

Trekking

The heartland of Nepal is far from any roads, and the only way to get there is by walking through endless ranges of hills. It's a rewarding experience to join local people and walk to remote villages and the foot of the Himalayan peaks.

Trekking in Nepal means a walking trip following trails, many of which have been used for centuries. It is not mountaineering, although some of the popular trekking trails are used by mountaineering expeditions on their approach marches. Their length varies – there are popular treks that only take a day and others that last a week or a month.

Nepal offers some of the most spectacular and beautiful scenery in the world. It has a near monopoly on the world's highest peaks – eight of the 10 highest are found here. Mountain flights may give you superb views, but there is absolutely nothing like waking up on a crystal-clear Himalayan day and seeing an 8000m peak towering over you.

Trekking in Nepal is not like hiking through an uninhabited national park. Local people are constantly passing by on the trails, usually carrying extraordinarily heavy loads of unexpected items. Along many routes there are regularly spaced villages in which to pause and find shelter. In the villages you can meet people from diverse ethnic groups. The warm, outgoing nature, general friendliness and good humour of Nepalis is often noted by trekkers. Religious festivals can make trekking even more enjoyable and interesting.

This chapter outlines the basic requirements for safe trekking on the mountain trails and gives an overview of the major trekking routes where you can stay in local lodges each night. For treks to more remote regions, you will require more detailed advice, maps and route descriptions; check out Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya*. This chapter covers multiday hikes: for our top 10 day hikes, see p77.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Make the approach to **Everest Base Camp** (p334), following in the footsteps of famous mountaineers
- Awake to the uncanny stillness of the **Annapurna Sanctuary** (p352) as dawn reveals the awesome sight of the surrounding peaks soaring overhead
- Visit remote mountain villages, meet the local people and experience Tibetan Buddhist culture in **Namche Bazaar** (p337)
- Witness the raw beauty of the glaciers; hear the crash of avalanches and the roar of raging rivers around **Manang Village** (p351), with a new and more spectacular view day after day



BEFORE YOU GO

PLANNING

Nepal offers plenty of opportunity for treks lasting a day or less, though most are considerably longer. From Pokhara (p268) or around the Kathmandu Valley (p162) you can do a variety of two-, three- or four-day walks, but Nepal's most popular treks take at least a week. For the very popular Everest Base Camp and Annapurna Circuit treks you have to allow three weeks each. Don't take on one of these treks too lightly; the end of the first week is not the time to discover that you're not keen on walking.

When to Trek

The best time to trek is the dry season from October to May; the worst time is the monsoon period from June to September. This generalisation does not allow for the peculiarities of individual treks. Some people even claim that the undeniable difficulties of trekking during the monsoon are outweighed by the virtual absence of Western trekkers.

The first two months of the dry season, October and November, offer the best weather for trekking. The air, freshly washed by the monsoon rains, is crystal clear, the mountain scenery is superb and the weather is still comfortably warm.

December, January and February are still good months for trekking, but the cold can be bitter and dangerous at high altitudes. Getting up to the Everest Base Camp can be a real endurance test and Thorung La on the Annapurna Circuit is often blocked by snow.

In March and April the weather has been dry for a long time and dust is starting to hang in the air, affecting visibility. The poorer quality of the Himalayan views is compensated for by the superb wildflowers, such as the wonderful rhododendrons.

By May it starts to get very hot, dusty and humid, and the monsoon is definitely just around the corner. From June to September the trails can be dangerously slippery due to the monsoon rains, and raging rivers often wash away bridges and stretches of trail. Nepal's famous *jukha* (leeches) are an unpleasant feature of the wet season but, with care, trekking can still be possible and there are certainly fewer trekkers on the trail.

What Kind of Trek?

There are many different styles of trekking to suit your budget, fitness level and available time. You can carry your own pack and tent and rely totally on your own navigation, language skills and prior research. Others find it makes sense to hire a local porter to carry your heavy luggage so that you can walk with only a small pack. A guide will also enhance the trekking experience. Most independent trekkers plan to sleep and eat in lodges every night and forego the complications of camping. To save time, many people organise a trek through a trekking agency, either in Kathmandu or in their home country. Such organised treks can be simple lodge-to-lodge affairs or magnificent expeditions with the full regalia of porters, guides, portable kitchens, dining tents and even toilet tents.

Trekking is physically demanding. Some preparation is recommended, even for shorter treks. You will need endurance and

MOUNTAINEERING IN NEPAL *Bradley Mayhew*

Mountaineering became a fashionable pursuit in Europe during the second half of the 19th century. Having knocked off the great Alpine peaks, Europeans found the much greater heights of the Himalaya an obvious new challenge. An Englishman named WW Graham made a mountaineering visit to Nepal in 1883 and reached the top of a 6000m peak. He was followed by another Englishman, Tom Longstaff, who climbed Trisuli (7215m) in 1907. For the next 20 years this remained the highest summit reached in the world. An Italian attempt on K2, in Pakistan, two years later became the first of the huge Himalayan expeditions involving hundreds of porters.

The West's newfound affluence after its recovery from WWII, together with more modern equipment, vastly improved oxygen apparatus, new mountaineering skills and the reopening of Nepal, led to a golden age of Himalayan mountaineering. The prewar failures were abruptly reversed in the 1950s, beginning with Maurice Herzog's valiant French expedition on Annapurna in 1950. His team's horrific storm-plagued struggle turned an already extremely difficult climb into an epic of human endurance, but for the first time mountaineers had reached the top of an 8000m peak. After descending the mountain they had a month-long struggle through the monsoon with the expedition doctor having to perform amputations of frostbitten fingers and toes.

The success of the 1953 British expedition to Everest began a trend towards larger and larger expeditions. The few climbers who did reach the summit from these expeditions required a huge pyramid of supporters below them. The effect on the environment was devastating, as forests fell to provide firewood for the expeditions and vast amounts of mountaineering equipment and garbage were left behind. The Everest Base Camp has been aptly titled the 'world's highest garbage dump'.

stamina to tackle the steep ascents and descents that are so much a part of trekking in the highest mountain range in the world.

On the trail you will begin to realise just how far you are from medical help and the simple comforts that you usually take for granted. For most people, this is part of the appeal of trekking, but for some it is a shock to realise just how responsible they are for their own wellbeing. A simple stumble can have catastrophic results. Even a twisted ankle or sore knee can become a serious inconvenience if you are several days away from help and your companions need to keep moving.

Independent Trekking

Independent trekking does not mean solo trekking. It simply means that you are not part of an organised tour. The trekking trails described here have accommodation along their entire length so there's no need to pack a tent, stove or mat.

For experienced hikers, guides and porters are not necessary on the Annapurna or the Everest treks. A good guide or porter will enhance your experience, but a bad one will just make life more complicated (see right).

There are many factors that influence how much you spend on an independent

trek. In most places, dorm accommodation costs around Rs 50 to 100, a simple meal of rice and daal around Rs 50 to 75. As you get further from the road on the Annapurna Circuit and in the Everest region, prices can be more than twice as high. After a long day hiking, most people will weaken when confronted by a cold beer, an apple pie or a hot shower, and these will dramatically add to your costs. Budget for US\$10 to US\$20 per day in the Annapurna and Everest regions, which will also cover the occasional luxury.

In almost all lodges prices are fixed and are more than reasonable. Remember this – and the real value of the rupee – before you start to get carried away with bargaining.

Guides & Porters

If you can't (or don't want to) carry a large pack, if you have children or elderly people in your party, or if you plan to walk in regions where you have to carry in food and tents, you should consider hiring a porter to carry your heavy baggage.

If you make arrangements with one of the small trekking agencies in Kathmandu, expect to pay Rs 200 to 300 per day for a guide, and Rs 300 to 750 for a porter. The reason a guide is cheaper is that you will be

TREKING SAFELY IN MAOIST COUNTRY

At the time of writing, the Maoist uprising in rural Nepal had significantly affected most trekking routes, though the Maoists have made it clear that they are not targeting foreign tourists. While no tourists have been harmed by Maoist groups, trekkers have been asked for 'donations', ranging from Rs 1000 to US\$100, when passing through areas under Maoist control. There have been several ugly confrontations when trekkers initially refused to pay up. Check the current situation before heading out on the trail, as with all treks, and cooperate fully with demands of both government officials and Maoists when required.

Even in the relatively unaffected regions of Annapurna and Everest, telephone booths and ACAP posts have been destroyed and some police checkpoints are no longer manned.

Before undertaking any trek you should register with your embassy and follow its travel advice. For up-to-date information visit www.trekinfo.com, which has links to various travel advice and news sites. See also the boxed text, p19.

buying the guide's food – so remember to factor that in.

FINDING GUIDES & PORTERS

To hire a guide, look on bulletin boards, hire someone through a guesthouse or agency, visit a trekking company or check with the office of the Kathmandu Environmental Education Project (KEEP; see p331). **Chhetri Sisters Guesthouse** (☎ 061-524066; trek@3sistersadventure.com) at Lakeside North, Pokhara, organises women porters and guides for women trekkers (see p259).

It's fairly easy to find guides and porters, but it is hard to be certain of their honesty and ability. Unless you have first-hand recommendations, you're best to hire someone through a guesthouse or agency. A porter or guide found at a street corner can easily disappear along the trail with all your gear even if they are carrying a slew of letters from past clients certifying their honesty.

There is a distinct difference between a guide and a porter. A guide should speak English, know the terrain and the trails, and supervise porters, but probably won't carry a load or do menial tasks such as cooking or putting up tents. Porters are generally only hired for load-carrying, although an increasing number speak some English and know the trails well enough to act as guides.

If during a trek you decide you need help, either because of illness, problems with altitude, blisters or weariness, it will generally be possible to find a porter. Most lodges can arrange a porter, particularly in large villages or near a hill-country airstrip where there are often porters who have just finished working for a trekking party and are looking for another load to carry.

OBLIGATIONS TO GUIDES & PORTERS

An important thing to consider when you decide to trek with a guide or porter is that you are placing yourself in the role of an employer. This means that you may have to deal with personnel problems, including medical care, insurance, strikes, requests for time off and salary increases, and all the other aspects of being a boss. Be as thorough as you can when hiring people and make it clear from the beginning what the requirements and limitations are. After that, prepare yourself for some haggling – it's part of the process.

When hiring a porter you are responsible (morally if not legally) for the welfare of those you employ. Many porters die or are injured each year (see the boxed text, opposite) and it's important that you don't contribute to the problem.

These are the main points to bear in mind when hiring a porter.

- Ensure that adequate clothing is provided for any staff you hire. This needs to be suitable for the altitudes you intend to trek to, and should protect against bad weather. Equipment should include adequate footwear, headwear, gloves, wind-proof jacket and trousers, sunglasses, and blanket, sleeping mat and tent if you are trekking to remote areas or high altitude.
- Ensure that whatever provision you have made for yourself for emergency medical treatment is available to porters working for you.
- Ensure that porters who fall ill are not simply paid out and left to fend for themselves (it happens!).
- Ensure that porters who do fall ill, and are taken down and out in order to access medical treatment, are accompanied by someone who speaks the porter's language and also understands the medical problem.

Whether you're making the arrangements yourself or dealing with an agency, make sure you clearly establish where you will go, how long you will take, how much you are going to pay and what you will supply along the way. With a guide, agree on a fixed daily rate for food rather than pay as you go. Arrangements where you pay for the guide or porter's accommodation and food can end up being surprisingly expensive. The amount of food a hungry Nepali guide can go through, when you're footing the bill, can be stunning. You need to increase the allowance at higher elevations where food is more expensive.

When you do provide equipment for porters, be sure to make it clear whether it is a loan or a gift. In reality it can be very hard to get back equipment that you have loaned unless you are very determined and thick-skinned. If you're hiring your own porters, contact KEEP (see p331) for information about the porter clothing bank, a scheme that allows you to rent protective gear for your porter.

TREKking WITH A PORTER

Porters are the backbone of the trekking industry in Nepal, and yet every year there are incidents (all of them preventable) involving porters suffering from acute mountain sickness (AMS), snow blindness and frostbite. Some of these illnesses have resulted in fatalities. It seems porters are well down the pecking order with some trekking companies that simply don't look after the porters they hire. This certainly does not apply to all companies, but there are plenty, especially at the budget end of the scale, who are more worried about their own profit than the welfare of those they rely on to generate that profit.

Porters often come from the lowland valleys, are poor and poorly educated, and are often ignorant of the potential dangers of the areas they are being employed to work in. Stories abound of porters being left to fend for themselves, wearing thin cotton clothes and sandals when traversing high mountain passes in blizzard conditions. At the end of each winter a number of porters' bodies are discovered in the snowmelt – they become tired, ill or affected by altitude, and simply sit down in the snow, get hypothermia and die. If you are hiring a porter independently, you have certain obligations to meet. If you are trekking with an organised group using porters, be sure to ask the company how they ensure the wellbeing of porters hired by them.

In order to prevent the abuse of porters, the **International Porter Protection Group** (IPPG; www.ippg.net) was established in 1997. The aim of both the IPPG and its sister organisation **Porters Progress** (www.portersprogress.org) is to improve health and safety for porters at work, to reduce the incidence of avoidable illness, injury and death, and to educate trekkers and trekking and travel companies about porter welfare. Both organisations operate a clothing bank for porters, with branches in Lukla and Thamel. IPPG has an office in the **International Mountain Explorers Connection** (IMEC; Map p136; ☎ 2081407; www.mountainexplorers.org) in Thamel. Porters Progress has an office further north in Thamel (Map p136).

Organised Trekking

Organised treks can vary greatly in standards and costs. Treks arranged with international travel companies tend to be more expensive than trips arranged within Nepal.

INTERNATIONAL TREKking AGENCIES

After reading the glossy brochure of an adventure-travel company, you pay for the trek and everything is organised before you leave home. The cost will probably include flights to and from Nepal, accommodation in Kathmandu before and after the trek, tours and other activities as well as the trek itself. A fully organised trek provides virtually everything: tents, sleeping bags, food, porters as well as an experienced English-speaking *sirdar* (trail boss), Sherpa guides and usually a Western trek leader. All you need worry about is a daypack and camera.

Companies organising trekking trips in Nepal include some well-known names such as **Mountain Travel-Sobek** (www.mtsobek.com), **Wilderness Travel** (www.wildernesstravel.com) or **Above the Clouds** (www.aboveclouds.com) in the USA, **World Expeditions** (www.worldexpeditions.com.au) or **Peregrine Adventures** (www.peregrineadventures

.com) in Australia, and **Explore Worldwide** (www.exploreworldwide.com) in the UK. Although the trek leaders may be experienced Western walkers from the international company, the on-the-ground organisation in Nepal will most probably be carried out by a reputable local trekking company.

LOCAL TREKking AGENCIES

It's quite possible (and it can save a lot of money) to arrange a fully organised trip when you get to Nepal, but if you have a large group it's best to make the arrangements well in advance. Many trekking companies in Nepal can put together a fully equipped trek if you give them a few days notice. With the best of these companies a trek may cost upwards of US\$60 or US\$70 per person per day and you'll trek in real comfort with tables, chairs, and dining tents, toilet tents and other luxuries.

There are more than 300 trekking agencies in Nepal, ranging from those connected to international travel companies, down to small agencies that specialise in handling independent trekkers. These small agencies will often be able to fix you up with individual porters or guides. A group

trek organised through one of these agencies might cost US\$30 to US\$50 per person per day. Group treks staying at village inns along the route can be cheaper still (around US\$25 a day including a guide and food).

Some trekking agencies that have been recommended include:

Adventure Nepal Trekking (☎ 01-4412508; fax 4222026; Tridevi Marg, Thamel, PO Box 915, Kathmandu)

Ama Dablam Trekking (☎ 01-4415372/3; fax 4416029; himalaya.sales@amadablam.wlink.com.np; Lazimpat, PO Box 3035, Kathmandu)

Annapurna Mountaineering & Trekking (☎ 01-4222999; fax 4226153; amtkt@csl.com.np; Durbar Marg, PO Box 795, Kathmandu)

Asian Trekking (☎ 01-4424249; fax 4411878; Tridevi Marg, Thamel, PO Box 3022, Kathmandu)

Bhrikuti Himalayan Treks (☎ 01-417459; fax 4413612; asianbht@csl.com.np; Nag Pokhari, Naxal, PO Box 2267, Kathmandu)

Chhetri Sisters (☎ 061-524066; trek@3sistersadventure.com; Lakeside North, Pokhara)

Crystal Mountain Treks (☎ 01-4416813; fax 4412647; dinesh@crystal.wlink.com.np; Nag Pokhari, Naxal, Kathmandu)

Himalayan Hill Treks & River Tours (☎ 01-4520609; info@hilltreks.com; Patan)

Inner Nepal Treks (☎ 01-4226130; fax 4224237; explore@mos.com.np; Kamaladi, Kathmandu)

Journeys Mountaineering & Trekking (☎ 01-4415092; fax 4419808; journeys@mos.com.np; Baluwatar, Kathmandu)

Lama Excursions (☎ 01-4220186; fax 4227202; trek@lamex.wlink.com.np; Chanddol, Maharajganj, Kathmandu)

Malla Treks (☎ 01-4410089; fax 4423143; info@mallatreks.com; Lekhnath Marg, Kathmandu)

Mountain Travel Nepal (☎ 01-4414508; info@tigermountain.com; Lazimpat, Kathmandu)

Sherpa Society (☎ 01-4470361; fax 4470153; passang@mos.com.np; Chabahil, Chuchepati, Kathmandu)

Sherpa Trekking Service (☎ 01-4220243; fax 4227243; sts@wlink.com.np; Kamaladi, Kathmandu)

Sisne Rover Trekking (☎ 061-520893; fax 523262; sisne@mos.com.np; Lakeside, Pokhara)

Thamserku Trekking (☎ 01-4354491; fax 4354329; info@trekkinginnepal.com; Basundhara, Ring Rd, Kathmandu)

Treks & Expedition Services (☎ 01-4418347; fax 4410488; Kamal Pokhari, Kathmandu)

Venture Treks & Expeditions (☎ 01-4221585; fax 4220178; temtig@mos.com.np; Kantipath, Kathmandu)

Yeti Mountaineering & Trekking (☎ 01-4425896; fax 4410899; ymtrek@csl.com.np.wlink.com.np; Ramshah Path, Kathmandu)

Books & Maps

The best series of maps of Nepal is the 1:50,000 series produced by Erwin Schneider for Research Scheme Nepal Himalaya and originally printed in Vienna. Most sheets are now published by Nelles Verlag in Munich. They cover the Kathmandu Valley and the Everest region from Jiri to the Hongu Valley. The 1:100,000 Schneider maps of Annapurna and Langtang are available from many map shops overseas and at bookshops in Kathmandu.

National Geographic produces trekking maps to the Khumbu, Everest Base Camp, Annapurna and Langtang areas, as part of its Trails Illustrated series (Rs 950 to 1050). They are generally good for the most popular treks.

The Finnish government has assisted Nepal's survey department with the production of a series of 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 maps covering most of Nepal, but they don't show all the trekking trails. They are available in some bookshops and from the Maps of Nepal outlet in Baluwatar, Kathmandu, on the road towards Bhaktapur, for Rs 80 per sheet.

There are numerous 'trekking' maps produced locally by Himalayan Map House, Nepa Maps and Shangri-La Maps. They cost from Rs 400 and are readily found in map and bookshops in Thamel. These maps are adequate for trekking the popular trails and are relatively inexpensive. Be aware that there is a great deal of repackaging going on. Don't buy two maps with different covers and names assuming you are getting significantly different maps. Check them first.

All of these maps are available at bookshops in Kathmandu, and some speciality map shops overseas stock a selection. Most are available online from **Stanfords** (www.stanfords.co.uk), **Omni Resources** (www.omnimap.com) or **Melbourne Map Centre** (www.melbmap.com.au).

What to Bring EQUIPMENT

It's always best to have your own equipment since you will be familiar with it and know for certain that it works. If there is some equipment that you do not have, you can always buy or rent it from one of Nepal's many trekking shops. Much of the equipment available is of adequate quality (but

check items carefully) and the rental charges are generally not excessive, but large deposits are often required (usually equal to a generous valuation of the equipment itself). Never leave your passport as a deposit.

Hire rates in Kathmandu vary depending on quality. You can hire a sleeping bag (two for four season) for Rs 25 to 55, a down jacket for Rs 20 to 40 and a tent for Rs 120 to 150.

Thamel is the centre for equipment shopping in Nepal, though Pokhara and Namche Bazaar also have trekking-equipment outlets. It is no longer easy to pick up the leftover gear from trekking expeditions, but there is a great deal of new equipment you can purchase including last-minute sundries such as iodine, sun block and LED head lamps.

Some trekking gear, including sleeping bags, down jackets, duffel bags, backpacks, camera cases, ponchos and wind jackets, is manufactured in Kathmandu and sold in Thamel at very reasonable prices. Much of this locally produced gear is decorated with well-known brand names, but don't be deceived into thinking you're getting top-quality merchandise at a bargain price. Even so, most items are well made and will stand up to the rigours of at least one major trek.

Kathmandu does have a *pukka* (real) North Face showroom on Tridevi Marg but the selection is small and prices are similar to those in the US.

Approximate retail prices for new Nepali-made gear complete with fake brand names are as follows:

Item	Cost (Rs)
sleeping bag (2-4 season)	4000-6000
down jacket	3000
rain/wind jacket	450-1500
pile jacket	300-1000
day-pack	350-1300
expedition pack	1500-3000
duffel bag	300-450
quality socks	160-850

CLOTHING & FOOTWEAR

The clothing you require depends on where and when you trek. If you're going to the Everest Base Camp in the middle of winter you must be prepared for very cold weather and take down gear, mittens and the like. If you're doing a short, low-altitude trek early or late in the season the weather is often

likely to be fine enough for T-shirts and a pile jacket to pull on in the evenings.

Apart from ensuring you have adequate clothing to keep warm, it's important that your feet are comfortable and will stay dry if it rains or snows. Uncomfortable shoes and blistered feet are the worst possible trekking discomforts. Make sure your shoes fit well and are comfortable for long periods. Running shoes are adequate for low-altitude (below 3000m), warm-weather treks where you won't encounter snow, though they lack ankle support. Otherwise the minimum standard of footwear is light-weight trekking boots. Trekking boots can be bought in Kathmandu for Rs 2000 to 3000, but these are generally seconds and are not recommended. The best idea is to bring your own worn-in boots.

OTHER GEAR

In winter or at high altitudes a top-quality four-season sleeping bag will be necessary. If you are going on an organised trek check what equipment is supplied by the company you sign up with. If you need to hire one, it could be grubby; check for fleas or worse.

Rain is rare during most of the trekking season, though weather patterns in the Bay of Bengal can cause massive rainstorms during autumn, and there are sure to be a few rainy days during spring. You should be prepared for rain by carrying waterproof gear, or at least a portable umbrella. The rainy season just before and after the monsoon months also brings leeches with it, and it's good to have some salt or matches to deal with them. Take a torch (flashlight) for those inevitable calls of nature on moonless nights.

MONEY

Except in Solu Khumbu and on the Annapurna treks, changing foreign money is likely to be very difficult if not impossible. Bring enough money for the whole trek and don't count on being able to change Rs 1000 notes except in Namche Bazaar and Jomsom.

DOCUMENTS & FEES Trekking Permits

Permits are not required for trekking in the Everest, Annapurna and Langtang regions described in this book.

National Park & Conservation Fees

If you trek in the Annapurna, Manaslu, Kanchenjunga or Makalu regions, you will enter a conservation area and must pay a conservation fee; if your trek enters a national park, you must pay a national park fee.

You should buy an entrance ticket for all national parks and conservation areas in advance at the **national parks office** (☎ 8am-2pm Sun-Fri) just next to the **Annapurna Conservation Area Project office** (ACAP; Map p136) in the Sanchaya Kosh Bhawan Shopping Centre at the entrance to Thamel in Kathmandu. You can pay the national park fee when you arrive at the park entrance station, but *you must pay the conservation fee in advance*. Currently, the (once-only) fee is Rs 1000 (US\$15) for national parks, Rs 2000 (US\$30) for Annapurna and Rs 1000 for Makalu-Barun and Kanchenjunga conservation areas.

Conservation fees for the Annapurna area are also payable in Pokhara at the **ACAP office** (☎ 061-532275), Pardi Damside inside the Nepal Tourism Board's (NTB) Tourist Service Centre building. Bring Rs 2000 and one photograph. Fortunately the permit is issued on the spot and you should accomplish the task quickly unless there is a long queue. If you arrive at an ACAP checkpoint without a permit you will be charged Rs 4000!

RESPONSIBLE TREKking

Nepal faces several environmental problems as a result of, or at least compounded by, tourists' actions and expectations. These include the depletion of its forests for firewood; the build-up of nonbiodegradable waste, especially plastic bottles; and the pollution of its waterways. You can help by choosing an environmentally and socially responsible trekking company and heeding some of the following advice.

Trekking Gently in the Himalaya, a booklet by Wendy Brewer Lama, is an excellent resource which has essential tips for trekkers. It's available at the KEEP offices (opposite) in Thamel and Pokhara.

Firewood & Forest Depletion

Minimise the use of firewood by staying in lodges that use kerosene or fuel-efficient wood stoves and solar-heated hot water. Avoid using large open fires for warmth – wear additional clothing instead. Keep showers to a minimum, and spurn showers

altogether if wood is burnt to produce the hot water.

Consolidate cooking time (and wood consumption) by ordering the same items at the same time as other trekkers. Daal bhaat (rice and lentils) is usually readily available for large numbers of people, does not require special lengthy cooking time and is nutritious and inexpensive. Remember that local meals are usually prepared between 10am and 11am, so eating then will usually not require lighting an additional fire. Treat your drinking water with iodine rather than boiling it.

Those travelling with organised groups should ensure kerosene is used for cooking.

Garbage & Waste

You can do several things to reduce the amount of rubbish and pollution in the hills. Purifying your own water instead of buying mineral water in nonbiodegradable plastic bottles is the most important of these.

Independent trekkers should always carry their garbage out or dispose of it properly. You can burn it, but you should remember that the fireplace in a Nepali home is a sacred institution and throwing rubbish into it would be a great insult. Take out all your batteries, as they will eventually leak toxins.

Toilet paper is a particularly unpleasant sight along trails; if you must use it, carry it in a plastic bag until you can burn it. Better yet, carry a small plastic trowel to bury your faeces (well away from any streams) and a small plastic water container so that, like the vast majority of people in the world, you can clean yourself with water instead of toilet paper.

Those travelling with organised groups should ensure that toilet tents are properly organised and that rubbish is carried out. Check on the company's policies before you sign up.

Water

Do your bit to minimise pollution and don't soap up your clothes in the streams. Instead use a bowl or bucket and discard the dirty water away from water courses.

On the Annapurna Circuit, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (with New Zealand government assistance) has introduced the Safe Water Drinking Scheme – a chain of 16 outlets selling purified water to trekkers.

Its aim is to minimise the demand for plastic mineral-water bottles. An estimated one million plastic bottles are brought into the Annapurna Conservation Area each year, creating a serious litter problem. The outlets are found in Tal, Bargarchap, Chame, Pisang, Hongde, Manang, Letdar, Thorung Phedi, Muktinath, Kagbeni, Jomsom, Marpha, Tukuche, Khobang, Lete and Ghasa.

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

Several organisations are attempting to deal with the environmental problems created by trekking. One organisation, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), has done a great deal to encourage sustainable development in the Annapurna region. ACAP has offices in Thamel (Sanchaya Kosh Bhawan Building), Patan and Pokhara.

These organisations in Kathmandu offer free, up-to-date information on trekking conditions, health risks and minimising your environmental impact.

Kathmandu Environmental Education Project (KEEP; Map p136; ☎ 4412944; www.keeppnepal.org; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun-Fri), in Thamel, has a library, some useful notebooks with up-to-date information from other trekkers, an excellent notice board and embassy registration forms for most countries. It also sells iodine, biodegradable soap and other environmentally friendly equipment.

The **International Mountain Explorers Connection** (IMEC; Map p136; ☎ 2081407; info@mountainexplorers.org; www.hec.org; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun-Fri) also provides information on trekking. Members can store luggage here and use the mail and email service.

Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA; Map p136; ☎ 4445505, 4440292; ☎ noon-1pm, 2-5pm Sun-Fri; www.himalayanrescue.org; Thamel) has information about AMS and useful notebooks with up-to-date information from other trekkers, plus trail conditions, weather updates and embassy registration forms. It runs health posts at Pheriche, Machermo and Manang. Free lectures on altitude sickness are held at the Thamel office at 3pm Monday to Friday. Both KEEP and the HRA offices are excellent places to visit and advertise for trekking companions.

The slide shows held in the Kathmandu Guest House (p135) by Chris Beall, a British freelance photographer, writer and trek leader, are another good source of

up-to-date information in Kathmandu for independent trekking. The shows cost Rs 300 (including tea/coffee and biscuits) and you get plenty of time to ask questions at the end. You'll see posters up at the Kathmandu Guest House.

HEALTH

Acute mountain sickness (AMS) or altitude sickness is the major concern on all high-altitude treks, but for the majority of trekkers health problems are likely to be minor, such as stomach upsets and blisters. Commonsense precautions are all that's required to avoid illness.

Basic rules for healthy trekking include taking care that water is always safe to drink. The best method is to treat water with iodine, as this is safe and does not require the use of firewood or kerosene to boil water. Diarrhoea is one of the comparatively minor problems that can ruin a trek so watch what you eat and ensure your medical kit has a medication such as Lomotil or Imodium (for emergencies only) and an antibiotic like Norfloxacin. The food on an organised trek is unlikely to cause problems, but village-inn trekkers are at risk.

At high altitudes the burning power of the sun is strong, so make sure you have a pair of good sunglasses, a hat and a maximum protection sunscreen. If there is any likelihood that you'll be walking over snow, sunglasses are insufficient; you need mountaineering glasses with sidepieces. Ensure that your porters also have adequate eyewear.

Many people suffer from knee and ankle strains, particularly if they are carrying their own pack. If you have a predisposition to these injuries, carry elastic supports or bandages. Lightweight, collapsible trekking poles are invaluable in this regard, providing extra support and stability, especially on those knee-pounding descents. They can also come in handy when the village dogs get a bit too close. You should also carry plasters (Band-Aids) in case of blisters.

Make sure you are in good health before departing, as there is very little medical attention along the trails and rescue helicopters are not only very expensive but *must* be cleared for payment in advance. Your embassy can do this if you have registered with it. See p335 for more information on possible medical assistance along the way.

In general, Himalayan hospitals can offer only very limited facilities and expertise. The **Himalayan Rescue Dog Squad** (☎ 061-523267; www.hrdnsrescue.org.np; Riverside Hospital & Disaster Relief Unit, Shyauli Bazaar, Lamjung) operates the largest rescue organisation in Nepal.

Be ever-alert for the symptoms of AMS. See p388 for more detailed information on staying healthy while trekking.

TREKING SAFELY

Usually, the further you get from heavily populated centres the less likely it is that your personal safety will be threatened. Assaults in remote places are not unheard of, however. Indeed, some places have earned quite a reputation for violent assaults, almost without exception involving a solo trekker or small party of two or three. On the trails that run from Ghorapani to Tikhedhunga and Ghorapani to Ghandruk it is important to stay in a group and remain alert, particularly towards the end of a long tiring day. Several basic rules should be followed: don't trek alone, don't make ostentatious displays of valuable possessions and don't leave lodge doors unlocked or valuables unattended.

See also p359.

Choosing Companions

You should never trek alone. It's useful to have someone to watch your pack – when you have to run off the trail into the bushes, or even when you are in a lodge and go out to the toilet. It's also important to have someone around in case of injury or illness. Women should choose trekking companions carefully and treat with caution any offer of a massage in a remote hotel.

If you do not already have a travelling companion, then you should find either a guide or another trekker in Kathmandu or Pokhara to trek with. If you're looking for a Western companion, check hotel bulletin boards or just chat with someone who sits next to you in a restaurant and perhaps your schedules and ambitions will coincide. Two websites that you can visit to find trekking companions and guides are www.trekinfo.com and www.yetizone.com. Unless you have a friend to trek with, or are prepared to take a chance on finding a companion in Nepal, booking a group trek may be the safest option.

Trail Conditions

Walking at high altitudes on rough trails can be dangerous. Watch your footing on narrow, slippery trails, and never underestimate the changeability of the weather – at any time of the year. If you are crossing high passes where snow is a possibility, never walk with less than three people. Carry a supply of emergency rations, have a map and compass (and know how to use them), and have sufficient clothing and equipment to deal with cold, wet, blizzard conditions.

You will be sharing the trail with man and beasts, usually carrying large burdens – not for fun but to scrape a living, so show respect. If a mule or yak train approaches, move to the high side of the trail. If you move to the outside you are at risk of being knocked over the edge. Buffalo will happily trample all over you, especially when they are moving downhill – give them a wide berth.

Register with Your Embassy

All embassies and consulates strongly recommend that their citizens register with them before they hit the trail. See the boxed text, p359.

Rescue Insurance

Check that your travel-insurance policy does not exclude mountaineering or alpinism. Although you will not be engaging in these activities on the trekking trail, you may have trouble convincing the insurance company of this fact. Check what insurance is available through your trekking company, if using one. Rescue insurance will need to cover an emergency helicopter evacuation or a charter flight from a remote airstrip. You can purchase rescue insurance from most alpine clubs in Western countries. In Nepal, **Neco Insurance** (☎ 01-4427354; info@necoin.com.np; PO Box 12271, Kathmandu) offers trekking policies. Personal accident, medical and evacuation insurance for trekkers is US\$6.88 per day for the first 15 days of trekking and US\$4.40 per day thereafter.

Altitude

Walking the trails of Nepal often entails a great deal of altitude gain and loss; even the base of the great mountains of the Himalaya can be very high. Most treks that go through populated areas stick to between 1000m and 3000m, although the Everest

Base Camp trek and the Annapurna Circuit trek both reach over 5000m. On high treks like these ensure adequate acclimatisation, and the maxim of 'walking high, sleeping low' is good advice; your night halt should be at a lower level than the highest point reached in the day.

TREKS

ROUTES & CONDITIONS

Most trekkers want to get away from roads as quickly as possible, and it is still possible to leave them quickly behind. Nepali trails are often steep and taxing. The old adage that 'the shortest path between two points is a straight line' appears to have been firmly drummed into Nepalis, irrespective of any mountains that may get in the way! In compensation, the trails are often very well maintained. Busy trails up steep slopes are often endless stone staircases.

A typical day's walk lasts from between five to seven hours and involves a number of ascents and descents. It's rare to spend much time at the same level. On an organised camping trek the day is run to a remarkably tight schedule. A typical pattern would be: up at 6am, start walking at 7am, stop for lunch at 10am, start after lunch at noon, stop walking at 3pm. Nepalis rise early, eat very little for breakfast, eat a large lunch in the late morning and a second meal before dark, then retire early – you will be best off to try and follow a similar schedule.

A little rudimentary knowledge of the Nepali language will help to make your trek easier and more interesting, although finding your way is rarely difficult on the major trekking routes and English is fairly widely spoken. See p398 for some useful Nepali words and phrases.

Sleeping

Organised treks camp each night and all you have to do is eat and crawl into your tent. Even erecting the tent is handled by the trekking crew, who put it up for you at the site selected by your *sirdar* or group leader.

Independent trekkers stay in the small lodges, guesthouses or village inns that have flourished along the popular trails. These lodges range from simple extensions of a traditional family home (which can sometimes be a plywood firetrap of questionable construction) to quite luxurious places with private rooms, extensive menus and even attached toilets and showers. It's possible to make quite long treks relying entirely on local accommodation and food. Nevertheless, it's still a good idea to carry a sleeping bag as lodges sometimes run out of bedding at peak season.

Eating

On an organised trek your only concern with food is sitting down to eat it. The porters carry virtually all of the ingredients with them, and there will be a cook with well-drilled assistants who can turn out meals of stunning complexity.

Independent trekkers will find numerous places to eat along the most popular trails, although it's wise to carry some emergency food supplies such as cheese, dried fruit or chocolate. On the Everest and Annapurna treks it's unlikely that you will walk more than an hour or two without coming across some sort of establishment that can offer tea, soft drinks, beer, and often a full meal. KEEP and other environmentally concerned organisations point out that the local diet of daal bhaat is nutritious, easily prepared, available everywhere, and requires a minimum of fuel for preparation. You lessen your impact on the environment and usually eat better if you adapt to the local diet.

RESTING – A NEPALI INSTITUTION! *Joe Bindloss*

With the tortuous nature of the Nepali landscape, getting around on foot can be heavy going. To ease the burden on travellers, villagers across Nepal have created thousands of *chautaras* – stone platforms shaded by pipal or banyan trees – where walkers can rest their feet and set down their loads. Many *chautaras* stand on the site of ancient pre-Hindu shrines, and the platforms are still a focal point for village life – a place to meet and chat, or trade and carry out religious rituals. Even today, constructing a *chautara* is seen as a sure-fire way to improve karma (the Buddhist and Hindu law of cause and effect) for future existences.

EVEREST NUTS *Bradley Mayhew*

The world's highest peak has attracted many commendable achievements: the first ascent without oxygen (1978), first summit with an artificial leg (1998), the first ski descent (2000), the first blind ascent (2001), youngest ascent (aged 16), oldest ascent (64) and fastest ascent (eight hours). Sherpa Babu Chiru spent a particularly amazing 21 hours on top of Everest without oxygen in 1999.

But there have also been some admirably silly achievements.

Perhaps most ambitious was the Briton Maurice Wilson, who planned to crash his Gipsy Moth plane halfway up the mountain and then climb from there to the top, not letting his almost total lack of mountaineering, or flying, experience get in the way of an obviously silly plan. (He eventually froze to death at Camp III dressed in a light sweater.)

Maybe it's something in the national psyche (this is after all the nation that gave us Monty Python), for it was also a team of Brits who trekked all the way to Everest Base Camp to play the 'world's highest game of rugby' at 5140m. They lost.

My personal Everest heroes are the British (!) pair who carried an ironing board up Everest to 5440m to do some extreme ironing ('part domestic chore, part extreme sport'). For anyone contemplating a repeat expedition, the duo have revealed that expedition preparation can be limited to three important factors: 'a few beers, a drunken bet and a stolen ironing board'.

The standard of cuisine on the Jomsom Trek is so westernised that it has been dubbed 'the apple pie trail' because that dish features on so many village-inn menus. It's surprising how many places even have cold beer available as well; before you complain about the price, contemplate the fact that somebody had to carry that bottle of beer all the way there and will probably have to carry the empty bottle back again!

CHOOSING A TREK

It is possible to do short treks in Nepal that do not reach demanding altitudes or need sophisticated equipment, years of experience or athletic stamina. A certain level of mental and physical fitness and sensible planning and preparation will ensure that yours is an enjoyable experience. For a selection of short treks see p268 and p162.

One statistic that is difficult to determine is distance. It is easy to judge distances from a map, but a printed map is in two dimensions. With the many gains and losses of altitude – and all the turns and twists of the trail – a map measurement of the routes becomes virtually meaningless. Someday someone will take the time to push a bicycle-wheel odometer over every trail in Nepal to get accurate distance measurements. Until then, we'll just have to be satisfied with the estimate that most of the days listed here are 10 to 20km of trekking.

The six popular longer treks described in this chapter are: the Everest Base Camp,

Helambu, Langtang, Jomsom, Annapurna Circuit and Annapurna Sanctuary treks.

EVEREST BASE CAMP TREK

Duration 21 or 15 days

Max elevation 5545m

Best season October to December

Start Jiri or Lukla

Finish Lukla

This trek takes about three weeks unless you fly in as well as out of Lukla. It reaches a significant height of 5545m at Kala Pattar, a small peak offering fine views of Mt Everest. Although the final part of the trek is through essentially uninhabited areas, small lodges operate during the trekking season so it's quite suitable for independent trekkers.

Everybody has heard of Mt Everest and that's the reason why the Everest Base Camp trek is so popular. The trek has a number of stunning attractions; not least of these is being able to say you've visited the highest mountain in the world. In addition there's the spectacular scenery and the outgoing Sherpa people of the Solu Khumbu region where Mt Everest and its attendant lesser peaks are.

The 15-day trek from Lukla to Kala Pattar has become the most popular trek because it avoids Maoist country. If you fly to Lukla, be sure to schedule acclimatisation days at Namche and Pheriche to avoid altitude sickness.

The trek from Jiri to Lukla is not only a hard slog, but is also pretty sparse in the breathtaking-views department. The trek doesn't follow valleys, as the Annapurna treks do. Instead the trail from Jiri cuts across the valleys, so for day after day it's a tiring process of dropping down one side of a steep valley and climbing up again on the other. By the time you reach the base camp your ascents will total almost 9000m – the full height of Everest from sea level. Most trekkers now avoid the Jiri portion of the trek because the Maoists usually demand Rs 5000 per person on the first or second day of the trek, please check the situation on the ground before committing to this portion of the trek.

The trek starts in Nepali-speaking Hindu lowlands and ends in the Tibetan-Buddhist highlands where the Sherpas are renowned for their enterprise, hard work, civic responsibility and devotion to the practice of Buddhism. In their often inhospitable land, the potato, a relatively recent introduction, is the main crop, but these days trekking and mountaineering are the backbone of the Sherpa economy. More than half the population in the region is now involved with tourism, and Namche Bazaar looks more like an alpine resort than a Sherpa village.

Flights In & Out

Most Everest trekkers opt to fly one way to avoid having to repeat the difficult initial Jiri to Lukla leg. This introduces its own problems, as flights to Lukla are notorious for cancellations, waiting lists and short-tempered trekkers, although things have improved in recent years. If you have the time, walk in from Jiri and fly out from Lukla. For a shorter trip you can fly in to Lukla, trek to Everest and then fly out, again from Lukla, taking around 15 days to trek to Kala Pattar and back. From Lukla you can just visit Thami, Namche Bazaar and Tengboche, which will take about a week.

Emergency Facilities

There are small hospitals in Jiri, Phaplu and Khunde (just north of Namche Bazaar); the Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) has a medical facility in Pheriche.

Access: Kathmandu to Jiri

The road to Jiri follows the Kodari road to Lamosangu, 78km from Kathmandu, and

turns off there to Jiri, a further 110km. An 'express' (10-hour) bus to Jiri leaves from the Kathmandu bus station at 6am (Rs 320) and 7am (Rs 290), and there are normal buses (Rs 247) between 5.30am and 8am. Keep a close eye on your luggage.

The Trek**DAY 1: JIRI TO SHIVALAYA**

The walk starts with a climb to the ridge top at 2370m then drops down to Shivalaya (1750m).

DAY 2: SHIVALAYA TO BHANDAR

From Shivalaya you climb to Sangbadanda (2150m), Kosaribas (2500m), then to Deorali, a pass at 2705m. There are hotels on the pass, or you can descend to Bhandar (2150m). This Sherpa settlement has a *gompa* (Buddhist monastery) and a number of hotels. It's possible to take a short detour between Sangbadanda and Bhandar to visit Thodung (3090m), where there's a cheese factory, established in the 1950s with Swiss aid.

DAY 3: BHANDAR TO SETE

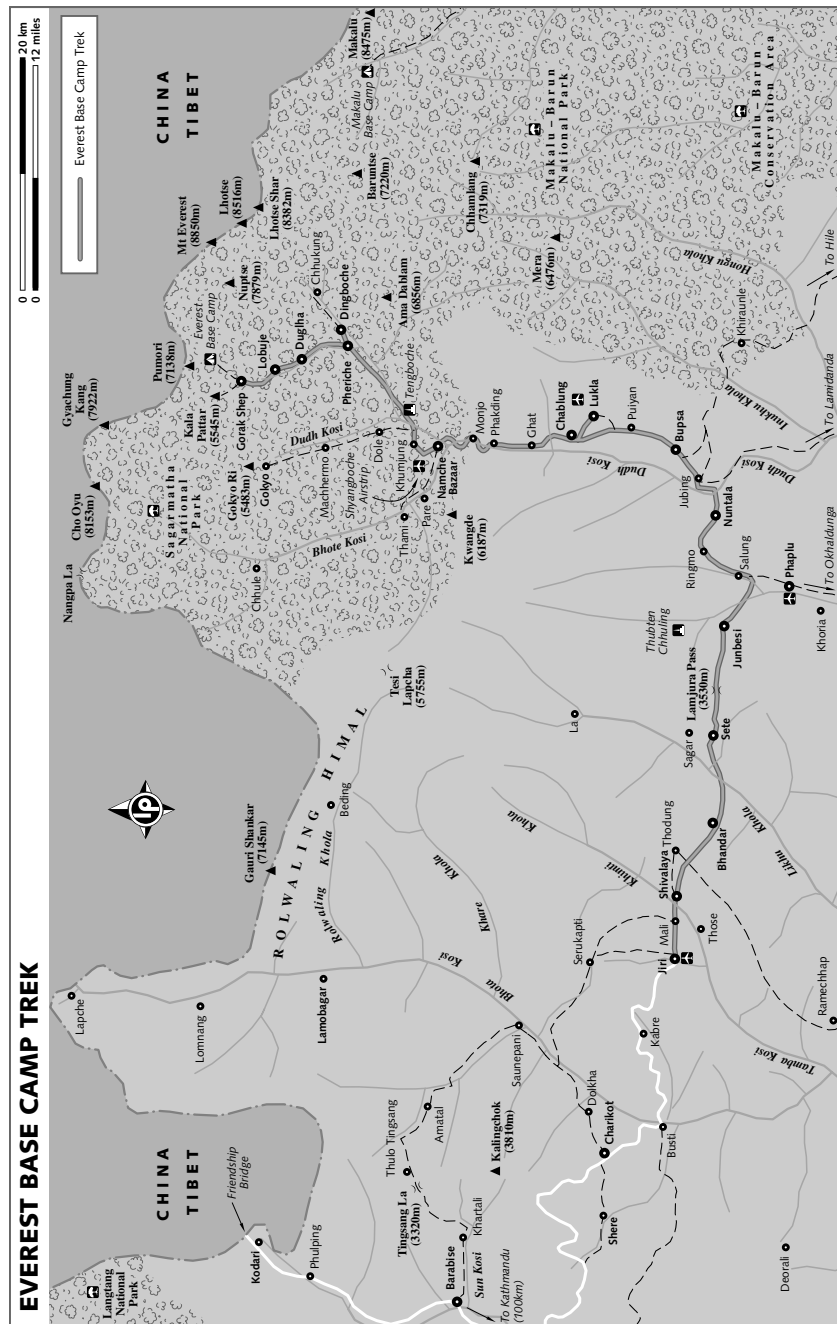
The trail drops down to the Likhu Khola, crosses the river at 1490m, and tracks along it to Kenja (1570m). Now the long ascent to the Lamjura Bhanjyang (pass) begins. The first part of the climb is quite steep, then it traverses to Sete (2575m), an abandoned gompa. From here on the villages are almost all inhabited by Sherpas and have both Nepali and Sherpa names (the Sherpa village names are given in brackets).

DAY 4: SETE TO JUNBESI

It's a long but gradual climb to the Lamjura Bhanjyang (3530m). You're rewarded with frost and often snow along the trail in winter or with lovely flowering rhododendrons in the spring. Goyom (3300m), on your way to the pass, is a good lunch stop. The pass is the highest point between Jiri and Namche Bazaar and from the top you descend to Tragdobuk (2860m), then to the pretty Sherpa village of Junbesi (Jun; 2675m). Junbesi has a monastery and some good hotels. It is a good place for a rest day with some interesting walks in the vicinity.

DAY 5: JUNBESI TO NUNTALA

The trail climbs to Khurtang, on a ridge at 2980m (where for the first time you can



see Everest), then on to Salung (2980m). A lower trail from Jumbesi leads to the hospital and airstrip at Phaplu and the district headquarters and bazaar at Salleri. From Salung the trail descends to the Ringmo Khola (2570m). Then it's up to Ringmo where apples and other fruit are grown.

A short climb from Ringmo takes you to the 3071m Trakshindo La, then the trail drops down past the gumpa of the same name, and on to Nuntala (Manidingma; 2250m), where there are numerous hotels offering a variety of standards.

DAY 6: NUNTALA TO BUPSA

The trail descends to the Dudh Kosi (1480m) and crosses it to follow the eastern bank. The trail climbs to Jubing (Dorakbuk; 1680m) and continues over a ridge to Khari Khola (Khati Thenga; 2070m). You should arrive in Khari Khola early enough to push on up the steep hill to Bupsa (Bumshing; 2300m). There are several hotels on the top of the ridge and a few less sumptuous hotels at Kharte, 20 minutes' walk beyond Bupsa up the trail to the north.

DAY 7: BUPSA TO CHABLUNG

From Bupsa the trail climbs gradually, offering views of the Dudh Kosi 1000m below at the bottom of the steep-sided valley, until it reaches a ridge at 2840m overlooking Puiyan (Chitok). The trail is very narrow in places as it makes its way down to Puiyan (2730m), in a side canyon of the Dudh Kosi valley. Climb to a ridge at 2750m then drop down to Surkhe (Buwa; 2290m). Just beyond Surkhe is the turn-off to Lukla with its airstrip.

The trail continues to climb through Mushe (Nangbug) and then Chaunrikharka (Dungde; 2630m) to Chablung (Lomdza).

If you are flying in to Lukla, trek downhill past Chablung to Phakding for the night.

DAY 8: CHABLUNG TO NAMCHE BAZAAR

From Chablung the trail contours along the side of the Dudh Kosi valley before descending to Ghat (Lhawa; 2530m). The trail climbs again to Phakding, a collection of about 25 lodges at 2800m.

The trail crosses the river on a long, swaying bridge, and then leads you along the river to Benkar (2700m). A short distance beyond Benkar the trail crosses the

Dudh Kosi to its east bank on a suspension bridge and climbs to Chomoa.

It's a short climb up to Monjo (2800m), where there are some good places to stay. Show your entrance ticket at the Sagarmatha National Park entrance station, then descend to cross the Dudh Kosi. On the other side it's a short distance to Jorsale (Thumbug; 2810m), then the trail crosses back to the east side of the river before climbing to the high suspension bridge over the Dudh Kosi.

It's a steady climb from here to Namche Bazaar (Nauche; 3480m). As this is the first climb to an altitude where AMS may be a problem, take it easy and avoid rushing. There is another national park entrance station just below Namche where permits are again checked and fees collected.

DAY 9: ACCLIMATISATION DAY IN NAMCHE BAZAAR

Namche Bazaar is the main centre in the Solu Khumbu region and has shops, restaurants, a bakery, hotels with hot showers, a pool hall, a police checkpoint, a moneychanger, a bank and even an Internet service. Pay a visit to the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee office to find out about conservation efforts being made in the region, and also visit the national park visitor centre on the ridge above town (well worth a visit).

Namche Bazaar and the surrounding villages have an ample supply of hydro-electricity, used for lighting and cooking as well as powering the video parlours. There is a colourful market each Saturday.

There is plenty to do around Namche Bazaar and you should spend a day here acclimatising. Remember that the victims of AMS are often the fittest and healthiest people who foolishly overextend themselves. It's helpful to do a strenuous day walk to a higher altitude as part of your acclimatisation, coming back down to Namche to sleep. For this purpose the long day walk to Thami (to the west) is worthwhile.

DAY 10: NAMCHE BAZAAR TO TENGOBOCHE

The slightly longer route from Namche Bazaar to Tengboche via Khumjung and Khunde is more interesting than the direct one. The route starts by climbing up to the Shyangboche airstrip. Above the airstrip is the Everest View Hotel, a Japanese scheme

to build a deluxe hotel with great views of the highest mountains on earth. The hotel has had a chequered history, but is once again open, with rooms at US\$135, plus an extra charge for oxygen if needed!

From the hotel or the airstrip you continue to Khumjung (3790m) and then re-join the direct trail to Tengboche. The trail descends to the Dudh Kosi (3250m) where there are several small lodges and a series of picturesque water-driven prayer wheels. A steep ascent brings you to Tengboche (3870m). The famous gumpa, with its background of Ama Dablam, Everest and other peaks, was burnt down in 1989. It has been rebuilt as a large, impressive structure. There's a camping area and a number of places to stay. During the November to December full moon the colourful Mani Rimdu festival is held here with masked dances in the monastery courtyard, and accommodation becomes extremely difficult to find.

DAY 11: TENGOBOCHE TO PHERICHE

Beyond Tengboche the altitude really starts to tell. The trail drops down to Devuche, crosses the Imja Khola and climbs past superb *mani* stones (carved with the Tibetan Buddhist chant *om mani padme hum*) to Pangboche (3860m). The gumpa here is worth visiting and the village is a good place for a lunch stop.

The trail then climbs to Pheriche (4240m), where there is an HRA trekkers' aid post and possible medical assistance. Pheriche has a number of hotels and restaurants that may feature exotic dishes left over from international mountaineering expeditions.

DAY 12: ACCLIMATISATION DAY IN PHERICHE

Another acclimatisation day should be spent at Pheriche. As at Namche, a solid day walk to a higher altitude is better than just resting; Dingboche and Chhukung (4730m) are possible destinations. Either walk offers good views.

DAY 13: PHERICHE TO DUGLHA

The trail climbs to Phalang Karpo (4340m) then Duglha (4620m). It's possible to continue on to Lobuje, but the HRA doctors at Pheriche urge everyone to stay a night at Duglha to aid acclimatisation.

DAY 14: DUGLHA TO LOBUJE

From Duglha the trail goes directly up the terminal moraine (debris) of the Khumbu Glacier for about one hour then left into the memorial area (in memory of those who have died making the ascent) Chukpilhara, before reaching the summer village of Lobuje (4930m). The altitude, the cold and the crowding in the lodges can combine to ensure less than restful nights.

DAY 15: LOBUJE TO GORAK SHEP

The trail continues to climb to Gorak Shep (5160m). The return trip from Lobuje to Gorak Shep takes a couple of hours, leaving enough time to continue to Kala Pattar – or you can opt to overnight in Gorak Shep and reach Kala Pattar the next morning. At 5545m this small peak offers the best view you'll get of Everest without climbing it.

Although there is accommodation at Gorak Shep it's cold and the altitude makes life uncomfortable. It's a better plan to return to Lobuje for the night. The altitude hits nearly everybody; getting back down to Lobuje or even better, to Pheriche, makes a real difference.

DAY 16: GORAK SHEP TO LOBUJE

If you want to get to the base camp then it's about six hours round trip from Gorak Shep. There's no view from base camp; if you only have the energy for one side trip, then make it Kala Pattar. The trek back down to Lobuje is easy, but it seems endless because of the many uphill climbs.

DAY 17: LOBUJE TO DINGBOCHE

Staying the night at Dingboche instead of at Pheriche makes an interesting accommodation alternative. It's a 'summer village' at 4410m with numerous large lodges.

DAYS 18 TO 20: DINGBOCHE TO LUKLA

The next three days retrace your steps down to Lukla via Tengboche and Namche Bazaar. There is extreme pressure for a seat on flights out of Lukla, so be sure to have an advance booking, and be there the evening before your flight to reconfirm (the airline offices are generally open from 5pm to 6pm, but sometimes it's 6pm to 7pm). Then be prepared for a torrid time at the airstrip as frustrated trekkers vie for the limited seats. This is especially so when flights have been

cancelled for a few consecutive days due to poor visibility, and there is a huge backlog of passengers all wanting to get back to Kathmandu.

DAY 21: BACK TO KATHMANDU

If the gods are with you, your flight will come in and your reservation won't have been cancelled. Then, after it took you so many days to get here by road and foot, your aircraft only takes 35 minutes to fly you back.

Alternative Routes & Side Trips

An interesting side trip is the nine-day round trip from Namche Bazaar to Gokyo and back. This trek ends at Gokyo Ri, a hill with fine, but different, views of Everest. You can even combine both Gokyo and base camp by crossing the 5420m Cho La, but you need to take this route seriously – it's best to bring your ice axe and crampons and know how to use them.

A shorter side trip from Namche Bazaar is to Thami, the gateway to Tesi Lapcha and the Rolwaling Himal. You can do a round trip to Thami in one very long day, but it's better to stay overnight to catch the morning views.

HELAMBU TREK

Duration 8 days

Max elevation 3640m

Best season October to April

Start/Finish Sundarrijal

The Helambu region offers a one-week trek that can start and finish in the Kathmandu Valley. There is not a lot of high mountain scenery but it is culturally interesting. There is plenty of accommodation along the route, but you must still carry a sleeping bag.

Although it's not as well known and popular as the Everest Base Camp trek or the Annapurna Circuit, this trek offers a number of distinct advantages. The trek is easily accessible from Kathmandu. Indeed, you could leave your hotel in Kathmandu and set foot on the Helambu trail within an hour. The Helambu trek only takes a week so it is ideal for people who do not have the time for one of the longer treks. And since it stays at relatively low altitudes it also does not require sophisticated cold-weather equipment and clothing.

The Helambu trek starts from Sundarrijal at the eastern end of the Kathmandu Valley and doesn't climb above 3500m. The trek makes a loop through the Sherpa-populated Helambu region to the northeast of Kathmandu and only the first day's walk is repeated on the return trip. The Sherpa people of the Helambu region are friendly and hospitable, just like their kinfolk of the Solu Khumbu region.

Wherever you trek in the region, you will enter the Langtang National Park. The army is particularly conscientious about collecting the Rs 1000 park entrance fee. On this trek there are park checkpoints at Magen Goth, Khutumsang and Sermathang that won't let you pass without a park permit (see p330).

Emergency Facilities

There is a national park radio at Magen Goth. Telephones are available at Tarke Gyang.

Access: Kathmandu to Sundarrijal

Occasional buses leave from Kathmandu City bus station (near Bagh Bazaar) to Sundarrijal (Rs 20), 15km from Kathmandu, or get a bus to Jorpati, just beyond Bodhnath, and catch a Sundarrijal bus at the road junction. A taxi will cost Rs 650. At Sundarrijal you enter the Shivapuri National Park (admission Rs 250; see p183).

The Trek

DAY 1: SUNDARIJAL TO CHISOPANI

From Sundarrijal the trail starts off up concrete steps beside the pipeline that brings drinking water down to the valley. Eventually the trail leaves the pipeline from near the dam and reaches Mulkharka, sprawling up the ridge around 1895m, 600m above Sundarrijal. There are superb views back over the valley and some teashops on the pass for rest and refreshment.

The trail continues to climb, but less steeply, to Chisopani (2300m). Chisopani is rather like a grubby little truck stop without the trucks but the mountain views in the morning can be very fine. Take care of your possessions here; it's still rather close to the Kathmandu Valley. There are a number of lodges at Chisopani.

DAY 2: CHISOPANI TO GUL BHANJYANG

The trail heads down to Pati Bhanjyang (1770m), which has a police checkpoint

and a number of lodges. The trail rises and falls through Chipling (2170m). From here the trail climbs again to reach a 2470m pass before descending a forested ridge to Thodang Betini (2250m). Continuing along the forested ridge, the trail descends to a large *chörten* overlooking the Tamang village of Gul Bhanjyang (2140m). This is a classic hill village with a pleasant main street, several shops and a number of places to stay.

DAY 3: GUL BHANJYANG TO THAREPATI

The trail climbs the ridge from Gul Bhanjyang to another pass at 2620m, then it's downhill to Khutumsang (2470m), in a saddle atop the ridge. The national park office is at the far side of the village. Show your park entry permit or pay Rs 1000 if you started at Sundarjal; you will have to show your permit yet again if you are headed in the opposite direction.

The trail follows a ridgeline with views of the Langtang and Gosainkund peaks through sparsely populated forests to Magen Goth (with an army checkpoint) before finally reaching Tharepati (3640m). The trail to Gosainkund and the Langtang trek branches off northwest from here. Tharepati has several lodges including the very nicely situated Himaliya Lodge on the Khutumsang side.

DAY 4: THAREPATI TO MALEMCHIGAON

From the pass the trail turns east and descends rapidly down a ravine to the large Sherpa village of Malemchigaon (2530m). There are a number of lodges in the village, and a very brightly painted gompa.

DAY 5: MALEMCHIGAON TO TARKE GYANG

From Malemchigaon the trail continues to drop, crossing the Malemchi Khola by a bridge at 1920m and then making the long climb up the other side of the valley to Tarke Gyang (2590m). This is the largest village in Helambu, and the prosperous Sherpas who live here specialise, among other things, in turning out 'instant antiques' for gullible trekkers. There are a number of lodges including the pleasant Mount View Hotel on the Malemchigaon side of the village. Tarke Gyang is a good place for a rest day or you can take a side trip up to the peak (3771m) overlooking the village. This is the end of the route down from the Ganja La.

From Tarke Gyang there is a very pleasant alternative return route via Sermathang (below).

DAY 6: TARKE GYANG TO KIUL

The circuit route back to Sundarjal leaves Tarke Gyang past the guesthouse and *mani* wall (walk to the left), then drops off the west side of the ridge in a rhododendron forest, along a broad, well-travelled path. Passing through the Sherpa villages of Kakani (2070m) and Thimbu (1580m), the trail enters the hot, rice-growing country of the Malemchi and Indrawati valleys.

The steep descent continues down to Kiul (1280m), strung out on terraces above the Malemchi Khola. The trail is now in semitropical banana-and-monkey country at an elevation below that of Kathmandu.

DAY 7: KIUL TO PATI BHANJYANG

There is construction work in this portion of the valley to build a tunnel that will take water from here to the Kathmandu Valley. The trekking route is likely to be confused and dusty while construction is under way.

The trail descends along a river, crossing it on the second suspension bridge at 1190m then joins a wide trail at Mahenkal and follows it to Talamarang (940m). The trail follows Talamarang Khola for some distance, then (it's hard to find at times) climbs steeply to Batache and then Thakani, on the ridge top, at 1890m. From here the trail follows the ridge to Pati Bhanjyang (1770m), where the Helambu circuit is completed.

DAY 8: BACK TO SUNDARIJAL

The final day largely retraces the route of the first day's walk.

Alternative Route from Tarke Gyang to Malemchi Pul Bazaar

An alternative route can be followed from Tarke Gyang through Sermathang and then along a ridge through Dubhachaur to join the road at Malemchi Pul Bazaar, south of Talamarang. This route is very pleasant as far as Malemchi and attracts relatively few trekkers. There are numerous lodges at Sermathang and Malemchi but the choice is limited elsewhere.

From Malemchi the final stretch back to Kathmandu is along a dusty roadway that brings you out on the Kathmandu to Ko-

dari road at Panchkhal, from where you will have to take a bus 55km back to Kathmandu via Dhulikhel and Banepa. You can usually get a ride on a bus or truck down the road from Malemchi and this route does avoid having to duplicate the final stretch from Pati Bhanjyang through Sundarjal.

(Another Helambu alternative is to start and finish from Malemchi Pul Bazaar, completing the shorter loop, which goes through Talamarang, Kiul, Tarke Gyang and Sermathang.)

DAY 1: TARKE GYANG TO SERMATHANG

The easy trail descends gently through a beautiful forest to Sermathang (2620m), the centre of an important apple-growing area. Sermathang is more spread out than the closely spaced houses of Tarke Gyang; there are fine views of the valley of the Malemchi Khola to the south. If you do the trek in the reverse direction this is where you must pay the Rs 1000 entry fee to the Langtang National Park. There are lodges at Sermathang.

DAY 2: SERMATHANG TO MALEMCHI PUL BAZAAR

From Sermathang the trail continues to descend to Dubhachaur (1610m) then steeply down to Malemchi Pul Bazaar at 880m where it meets the road. The village has a collection of lodges and inns. Buses run frequently along the road (known as the Helambu Hwy) from Malemchi Pul Bazaar via Bahunepati and Sipa Ghat to Banepa (via Panchkhal) where you change to a bus or taxi to Kathmandu.

LANGTANG TREK

Duration 7-8 days

Max elevation 3870m

Best season October to May

Start/Finish Syabrubesi

This trek has fine views, interesting villages, and although there are some relatively uninhabited stretches, accommodation is available.

The Langtang trek offers many of the benefits of the Helambu trek, and gives you the opportunity to get right in among the Himalayan peaks and to walk through remote, sparsely populated areas. If you want real adventure then the Langtang

and Helambu treks can be linked by high-altitude passes, via the Gosainkund Lakes or the Ganja La at 5106m (see p344).

The Langtang trek can take up to two weeks (although a three-day approach to the heart of the Langtang Valley is suggested here) and leads to the foot of glaciers high in the Langtang Valley. The trail passes through Tibetan and Tamang villages and offers fine views of the Ganesh Himal across to the northwest. Although the trek passes through lightly populated and undeveloped areas, it is still possible to stay at lodges at various points along the route. Ascending from just 541m at Trisuli Bazaar to 3870m at Kyanjin Gomba, the trail passes through an ever-changing climate and offers trekkers an exceptional diversity of scenery and culture.

The treks all enter the Langtang National Park and the army collects a Rs 1000 park entrance fee. Checkposts are at Dhunche and at Ghora Tabela. Video cameras are only allowed into the national park after paying a whopping US\$1000 fee.

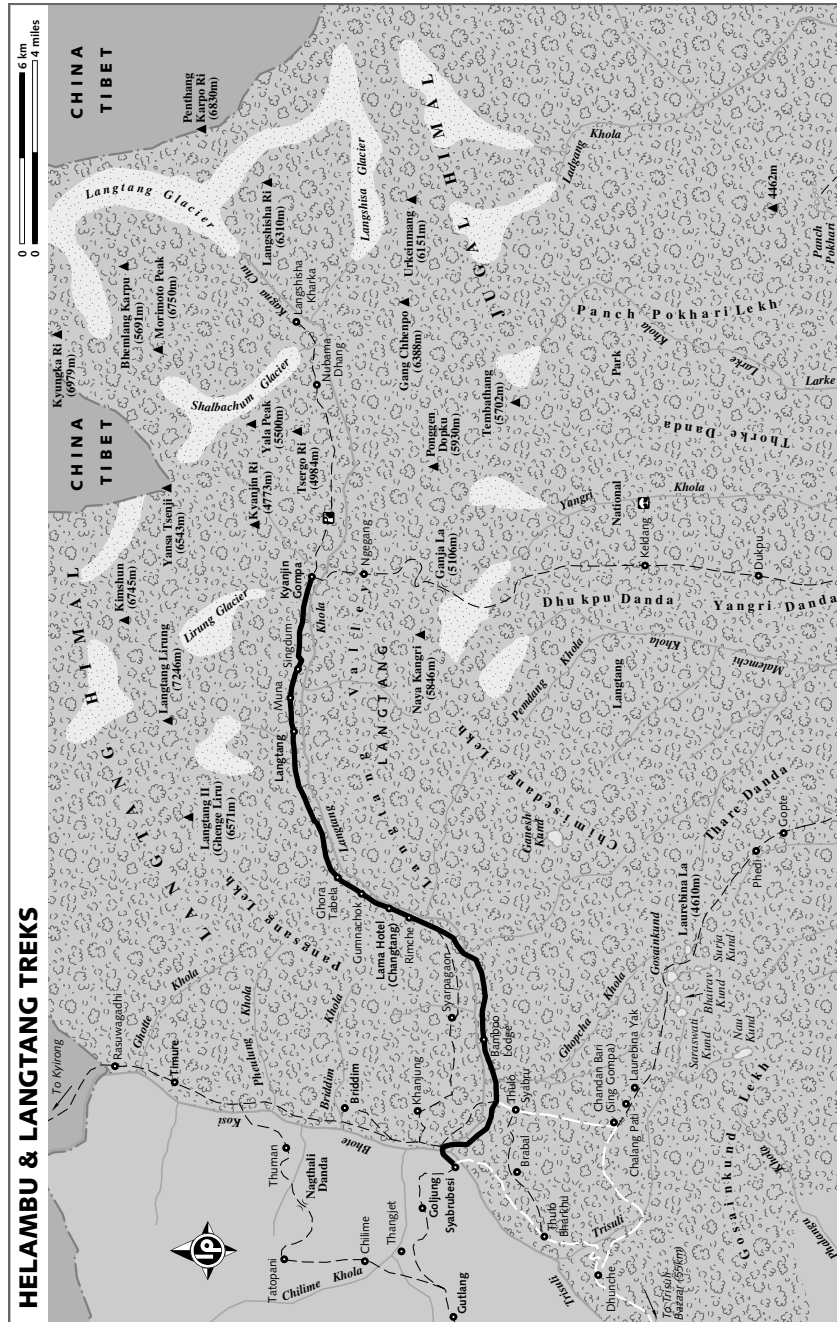
Emergency Facilities

There are national park radios at Ghora Tabela and Langtang, and there are telephones at Dhunche and Thulo Syabru. The Yeti Guest House in Kyanjin Gomba has a satellite phone that can be used to summon a helicopter in an emergency.

Access: Kathmandu to Syabrubesi

It's 72km from Kathmandu to Trisuli Bazaar, which takes about four hours by car or six by bus. The road is paved but very winding, with fine mountain views. From Trisuli, the 50km unpaved road leading to Dhunche is steep, winding and rather hairy, passing through Betrawati and Thare. There are buses at 7.30am and 8.30am from Kathmandu to Dhunche (Rs 159, eight hours). Dhunche is a pretty village at 1950m and here you must pay the entrance fee to Langtang National Park, though it's better to buy the permit in Kathmandu before starting your trek. For more details on the road to Dhunche, see p235.

There is a direct bus from Kathmandu to Syabrubesi, about 15km past Dhunche (a one-hour drive). The road descends from Dhunche, gently at first, then in a series of steep loops to a bridge across the Bhote



Kosi. Syabrubesi is a string of shops and lodges along the road just past the bridge. A bus departs Syabrubesi for Kathmandu (Rs 202, nine hours) at 6.30am and 7.30am. You can book a seat in advance at a roadside ticket office.

The Trek

DAY 1: SYABRUBESI TO LAMA HOTEL

Start the trek from the camping area below Syabrubesi (New Syabrubesi) and trek northward past some old government buildings to a suspension bridge over the Bhote Kosi, just north of the junction with Trisuli Khola. Turn right at the eastern end of the bridge and walk into the small settlement of Old Syabru.

The trek becomes a pleasant walk through trees where langur monkeys frolic, passing a side stream and small waterfall before reaching three *bhattis* (village inns) beside a stream at Doman (1680m). The trail then makes a steep climb over a rocky ridge to Landslide Lodge at 1810m, where the route from Thulo Syabru joins from above. Over the rest of the day's walk and the following morning, you will pass few settlements, but the forest abounds with birds.

It's then a long climb in forests to another trail junction with a sign pointing to Syabru (Thulo Syabru). This is a new national park trail that local people rarely use. Beyond the trail junction the trail climbs gently to Bamboo Lodge, a cluster of three hotels (none made of bamboo) at 1960m. Beyond Bamboo Lodge the trail crosses the Dangdung Khola, then climbs to a steel suspension bridge over the Langtang Khola at 2000m.

On the north bank of the Langtang Khola the route climbs alongside a series of waterfalls formed by a jumble of house-sized boulders. Climb steeply to a landslide and the Langtang View & Lodge at Rimche (2400m), and then ascend further to Changtang, popularly known as Lama Hotel, at 2470m.

DAY 2: LAMA HOTEL TO LANGTANG

The trail continues to follow the Langtang Khola, climbing steeply, at times very steeply, to Ghora Tabela (2970m), where there are fine views of Langtang Lirung. Although there is no permanent settlement here, there is a lodge; your national park entry permit will be checked again here.

From Ghora Tabela the trail climbs more gradually to Langtang village (3430m). The national park headquarters is here. Langtang and the villages around are in Tibetan style, with stone walls around the fields, and herds of yaks.

DAY 3: LANGTANG TO KYANJIN GOMPA

It only takes the morning (passing through small villages) to climb to Kyanjin Gumpa (3870m), where there is a monastery, lodges and a cheese factory. There are a number of interesting walks from the gumpa. If you are intending to continue over the Ganja La to Helambu you should spend some time here acclimatising.

DAYS 4-8: LANGTANG VALLEY & RETURN TO SYABRUBESI

From Kyanjin Gumpa you can climb to a viewpoint at 4300m on the glacial moraine to the north for superb views of Langtang Lirung. Day walks can also be made to Yala or further up the valley to Langshisha Kharka for more spectacular views. You can return the same way or take one of the high routes connecting to the Helambu trek.

LANGTANG TREK TO HELAMBU TREK CROSSINGS

If the weather permits, you could tackle the high route via the sacred and picturesque Gosainkund Lakes to join the Helambu Trek. And if you are a very experienced trekker, and adequately equipped with a good map, tent, stove and food, you could tackle the Ganja La.

Via Gosainkund

The trek via Gosainkund is a way of crossing between the Langtang and the Helambu treks. Adequate preparation is necessary, but there are lodges along the route, so finding food and accommodation is not a problem in the trekking season. This route does become impassable during winter.

It takes four days to walk from Dhunche, near the start of the Langtang Trek, to Tharepati in the Helambu region. The trek can also be made from Helambu or it can be done by turning off the Langtang trek from Thulo Syabru, and it is an excellent choice as a return route from the Langtang trek.

Gosainkund is the site for a great pilgrimage in August each year – this is the

height of the monsoon, not a pleasant time for trekking. The large rock in the centre of the lake is said to be the remains of a Shiva shrine and it is also claimed that a channel carries water from the lake directly to the tank at the Kumbeshwar Temple in Patan, 60km to the south.

Day 1: Dhunche to Chandan Bari The first day takes you from Dhunche at 1950m to Chandan Bari (Sing Gumpa) at 3330m. The route from Thulo Syabru to the gumpa can be confusing so take care.

Day 2: Chandan Bari to Laurebina Yak The walk climbs steeply with fine mountain views then heads for Laurebina Yak, which has lodges.

Day 3: Laurebina Yak to Gosainkund Lakes The trail drops to Saraswati Kund at 4100m, the first of the Gosainkund Lakes. The second lake is Bhairav Kund and the third is Gosainkund itself at an altitude of 4380m. There are several lodges, a shrine and numerous paths and small stone shelters for pilgrims on the northwestern side of the lake.

Day 4: Gosainkund Lakes to Gopte The trail climbs from the Gosainkund Lakes to the four lakes near the Laurebina La at 4610m. It then drops down again to Gopte at 3440m where there are seasonal village inns. It was in the Gopte area that an Australian trekker became lost in 1991 and was found alive after 43 days. Nearby is the place where a Thai International Airbus crashed into a mountain in 1992.

Day 5: Gopte to Tharepati The final day's walk descends to a stream and then climbs to Tharepati at 3690m, where this trail meets up with the Helambu trek.

Back to Kathmandu From Tharepati you're on the Helambu Trek and can either take the direct route south to Pati Bhanjyang and Kathmandu or east to Tarke Gyang and then complete the circuit back to Kathmandu.

Across the Ganja La

Walking from the Kyanjin Gumpa at the end of the Langtang route south to Tarke Gyang in Helambu involves crossing the 5106m Ganja La. The pass is usually blocked by snow from December to March and at any time a bad weather change can make crossing the pass decidedly dangerous. The walk takes five days; between Kyanjin and Tarke Gyang there is no permanent settlement. The final climb to the pass on both sides is

steep and exposed. During most of the year there is no water for two days south of the pass. You must come adequately equipped for all these complications.

JOMSOM TREK

Duration 9 days

Max elevation 3800m

Best season October to May

Start Naya Pul

Finish Muktinath and back to Jomsom

This trek from Pokhara up the Kali Gandaki valley is among the most popular in Nepal, with superb scenery, interesting people and the best trailside accommodation in the country. It takes a week to reach Muktinath, the end point of the trek. Walking back takes another week or you can fly from Jomsom.

Access: Pokhara to Naya Pul

Like many other treks in Nepal this one is getting shorter as roads gradually extend into the mountains. Eventually it may be possible to drive all the way to Jomsom, and then the trek will no longer exist. A road has already been pushed through the hills from Pokhara to Baglung to the west. Buses leave for Baglung from the bus stop in Bag Bazaar at the northern end of Pokhara. Take the bus up the ridge to Naudanda and then down into the Modi Khola valley and get off at Naya Pul (New Bridge) a few kilometres pass Lumle; the fare is Rs 55, or Rs 600 for a taxi.

ALTERNATIVE ACCESS POINTS

It's still possible to walk all the way from Pokhara to Birethanti. You can reach Naudanda by walking through Sarangkot (p265) and along the ridge to Naudanda. There are fine views of the whole Annapurna Range, Pokhara and Phewa Tal from this large village. Naudanda has a choice of hotels. From Naudanda, follow the road for a bit, then turn off past Khare to Chandrakot and drop to Birethanti.

You can also avoid the long climb over the Ghorapani hill by taking the bus on to Beni further northwest of Pokhara. From here it's a two-day walk up the Kali Gandaki valley to Tatopani.

If you want to trek the route just one way, it can save a lot of time and hassle and make the duration of your trek more predictable to

WARNING

The Ganja La is one of the more difficult passes in Nepal and should not be attempted without a knowledgeable guide, adequate acclimatisation, good equipment and some mountaineering experience.

fly to Jomsom first. In this way, you avoid the predicament of being stuck in Jomsom during flight cancellations. However, you will need to spend some days acclimatising to account for the sudden gain in altitude if you're continuing to Muktinath.

The Trek

DAY 1: NAYA PUL TO TIKEDUNGHA

From Naya Pul it's a short walk up Modi Khola to the large village of Birethanti (1000m), where you can really see how civilised this trek is. Birethanti has a bakery, bank and even sidewalk cafés! A trail north to Ghandruk turns off here. Birethanti has excellent hotels but it's best to continue further in order to shorten the next day's long climb. Sticking to the northern side of the Bhurungdi Khola, the trail climbs to Hille and nearby Tikhedhunga (1525m). Both Tikhedhunga and Hille have places to stay.

DAY 2: TIKEDUNGHA TO GHORAPANI

From Tikedhunga the trail drops down and crosses the Bhurungdi Khola, then climbs very steeply up a stone staircase to Ulleri, a large Magar village at 1960m. It continues to ascend, but more gently, through fine forests of oak and rhododendron to Banthanti (2250m) and then Nangathanti (2460m). Another hour's walk brings you to Ghorapani at 2750m.

Only a short walk beyond Ghorapani is Deorali pass and village (*deorali* means 'pass'), with spectacular views, and this is where most people stay. An hour's climb from here will take you to Poon (or Pun) Hill at 3210m, one of the best Himalayan viewpoints in Nepal. There are hotels at Ghorapani and at Deorali. *Ghora* means 'horse' and *pani* 'water' and indeed, long caravans of pack horses were once a regular sight here. The pack horses now go to Jomsom from Beni along the Kali Gandaki valley.

A trail also runs from Ghorapani/Deorali to Ghandruk. This part of the trek is plagued by leeches during the monsoon and there may be snow on the trail in the winter.

DAY 3: GHORAPANI TO TATOPANI

The trail descends steeply to Chitre (2420m), where there are more lodges. From here the hills are extensively terraced as the trail drops down through Sikha, a large village with

shops and hotels at 1980m, and then descends gently to Ghara (1780m). A further steep descent of 380m takes you to Ghar Khola village where the trail crosses the Ghar Khola on a suspension bridge and then climbs up above the Kali Gandaki before crossing that too. There's also an ACAP checkpoint here.

Turning north the trail soon reaches Tatopani (1190m). It's a busy population centre, although a monsoon flood in the late 1980s washed away a number of lodges and bathing pools, and the remainder of the village sits precariously on a shelf above the river. Tatopani offers some of the best food along the whole trail, and you can get a cold beer to go with it. *Tato* means 'hot'; the name is for the hot springs by the river. Tatopani is a popular destination for a shorter trek out of Pokhara. At the south end of the village is the trail to the hot springs and a police checkpoint where they enter your details into a register.

DAY 4: TATOPANI TO GHASA

The trail now follows the Kali Gandaki valley to Jomsom. The river cuts a channel between the peaks of Annapurna I and Dhaulagiri, thus qualifying the Kali Gandaki for the title of the world's deepest valley. The two 8000m-plus mountaintops are only 38km apart and the river flows between them at a height of less than 2200m.

The Kali Gandaki valley is home to the Thakalis, an ethnic group noted for their trading and business expertise, particularly in running hotels and lodges, not only here in their homeland but also in Pokhara and elsewhere in Nepal.

From Tatopani the route climbs across several landscapes and ascends gradually to Dana at 1400m. This is where the difficult track branches off to Maurice Herzog's base camp, used for his historic ascent of Annapurna in 1950.

The trail continues to climb to the waterfall of Rupse Chhahara (1560m) and at one stage takes a precarious route through a steep, narrow section of the gorge. A suspension bridge crosses the river at 1620m and the trail crosses back again at 1880m, then through Ghasa, the first Thakali village (2120m).

DAY 5: GHASA TO LARJUNG

A steep climb through forest takes you to the Lete Khola, then to the village of Lete

(2430m), with a superb view of the eastern flank of Dhaulagiri, and finally to Kalopani (2530m). Kalopani has great mountain views and some comfortable lodges to view them from.

From Kalopani the trail crosses to the east side of the Kali Gandaki, before crossing back again at Larjung. This village at 2570m has interesting alleyways and tunnels between the houses, an attempt to avoid the fierce winds that often whistle up the Kali Gandaki valley.

DAY 6: LARJUNG TO MARPHA

Khobang (2580m) is a village with a gumpa above it, and the mountain views on this stretch are the best to be seen.

Tukuche (2590m) is one of the most important Thakali villages, once a meeting place for traders from Tibet. Despite the growth of tourism in this area, Tukuche is still a quieter, smaller place than it was during this era of trade.

From here the landscape changes as you enter the drier and more desertlike country north of the Himalayan watershed. It also gets windier; gentle breezes from the north shift to a gale from the south as the morning wears on. Marpha (2680m) virtually huddles behind a ridge to keep out of the wind. The village also has some of the most luxurious accommodation to be found along the trail, which makes it a good alternative to staying in Jomsom. A government project between Tukuche and Marpha produces fruit and vegetables for the whole region.

DAY 7: MARPHA TO KAGBENI

The trail continues along the valley side, rising gradually before crossing over a low ridge to Jomsom. At 2713m, Jomsom is the major centre in the region and it has facilities such as a hospital, an ACAP visitor centre and a police checkpoint (where you must register and get your ACAP permit stamped). This is the last of the Thakali villages; those further north are inhabited by people of Tibetan descent.

Jomsom has regular flights to Pokhara for US\$54.

It's worth following the trail along the river all the way to the medieval-looking village of Kagbeni (2810m). This Tibetan-influenced settlement has a number of good

lodges, and is as close as you can get to Lo Manthang, the capital of the legendary kingdom of Mustang further to the north, without paying a US\$700 permit fee.

There is a recently built bridge and trail up the west bank of the Kali Gandaki, which provides an alternative to the original trail up the east bank.

DAY 8: KAGBENI TO MUKTINATH

From Kagbeni the path climbs steeply to rejoin the direct trail leading to Khingar (3200m). The trail climbs through a desert landscape then past meadows and streams to the village of Jharkot (3500m). A further climb brings you to Ranipauwa, the accommodation area of Muktinath (3710m).

Muktinath is a pilgrimage centre for Buddhists and Hindus. You'll see Tibetan traders as well as sadhus (holy men) from as far away as the south of India. The shrines, in a grove of trees, include a Buddhist gumpa and the Vishnu temple of Jiwala Mayi. An old temple nearby shelters a spring and natural gas jets that provide Muktinath's famous eternal flame. It's the earth-water-fire combination that accounts for Muktinath's great religious significance.

BACK TO POKHARA OR JOMSOM

From Muktinath you can retrace your steps to Pokhara, or simply trek back to Jomsom and hope to catch a flight from there. It is possible to continue beyond Muktinath and cross the Thorung La to walk the rest of the Annapurna Circuit but this long walk is better made in the opposite direction – it's a long, hard climb of 1600m ascent from Muktinath to the pass.

ANNAPURNA CIRCUIT TREK

Duration 16-18 days

Max elevation 5416m

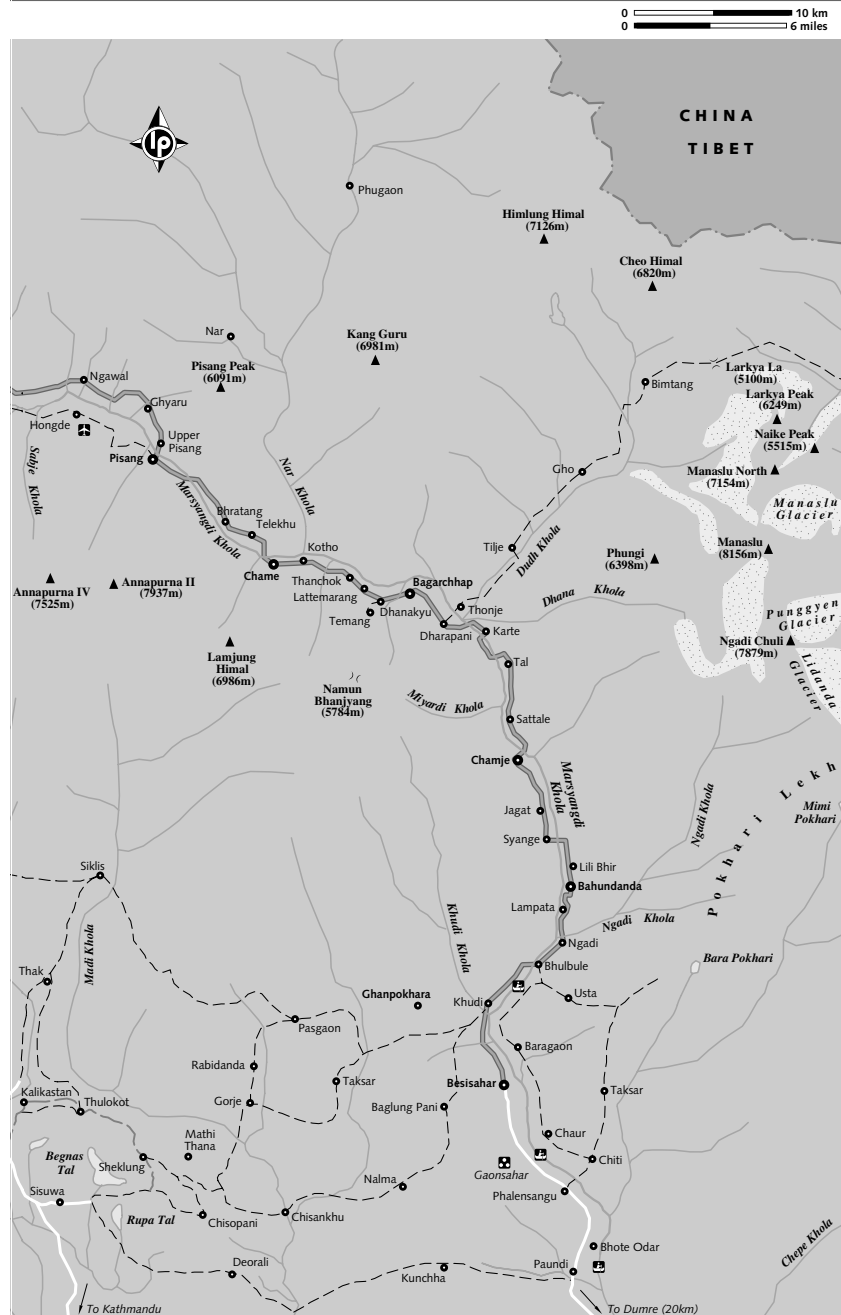
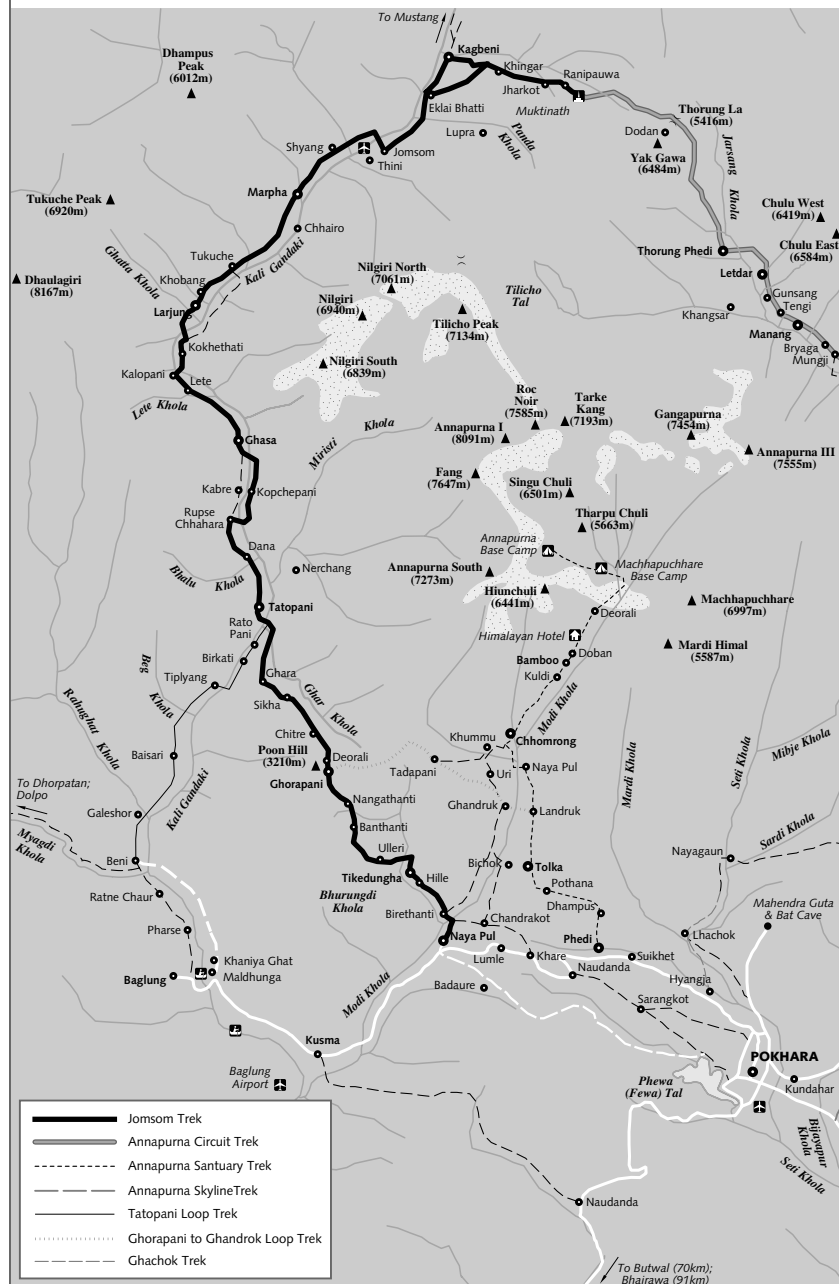
Best season October to November

Start Besisahar

Finish Naya Pul or Beni

It takes nearly three weeks to walk the entire Annapurna Circuit; for scenery and cultural diversity this is the best trek in Nepal. It crosses to the north of the main Himalayan range and crosses a 5416m pass. The last week of the trek is the Jomsom trek in reverse, following the dramatic Kali Gandaki valley.

ANNAPURNA TREKS



Since it opened to foreign trekkers in 1977, the trek around Annapurna has become the most popular in Nepal. It passes through country inhabited by a wide diversity of peoples, it offers spectacular mountain scenery and it goes to the north of the main Himalayan range to the dry Tibet-like trans-Himalaya. It also has the advantage of having accommodation available each night.

The circuit is usually walked counter clockwise due to the steepness of the track to the Thorung La. For many people, this is too much to manage in one day. The Thorung La at 5416m is often closed due to snow from mid-December to mid-March, and bad weather can move in at any time. The trail to Thorung La can be hard to find when covered in snow. Trekkers should be prepared to turn back due to the weather and altitude. Porters must be adequately equipped for severe cold and snow.

After you cross the Thorung La from Manang to Muktinath, the final seven days of the circuit trek are the same as the Jomsom Trek from Pokhara, but in reverse. Completing the Annapurna Circuit in 16 days allows for only one rest and acclimatisation day at Manang. It's best to slot a few additional days into the schedule.

Access: Kathmandu to Besisahar

It's a long and somewhat tedious 137km from Kathmandu to the turn-off at Dumre. From Dumre, at 440m, buses and 4WDs run regularly to Besisahar (820m). From Pokhara there are two buses (Rs 120, five hours) in the early morning and two at lunchtime. Buses also run frequently from Kathmandu (bus/minibus Rs 175/235, six hours).

The Trek

DAY 1: BESISAHAR TO BAHUNDANDA

Start the trek by taking a taxi or bus from Besisahar along the rough road to Khudi (830m). This is the first Gurung village you reach (many of Nepal's Gurkha soldiers are Gurungs). The Khudi trail offers fine views of Himalchuli (to the northeast) and Ngadi Chuli (aka Manaslu II, and before that, Peak 29) as it climbs to Bhulbule (840m). You enter the Annapurna Conservation Area here and should register at the ACAP checkpoint if it is open. If you did not get your permit in advance, you will have to pay double here.

The trail continues onto Ngadi before reaching Lampata (1135m) and then Bahundanda (1310m). Bahundanda has a few shops, several hotels and a public call office (telephone).

DAY 2: BAHUNDANDA TO CHAMJE

From Bahundanda the trail drops steeply to Lili Bhir and then follows an exposed trail; occasionally the steep drop beside the track is hidden by thick vegetation. Ghermu Phant has a high waterfall and in Syange (1080m) the trail crosses to the west bank of the Marsyangdi Khola on a suspension bridge. The trail then follows the river to the stone village of Jagat, perched strategically in a steep-sided valley and looking for all the world like the toll station for the Tibetan salt trade that it was. The trail descends before climbing through forest to Chamje (1400m).

DAY 3: CHAMJE TO BAGARCHHAP

The rocky trail crosses the Marsyangdi Khola again, then follows the valley steadily uphill to Tal (1700m). Here the valley has been filled by ancient landslides and the river meanders through the fertile flat land before disappearing under some huge boulders. Tal is the first village in the Manang district. The trail crosses the valley floor then climbs a stone stairway before dropping down to another crossing of the Marsyangdi (1850m). The trail continues to Dharapani (1920m), which is marked by a stone-entrance *chörten* typical of the Tibetan-influenced villages from here northward.

Bagarchhap (2160m) has flat-roofed stone houses of typical Tibetan design although the village is still in the transition zone before the dry highlands. A landslide roared through the centre of this village in late 1995 and managed to wipe out much of the village, including two lodges.

DAY 4: BAGARCHHAP TO CHAME

The trail, often rough and rocky, climbs over a ridge through Temang and then continues through forest of pine and fir to Kotho (2640m). Chame (2710m) is the headquarters of the Manang district and its buildings include many hotels, a health post and a bank. At the entrance to the village you pass a large *mani* wall with many prayer wheels. Walk to the left of the wall as the Buddhists do. There are fine views of Annapurna II

as you approach Chame, and two small hot springs are across the river. The route crosses the Marsyangdi Khola here.

DAY 5: CHAME TO PISANG

The trail runs through deep forest in a steep and narrow valley, and recrosses to the south bank of the Marsyangdi Khola at 3080m. Views include the first sight of the soaring Paungda Danda rock face, an awesome testament to the power of glacial erosion. The trail continues to climb to Pisang, which sprawls between 3240m and 3340m and has many lodges.

DAY 6: PISANG TO MANANG

The walk is now through the drier upper part of the Manang district, cut off from the full effect of the monsoon by the Annapurna Range. The people of the upper part of the Manang district herd yaks and raise crops for part of the year, but they also continue to enjoy special trading rights gained way back in 1784. Today they exploit these rights with shopping trips to Bangkok and Hong Kong where they buy electronic goods and other modern equipment to resell in Nepal.

From Pisang there are two trails, north and south of the Marsyangdi Khola, which meet up again at Mungji. The southern route via Hongde at 3420m, with its airstrip at 3325m, involves less climbing than the northern route via Ghyaru, though there are better views on the trail that follows the northern bank of the river.

The trail continues from Mungji (3480m) past the picturesque but partially hidden village of Bryaga (3500m) to nearby Manang (3570m) where there are a number of lodges and an HRA post.

DAY 7: ACCLIMATISATION DAY IN MANANG

It's important to spend a day acclimatising in Manang before pushing on to the Thorung La. There are some fine day walks and magnificent views around the village, and it's best to gain altitude during the day, returning to Manang to sleep. The view of Gangapurna glacier is terrific and can even be enjoyed with a warm Khukri rum from a bar. Manang is a trading centre and the villagers have cottoned on to what trekkers want. You can buy film, batteries, sun-

screen, Snickers and just about anything else a trekker could break, lose or crave. The Manangi's legendary trading skills are seen at their keenest here – buy with caution.

DAY 8: MANANG TO LETDAR

From Manang it's an ascent of nearly 2000m to the Thorung La. The trail climbs steadily through Tengi, leaving the Marsyangdi Valley and continuing along the Jarsang Khola valley. The vegetation becomes steadily sparser as you reach Letdar (4250m). The night in Letdar is important for acclimatisation.

DAY 9: LETDAR TO THORUNG PHEDI

Cross the river at 4310m and then climb up to Thorung Phedi (4420m). There are two hotels here – at the height of the season as many as 200 trekkers a day may cross over the Thorung La and beds can be in short supply. Some trekkers find themselves suffering from AMS at Phedi. If you find yourself in a similar condition you must retreat downhill; even the descent to Letdar can make a difference. Be sure to boil or treat water here; the sanitation in Letdar and Thorung Phedi is poor, and giardiasis is rampant. There is a satellite phone here that you can use for US\$5 per minute in an emergency.

DAY 10: THORUNG PHEDI TO MUKTINATH

Phedi means 'foot of the hill' and that's where it is, at the foot of the 5416m Thorung La. The trail climbs steeply but is regularly used and easy to follow. The altitude and snow can be problems; when the pass is snow-covered it is often impossible to cross. It takes about four to six hours to climb up to the pass, marked by *chörstens* and prayer flags. The effort is worthwhile as the view from the top – from the Annapurnas, along the Great Barrier to the barren Kali Gandaki valley – is magnificent. From the pass you have a tough 1600m descent to Muktinath (3710m).

Many start out for the pass at 3am. This is not necessary and is potentially dangerous due to the risk of frostbite if you are hanging around waiting in the cold snow for too long. A better starting time is 5am to 6am.

BACK TO POKHARA

The remaining six to seven days of the trek simply follow the Jomsom Trek route but in the opposite direction.

ANNAPURNA SANCTUARY TREK

Duration 10-14 days

Max elevation 4095m

Best season October to November

Start/Finish Phedi

This trek goes into the centre of the Annapurna Range, a magnificent amphitheatre on a staggering scale. Glaciers and soaring peaks and an eerie atmosphere create an unparalleled mountain experience.

At one time this trek was a real expedition into a wilderness area, but now there is a string of lodges that operate during the trekking season. The return trip can take as little as 10 or 11 days but it's best appreciated in 14 days. The walk to the base camp can be tacked on as a side trip from the Jomsom or Annapurna Circuit treks.

There are several possible routes to the sanctuary, all meeting at Chhomrong. The diversion from the Jomsom and Annapurna Circuit Treks is made from near Ghorapani to Ghandruk.

Access: Pokhara to Phedi

You can take a bus (Rs 30, 1½ hours) or taxi from Pokhara a short distance along the Baglung Hwy to Phedi, a cluster of shacks. The start of the trail is outside the Dhampus Mailee Hotel.

The Trek

DAY 1: PHEDI TO TOLKA

From Phedi the trail climbs steeply to Dhampus (1750m), which stretches for several kilometres along the ridge from 1580m to 1700m and has a number of widely

spaced hotels. Theft is a real problem in Dhampus, so take care.

The trail climbs to Pothana (1990m) and descends steeply through a forest towards Bichok. It finally emerges in the Modi Khola valley and continues to drop to Tolka (1810m).

DAY 2: TOLKA TO CHHOMRONG

From Tolka the trail descends a long stone staircase, and then follows a ridge to the Gurung village of Landruk (1620m). Ten minutes from here the path splits – north takes you to Chhomrong and the sanctuary, or you can head downhill towards Ghandruk.

The sanctuary trail turns up the Modi Khola valley to Naya Pul (1340m). It then continues from Naya Pul up to Jhinu Danda (1750m) and up again to Taglung (2190m), where it joins the Ghandruk to Chhomrong trail.

Chhomrong, at 2210m, is the last permanent settlement in the valley. This large and sprawling Gurung village has a good choice of hotels, and an ACAP office. Ask about trail conditions in the sanctuary when you register there.

DAY 3: CHHOMRONG TO BAMBOO

The trail drops down to the Chhomrong Khola, and then climbs to Sinuwa and on to Kuldi (2470m) where there is an abandoned ACAP checkpoint. The trek now enters the upper Modi Khola valley, where ACAP controls the location and number of lodges and limits their size. If the lodges are full, you may have to sleep in the dining room, or perhaps the lodge owner can erect a tent for

DANGERS ON THE SANCTUARY TRAIL

There is significant danger of avalanches along the route to the Annapurna Sanctuary between Doban and Machhapuchhare Base Camp. Trekkers have died and trekking parties have been stranded in the sanctuary for days, the trail blocked by tonnes of ice and snow. Always check with the ACAP office in Chhomrong for a report on current trail conditions, and do not proceed into the sanctuary if there has been recent heavy rain or snow.

There is also a theft racket throughout the Annapurna region, particularly in Dhampus and Tikhedhunga, but it can happen anywhere. Thieves often cut the tents of trekkers and remove valuable items during the night. Trekking groups have taken to pitching their tents in a circle like an old-time wagon train and posting a guard with a lighted lantern throughout the night. If you stay in a hotel, be sure that you know who is sharing the room with you, and lock the door whenever you go out – even for a moment (and that includes going to the toilet). The thieves watch everyone in order to decide who has something worth taking or is likely to be careless. If necessary they will wait patiently all night to make their move.

YETI! *Bradley Mayhew*

Along with the equally slippery notion of Shangri-la, the yeti is one of Nepal's most famous cultural exports, occupying a hotly debated biological niche somewhere between zoology and folk religion.

Before you throw your arms up in the air and storm out of the room, bear in mind that the pro yeti camp has some serious proponents. In 1938 mountaineer Bill Tilman tracked yeti footprints for over a mile. Eric Shipton photographed a yeti print on the Menling/Menlungtse Glacier in 1951. Edmund Hillary led an expedition in 1960 to track the yeti, as did Chris Bonington in 1986 and even travel writer Bruce Chatwin. Reinhold Messner claimed to have seen a yeti in Tibet in 1986 and wrote a book about the subject (*My Quest for the Yeti*).

There are dozens of cases of local sightings. Villages in the Rongbuk region of Tibet apparently discovered a drowned yeti corpse in 1958. In 1998 the official police report on the murder of a Sherpa woman near Dole on the Gokyo trek in Nepal cited 'yeti attack' as the cause of death! Japan's most celebrated yeti-hunter is Yoshiteru Takahashi, who in 2003 claimed to have found a yeti cave on the slopes of Dhaulagiri (his camera froze before he could take a photo...).

The Rolwaling region seems to be the heartland of yeti sightings, followed closely by the Khumbu. Trekkers on the Everest Base Camp trek can still see the yeti scalp at Khumjung Monastery (actually made from the skin of serow, a type of goat/antelope), though the yeti hand of Pangboche, said to have been that of a mummified lama, has mysteriously disappeared. The region's 'yeti pelts' actually belong to the Himalayan blue bear.

The word 'yeti' comes from the Tibetan *yeh-teh*, or 'man of the rocky/snowy places'; the alternative Tibetan names are the *migyū* and *mehton kangmi*, or 'abominable snowman'. First-hand accounts of the yeti describe it having reddish fur, a conical head, a high-pitched cry and strange body odour that smells of garlic (sounds like my friend Andre...), but a sign at Khumjung Monastery outlines the different types of yeti in more subtle and, more importantly, cultural terms. The ape like *dre-ma* and *tel-ma* are messengers of calamity, it says, while the *chu-ti* moves on all fours and preys on goats, sheep and yaks. Worst of all is the *mi-te*, a man-eater, six to eight feet tall, with 'a very bad temperament'. Consider yourself warned.

you. In winter, it is common to find snow from this point on. Continue on to Bamboo (2310m), which is a collection of three hotels. This stretch of trail has leeches early and late in the trekking season.

DAY 4: BAMBOO TO HIMALAYAN HOTEL

The trail climbs to Bamboo, then through rhododendron forests to Doban (2540m) and on to Himalayan Hotel at 2840m. This stretch of the trail passes several avalanche chutes. If you arrive early, it's possible to continue on to Deorali to make the following day easier.

DAY 5: HIMALAYAN HOTEL TO MACHHAPUCHHARE BASE CAMP

From Himalayan Hotel it's on to Hinko (3100m). There is accommodation in Deorali (3170m), on the ridge above Hinko. This is the stretch of trail that seems to be most subject to avalanches.

At Machhapuchhare Base Camp (which isn't really a base camp since climbing the

mountain is not permitted), at 3700m, there is seasonal accommodation available. These hotels may not be open, depending on whether the innkeeper and the supplies have been able to reach the hotel through the avalanche area.

Be alert to signs of altitude sickness before heading off to Annapurna Base Camp.

DAY 6: MACHHAPUCHHARE BASE CAMP TO ANNAPURNA BASE CAMP

The climb to the Annapurna Base Camp at 4130m takes about two hours, and is best done early in the day before clouds roll in and make visibility a problem. If there is snow, the trail may be difficult to follow. There are four lodges here, which can get ridiculously crowded at the height of the season. Dawn is best observed from the glacial moraine a short stroll from your cosy lodge.

BACK TO POKHARA

On the return trip you can retrace your steps back to Phedi, or divert from Chhomrong

to Ghandruk and on to Ghorapani to visit Poon Hill and follow the Annapurna Circuit or the Jomsom Trek route back to Pokhara.

The Ghorapani to Ghandruk walk is a popular way of linking the Annapurna Sanctuary Trek with treks up the Kali Gandaki valley. It's also used for shorter loop walks out of Pokhara (see p268 for more information).

OTHER TREKS

The treks described earlier in this chapter are used by the vast majority of trekkers. Yet there are alternatives that will take you to areas still relatively unvisited: the Kanchenjunga Base Camps, Makalu Base Camp, Mustang, Dolpo, and Rara Lake treks are some of these. There are no lodges on these treks, so you will need to make arrangements through a trekking company and pay a trekking permit fee. At the time of writing, all of these treks, except the Mustang trek, passed through 'Maoist country'; check with your embassy for the latest travel advice.

For information on the popular Annapurna Skyline Trek see p269. See Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya* for the complete story on trekking here. It has comprehensive advice on equipment selection, an excellent health and safety sec-

tion, and comprehensive route descriptions not only of the popular treks covered more briefly in this book, but also of a number of interesting but less heavily used routes.

If you're going right off the beaten track to explore remote areas like Makalu and Kanchenjunga in the east or Jumla and Dolpo in the west, you must be very self-sufficient. In these relatively untouched areas there is probably very little surplus food for sale and the practice of catering to Western trekkers has not yet developed.

Treks in more remote areas are camping treks that must be arranged by a trekking company; the company will arrange the permit.

Area	Fee (\$US)
Everest, Annapurna & Langtang	no permit required
Kanchenjunga & Lower Dolpo	\$10 per week for first four weeks, \$20 per week after that
Upper Mustang & Upper Dolpo	\$700 for 10 days, then \$70 per day
Manaslu	\$75 per week low season, \$90 high season
Humla	\$90 for seven days, then \$15 per day