejung	2420	
4	4	Phurumbu	1542	
5	6	Chiruwa	1270	
6	5.5	Sukathum	1576	
7	6	Amjilosa	2308	
8	5	Gyabla	2730	
9	4.5	Ghunsa	3595	
10	REST	Ghunsa	3595	
11	5.5	Khangpachen	4050	
12	REST	Khangpachen	4050	
13	5	Lhonak	4780	

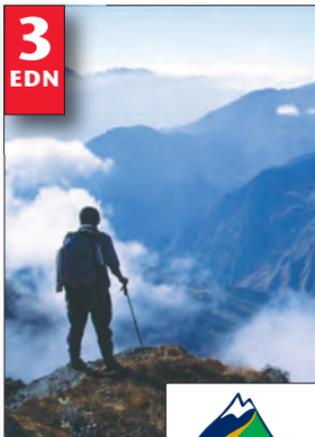








**3**  
EDN



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