

Himalayan Travel Guides

ADVENTURES in NEPAL



Marit Bakke and Olav Myrholt

Cover photos:

Front page: Chisopani on the Royal Trek, Middle Hills. Photo: Olav Myrholt

Back page: Curious kids on the Humla offering 'Namaste'. Photo: Amrit Ale

Adventures in Nepal

Discovering the country and the people



Marit Bakke and Olav Myrholt





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Preface

There are thousands of tour operators in Nepal and around the world, keen on sending travellers to Nepal, and trying to tell you what is best for you. It will help both your peace of mind and the health of tourism in Nepal if you arrive equipped with knowledge, critical awareness and sound expectations. This book is written with the aim of assisting your planning and offering realistic perspectives on what you can achieve within the time available and depending on your interests and level of fitness.

We hope this book will inspire you to visit Nepal and, once there, be an informed tourist when meeting people and experiencing the country's diverse cultures and traditions. In Nepal you will build up a rich store of memories from which you can always draw, yet can never exhaust. This book is also an attempt to promote a healthier, more responsible and sustainable tourism industry for the good of Nepal's development and its inhabitants.

Our aim is to spark your interest in less-visited areas, take the pressure off congested routes, and thereby help to spread the employment and income that tourism brings. We have catalogued many treks, tours and non-motorised adventures throughout Nepal. You will not find a 'Top 10' list because that would restrict your options – we want you to look beyond the main icons of Nepal, such as the Everest area, Annapurna and Langtang. Areas outside the core regions do not get the attention they deserve, and visitors miss out on fabulous experiences and attractions. By the time you turn the last page of *Adventures in Nepal*, you should be ready to search the bookshops and websites for more specific information and maps. And then you can confidently book your ticket and travel to Nepal.

Part I offers a brief introduction to Nepal's geography, environment and climate, its people, political history, culture and religion.

Part II touches on the social, economic and cultural vulnerability of Nepal as a developing country and how tourists can contribute to change this condition.

Part III gives an introduction to Nepal as a tourist destination, focusing on information and recommendations when planning a visit as well as advice for socially and culturally appropriate behaviour during and after travels in Nepal. We have integrated some aspects of the mountain trekking culture in our home country, Norway, where environmental and sustainable concerns have been prominent ever since the Norwegian Trekking Association was established in 1868.

Part IV presents brief descriptions of more than one hundred tours, treks and events in Nepal. Many of them have been popular for decades. More importantly, we want to draw attention to alternative, less-known trails and treks in areas where few tourists go.

With about 50 visits between us, the authors first came to Nepal because of the mountains, returning later mainly because of its people. We hope you will do the same – experience, enjoy and respect nature and the people.

Oslo, Norway, November 1, 2016

Marit Bakke and Olav Myrholt

Acknowledgments

Many people have been involved in making this book come true.

We thank the Norwegian Ambassador to Nepal since 2013, Kjell Tormod Pettersen, for initiating this book project, aimed at countering some negative aspects of commercialisation of the trekking industry in Nepal and offering alternative and wider perspectives for foreigners and Nepalis who seek adventures in the hills and mountains of Nepal.

We are grateful to the Norway-Nepal Association Board for its endorsement of our proposal, and the decision to publish this book. The Norwegian Embassy in Kathmandu facilitated deeply appreciated funding to cover the cost of publication. Pawan Shakya and Santosh Maharjan at Himalayan Map House have taken good care of layout and printing. Also Prajapati Sandesh has assisted with the layout.

David Durkan was actively involved in the initial planning of the project and has given valuable comments during the writing process. We also thank Anuradha and Øyvind Amundsgaard, Øyvind Bruland, Hari Dhakal, Kanak Dixit, Lena Fauske, Susan Höivik, Ann Jones, Arjun Karki, Yogi Kayastha, Gabrielle Kerr, Leyla Kutlu, Manohar Pradhan and Madhusudan Subedi for reading the manuscript and providing valuable comments.

In 2012 the Norway-Nepal Association launched an electronic version of the book *NEPAL: Om landet og folket* (NEPAL: The country and its people). Marit Bakke and Olav Myrholt were in the editorial group, together with Lena Fauske and Annelies Ollieuz. The positive response to the 2012 publication encouraged Marit and Olav to retain much of its structure and content, but the text has been thoroughly revised and updated for this publication. Part IV is completely new.

The photographer's name is acknowledged with each picture. Here we wish to thank everyone who donated their photographs. There are also some photos taken by Knut Palmstrøm. In 1957 he spent five months in Kathmandu as a United Nations representative, assessing labor market conditions in Nepal, and he also took many photos. A few years ago his son, Arild Palmstrøm, generously donated his father's photo collection to the Norway-Nepal Association. This is the first time some of these unique photos have been published.

Apart from the layout and printing, this book is produced entirely on a voluntary basis. We have done our best to ensure accurate information, and we apologise for any mistakes. However, we cannot take legal responsibility for any problems that may arise.

Why visit Nepal?

What is ‘adventure tourism’? It can mean base-jumping off cliffs in parachutes, bungee jumping from a high bridge or climbing Everest – but it also encompasses much more. Adventures involve going beyond your everyday realm and experiences, being challenged physically and mentally, and creating memories. Nepal has a rich cultural heritage that is worth exploring, and hosts a range of spectacular natural wonders found only in Nepal. In the course of not so many kilometres you can go from subtropical flora and fauna, via alpine valleys and desert landscapes, all the way to the top of the planet’s highest snow-covered peaks. This book, aimed at all those wishing to visit Nepal, takes a broad perspective: we see adventure tourism as a self-sustaining movement, rooted in nature and culture.

Trekking and mountaineering in Nepal today developed from traditional European mountaineering, where experienced climbers came to Nepal primarily to scale the Himalayan peaks. Research and scientific expeditions ensued in their wake. All this necessitated a trail network, a support apparatus with guides, tents, kitchens and porters to transport equipment and food. The hikers followed, using expedition-style practices, staying in tents and employing local porters and guides. The basic trails were already there: for centuries, they had linked villages, enabling long-distance traders and herders to move within the country and between Tibet, Nepal and India.

It was the early backpackers crossing Asia and the hippies who, during the 1960s and 1970s, made Nepal popular as a destination for other visitors, not only for mountain climbers and trekkers. Many backpackers stopped for a respite from the harsh trails, some of them establishing now well-known guesthouses, hotels, cafés and second-hand bookshops. The ‘flower children’ came searching for their true souls – some using various drugs in the small, dark cafés of Kathmandu’s Freak Street, others through religious meditation.



Bhaktapur in 1957.

📷 Knut Palmstøm

From the 1980s tourism grew into a serious industry, expanding to areas outside the Kathmandu Valley. The profits were invested in education for Nepal’s children, for upgrading private homes to lodges, and eventually building specialised lodges. These lodges – along with better trails and roads extending further into the mountains, small airstrips, and a wealth of guidebooks and articles – contributed to a substantial growth in the tourist and trekking industry. Today, you see few hippies in Freak Street, but many more tourists. In 2013, 797,616 visitors came to Nepal, the top five countries being India, China, the USA, Thailand, and the UK. The average length of stay was 12 days (*Nepal Tourism Statistics 2013*). Unfortunately, urbanisation and modernisation have resulted in more cars and motorcycles in the streets, creating chaos and air pollution. Political instability, the occasional strikes and natural disasters are further challenges for Nepal’s tourist industry.



Celebrating the new year, Thimi, Bhaktapur. 📷 HMMH



Sunbathing with grandchild.

© *Punya*

Mountain trekking and climbing have always involved a degree of risk, irrespective of where it is practised. Nature can be both a beautiful and a harsh mistress, setting her own terms and conditions, and repeatedly demonstrating that *she* has the upper hand – often with tragic consequences. The visitor is well advised to amass information, experience, and competence – whether for trekking the trails or climbing the highest peaks. Sadly, the trekking and climbing industry, from clients to agencies to government departments, sometimes behaves as if these time-honoured practices can be ignored.

In 2014, two avalanche and blizzard disasters in Nepal ended with approximately 70 people dead and hundreds suffering. The first disaster took place on 18 April. While carrying food and equipment up the Khumbu Icefall on Mount Everest, 16 Nepali support staff died in an avalanche and many were injured. The avalanche left families without a main wage earner and 32 children with no father. Not one Western guide, tour leader or client was in the danger zone: they

were in nearby comfortable lodges or safely asleep in their tents, while Nepali staff did the work, faced the danger and paid the price.

The second tragedy happened on 14 October during the peak trekking season. A heavy snowstorm followed by avalanches hit trekkers in the Nar Phu Valley and on the way across the 5,415m Thorung La Pass on the popular Annapurna Circuit. About 50 people died and many were seriously frostbitten, snow blinded, and injured – tourists and Nepalis alike. In fact, the total numbers could have been considerably lower if weather warnings had been received and trekking groups had been prevented from proceeding further. Warnings were indeed issued, but got no further than Kathmandu. The billions of Nepali rupees extracted from Trekkers' Information Management System (TIMS), national park permits and climbing fees failed to improve safety.

These accidents led to intense discussions about the state of tourism in Nepal – mountaineering and high-mountain trekking in particular. The accidents hurt Nepal as a country and, even more importantly, the thousands of Nepalis whose livelihoods depend on work in the tourism industry. The country's authorities as well as the tourist and trekking industry have a clear responsibility here.

On 25 April and 12 May 2015, disastrous earthquakes with strong aftershocks onwards shook Nepal. Although only about 10 per cent of the trekking areas were hit, tourism dwindled drastically. At the time of writing some of the trekking infrastructure like lodges and trails in most of Central Nepal is still being reconstructed, and most main routes are scheduled to be ready for the 2017 spring trekking season.

Now is the time for Nepalis and foreign visitors alike to mobilise. As tourists, we can contribute to a healthier and more sustainable industry that benefits the local people in the short and long term, and at the same time experience the country ourselves.

Part I

NEPAL

Geographic regions

To the local people, the high mountains of the Himalayas are the home of countless gods and deities. They have acted as both physical barriers and magnets for outsiders for thousands of years. Yet, the mountains are but a small part of Nepal's geographic tapestry. The differences in height, from less than 100 m in the lowlands to peaks over 8,000 m, produce a geography and climate that influence economic, social and cultural conditions in a land of about 30 million people.

The standard work on the geographic and natural aspects of the country remains *Nepal*, written by the Swiss geologist Toni Hagen, published in 1961, and reprinted in 1998 and 2008. In the 1950s Hagen was given permission to travel unhindered, and he virtually walked the whole country to complete the first geological survey of Nepal. The overview below is based partly on Toni Hagen's descriptions.

Nepal: Main geographic and ecological divisions

Regions from south to north	Description	Significant crops, animals and vegetation
Terai	The Terai is a flat lowland strip averaging 200 m above sea level, bordering India. It was originally covered by jungle and tall sal tree forests, and, until the 1950s, sparsely inhabited by the indigenous Tharu people. With the control of malaria, immigrants from the hills and India settled here and cleared the jungle for agriculture. Formerly considered a wild borderland, Terai is now the food-basket of the country, and home to a mixed population of about 13 million.	Rice, jute, wheat, sugarcane, mustard, legumes. Rhino, elephant, tiger, fish. Sal forests, jungle.
Chure and Siwalik	From the Terai, the first Himalayan foothills rise to a low chain of brush-clad hills called the Chure, providing rather unproductive, sloping and gravelly land. This is where the major Himalayan rivers enter the plains and split into many branches. Behind the Chure Hills the more populous Siwalik Hills rise to approximately 1,200 m. Between the Chure and the Siwaliks lies the Inner Terai with broad and fertile valleys.	Rice, wheat, mustard, mango, banana. Leopard, monkey. Subtropical shrubs and scraggly forests.

Mahabharat	The Mahabharat is a fertile, densely forested mountain range interspersed with deep valleys running east-west across the whole country, varying in height from 1,000 to 3,000 m. Throughout history, these hills and mountains provided a barrier against the south, preventing invasions and resisting cultural changes as well as providing a safe haven for population groups escaping upheavals in India. Important trade routes once crossed the Mahabharat between India and Tibet. It was not until 1956 that a road was built between the plains and Kathmandu.	Maize, guava, millet, banana, ginger, mustard, cardamom. Leopard, musk deer, monkey, cattle, goat, buffalo and fowl. Broadleaf forests, oak, bamboo and rhododendron.
The Middle Hills	The Middle Hills or the Midlands cover a maze of hills and river valleys, the term sometimes including the Mahabharat. This became the heartland of modern Nepal. The ancestors of Indian ethnic groups that fled from the Indian plains settled in the lower regions, eventually dominating much of today's Nepal. Tibeto-Burman speaking people had earlier moved in from the north and east. Numerous other population groups and cultures mixed to create Nepal's unique multi-cultural mosaic. The agricultural terraces of the Middle Hills are among the world's greatest engineering feats, and produce a wide variety of crops. Elevations here range from subtropical, fertile valleys at 500 m to alpine hills and mountains up to above 3,000 m. The population is about 15 million.	Banana, guava, maize, rice, legumes, millet. Leopard, water buffaloes, barking deer, goat and fowl. Subtropical mixed broadleaf forests, oak, bamboo.
The Himalaya	The main Himalayan mountain chain runs along the Nepal-Tibet border with typical elevations of 5,000 to 7,000 m, and with eight peaks above 8,000 m, the highest being Everest at 8,848 m. The Himalaya consists of a series of mountain massifs, divided by deep and narrow valleys, with raging rivers that run from the Tibetan plateau towards the Indian plains. The Kali Gandaki gorge between Annapurna and Dhaulagiri is the deepest valley in the world. Interdependent population groups, mostly of Tibeto-Burmese origins have settled in the slopes of these massifs, the southern foothills being the most fertile.	Millet, potato, buckwheat, barley. Sheep, chyangra goats, zopko, mules and donkeys. Vultures, musk deer, blue sheep, bear. Alpine brush and heathers, bamboo, pine trees, rhododendrons, primula.
Inner Himalaya	The area behind the Himalayan massifs consists of high valleys, cold plains and snowy mountains. Ecologically the area north of the main Himalayan range is considered high-altitude desert. The Tibetan Plateau proper extends into Nepal, notably in Humla, Dolpo and the Mustang Districts. Some of the inner valleys are deemed <i>beyul</i> – mystical hidden valleys of beauty, peace, and refuge. The Inner Himalaya has elevations from 2,400 and up to above 5,000 m. The population consists mainly of 12 different Tibetan ancestries (including Sherpa) following lamaist belief systems; they have historically moved in from Tibet to the north and east in Nepal. Livelihoods depend on semi-nomadic animal husbandry and trade along with sparse grain-based agriculture, today also supplemented with earnings from tourism.	Barley, potato, turnip, radish. Chyangra goats, yak, horses. Snow leopard, blue sheep. Low brush, birch, sea buckthorn, juniper.

Climate

The Himalaya serves as a barrier between the dry plateau of Tibet and the summer monsoon rains that come from the Indian Ocean to the south. The monsoon in Nepal usually starts at the end of May and gradually stops at the end of September, although in eastern Nepal it may continue longer. Nepal is considered as the central part of the Himalayan mountain chain. The further west you go, the drier it gets, while eastern Nepal seems permanently green and lush by comparison.

Generally speaking, the best time for visitors, especially for trekking and mountaineering, is from October to the beginning of December, and from middle February through April. The main mountaineering season on the high Himalayan peaks is May, a pre-monsoon time when conditions are very hot and dusty at lower elevations. The autumn usually provides a more stable weather pattern and very clear days, but dust increasingly fills the air during late winter and spring. Winter sets in late November or December and continues to early March. The Nepalis themselves operate with six distinct seasons:

<i>Basanta</i> (spring)	mid-March – May
<i>Grishma</i> (summer)	mid-May – July
<i>Barsha</i> (monsoon)	mid-July – September
<i>Sharad</i> (early autumn)	mid-September – November
<i>Hemanta</i> (late autumn)	mid-November – January
<i>Shishir</i> (winter)	mid-January – March

From the 1970s, global warming has led to glaciers shrinking, a process that is accelerating. Evidence is accumulating that parts of the 'Third Pole' (the Himalayas and Hindu Kush) are melting. As the glaciers retreat they leave behind giant moraines of rock and ice that create natural dams, where the meltwater builds up to form large lakes. These build-ups have already led to serious floods, landslides and loss of life and property. Adding to the problem, some glaciers are melting from within, before collapsing and causing floods (<http://www.icimod.org/>). Melting snow in the Himalaya feeds the Ganges, Indus and Brahmaputra Rivers, on which millions of people depend. These regional climate changes can have serious consequences also beyond the borders of Nepal.

People of Nepal

Ethnic groups

The people of Nepal can roughly be divided into two main groups: *Tibeto-Burman* and *Indo-Aryan*. In addition, there are a few small indigenous ethnic groups of uncertain or mixed origins. Officially there are about 105 different ethnic groups (www.welcomenepal.com). Below is a brief overview of some of the larger and better-known population groups.

The high mountains, poor roads and paths, and long distances between populated areas mean that many groups have been isolated, and some still are. One result is that many groups still practise their own language/dialect, of which there are at least 90 in Nepal today (www.welcomenepal.com). Many groups have their own very special social norms as well as distinctive religious and cultural practices.



Traditional Hukkah.



📷 *Punya*

Newar

Newars are believed to be the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, and the only ethnic group in Nepal with urban origins. The Newari language and syncretic tantric religion remain strong parts of their identity. Newaris are famed as skilled workers in wood, metal and stone handicraft, and are the creators of the Nepali stupa and the Asian pagoda. Much Tibetan jewelry has been made by Newars, and to some extent the Tamangs. Today, the Newars predominate in Nepal's urban areas as business people, administrators and academics.



📷 *HMH*

Madhesis

Madhesis are Nepali citizens of plains origin. There is a continuation of the same population across the border to India, but they are not defined as Madhesis. The mother tongues of the Madhesis are Maithili, Bhojpuri, Avadi and Hindi. Madhesis are primarily agriculturalists, labourers, trades- and service people. The tropical, flat landscape, the open border and cultural, religious and political reference-points as well as class and caste relations give the Terai strong links to India, yet the Madhesis are proud to be Nepalis. Not counted among the ethnic Madhesis are the Tharu and several other distinct ethnic groups who originally lived in the Terai, such as Nepali Muslim, Satar, Rajbanshi, and Dhimals. The Licchavis, pre-Aryans who established early kingdoms in the Hills came from the Madhesis.



📷 *HMH*

Tharu

Tharus are indigenous people who live in the Terai and Inner Terai. They are divided into a few subgroups, but have retained a common identity in the face of land grabs and oppression by other ethnic groups who moved into Terai in the 1950s, exploiting their land management and unique social system. Many Tharus still suffer from debt burdens and the remnants of a slave labour system called kamaiya. They are mostly agriculturalists, from an untraceable but mixed past. They are statuesque people with a strong pride in terms of culture and arts. Tharus have a degree of natural tolerance to malaria which enabled them to live in the Terai before DDT and malaria-mosquito control efforts opened the land to immigration from India and the Nepali Hills.



📷 *HMH*

Kiratis

Kiratis comprise groups in the east: Rai, Sunuwar, Lepcha, Limbu, and their subgroups. By the Middle Ages, a strong Kirati kingdom had been established in the east, having its own written language and religion (Kirati) with far-eastern Himalayan roots. The Kiratis expanded westwards and settled early in the Kathmandu Valley. Today, they form about half the population of the easternmost hill regions, retaining a strong sense of identity. They are mostly agriculturalists, cash croppers and traders, and are increasingly involved in administration and service.



📷 *Olav Myrholt*

Hill Brahmin and Chhetri

Brahmin and Chhetri castes constitute the most numerous population groups in Nepal, traditionally living in the Middle Hills. Historically moving in from the west, they are of Indo-Aryan origin, also called Pahari or Khas, and brought with them Hinduism and the caste system as they fled the successive historical invasions of India. They introduced advanced rice cultivation to Nepal. Since the unification of Nepal in 1768, the Brahmins and Chhetris have, based on their caste position, constituted the political, religious and administrative elite, to some degree sharing this position with Newar clans. Brahmins and Chhetris established Nepali as a national language, which became the lingua franca after the unification. They have traditionally held the perceived 'true' values of Nepal, including having a royal family.



📷 Olav Myrholt

Dalit

Dalits are ethnically similar to the Brahmin and Chhetri, of Indo-Aryan origin, and speaking Nepali. However, for centuries they have, due to the caste ethos of ritual impurity, been subjected to oppression and exploitation. They have been relegated to performing tasks and jobs that are considered ritually unclean, physically demanding, manual in nature, and of very low status. Family names tend to indicate which subcaste a Dalit belongs to, and thus often also his/her ancestral profession. Collectively, the Dalits are Nepal's worst-off population group.



📷 Olav Myrholt

Gurung

Gurungs traditionally live in the Pokhara and Gorkha regions, often in relatively large villages south of the Annapurna and Manaslu Massifs. An ethic of hard work, a collaborative spirit, and tolerance has brought many of them from a tough life as hill farmers and animal herders to recruitment as Gorkha (Gurkha) soldiers, and to work in modern professions, overseas work, and increasingly into education and business.



📷 Olav Myrholt

Bhotya

Historically, the Bhotya lived in the Inner Himalaya, moving into Nepal from eastern Tibet. They consist of 12 distinct groups and dialects. Their dress, religion and livelihoods remain in typical Tibetan variations. One Bhotya group, the Sherpas, have become famous because of their involvement in the mountaineering industry. Sherpa means 'people from the east': they migrated south from Tibet during the 16–18th centuries. Many Tibetans proper have settled in Nepal since the 1950s as refugees.



📷 Punya

Tamang

Tamangs constitute the second largest of the Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups, and include several subgroups. Traditionally they have lived south of the Ganesh Himal and around Kathmandu, into the hills and mountain areas and extending eastward toward Ramechhap. The Tamangs are skilled farmers and artisans. They practice a variant of Buddhism and dress mostly in highland style.



📷 HMM

Magar

From their looks and livelihoods, the Magars are hard to distinguish from the Gurungs, and they often share villages and social life. Apart from the Khas, Brahmin, Chhetri and Dalit, Magars constitute the most numerous ethnic group in Nepal, mostly living in the Mahabharat Hills and in areas west to the Bheri River watershed. Like the Gurungs, they spread eastwards with the unification campaign, and settled on land granted for their participation as soldiers during the latter half of 18th century. They are generally Hindu-oriented and speak mostly Nepali in addition to their own language.



📷 HMM

Thakali

Originally from the Kali Gandaki Gorge in Mustang district, but many have migrated south to the trading towns and Kathmandu. Once they held the monopoly of the Tibetan salt trade to India, but this has ended. Many continue to be involved in modern travel and transport. They are savvy business people, investing in agriculture, food processing, land, loans, tourism, and work as government contractors.

The Caste System and Inequalities

The caste system originated in the old Vedic Indian culture and came into Nepal with the introduction of Hinduism. Under the caste system positions in the hierarchy are determined by birth; each caste group is traditionally linked to specific occupations based on considerations of ritual purity. According to one theory, occupation-based differentiation in Nepal was the consequence of Hindu Khas people moving from the west; reluctant to do certain manual work, they looked for solutions to cope with tasks they felt below their dignity. Thus, the Tibeto-Burman groups of the Middle Hills and the indigenous groups were basically co-opted into a Sanskritised social hierarchy and belief system. Over time certain of these practices have been assimilated into some Buddhist and animistic communities, today presenting a pragmatic but confusing mix of religious practices.

The ascribed position within the caste system often induces a certain degree of fatalism. In everyday language Nepalis tend to speak of three main *jaats* (caste groupings): 1) the *twice-born*, whose males can wear the holy thread; 2) the *matwali*, those who drink alcohol, and 3) *paani nachaalne*, those who may not give water to higher castes. However, with rising education levels, better communication and higher income for many, the social barriers formed by caste and the role of gender and the traditional *jaats* have decreased. Caste rituals and practices are more dominant in the countryside than in the large towns and cities, especially in western Nepal. Even in urban areas, the Brahmins and Chhetris predominate in higher political, administrative and business positions. Dalits are still discriminated against: for instance, they often must wash their own dishes in public eating places, unlike other castes or tourists.

Muluki Ain or the Civil Code of 1854 confirmed and strengthened the political and economic dominance of the higher castes. In 1959, caste was officially abolished in Nepal, and, in 1963, discrimination based on caste was made officially illegal. However, there is still widespread discrimination of certain ethnic groups.

Until recently, marriage across caste and ethnic group lines was not accepted. While still frowned upon, such social barriers are becoming less rigid today. Low castes and some ethnic groups, and the Muslim minority, constitute the majority among the very poor. Roughly, the three *jaats* mentioned above reflect an economic and social class hierarchy that is slowly becoming less important as their cultures become more integrated. Recently, the Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups have tended to rise in socio-economic status, while Hill Dalits and Madhesi Dalits have remained behind. People use personal networks, real and ritual relatives, acquaintances and other door openers to override the odds against them and achieve their goals. This is aptly termed *aphno manchhe* – ‘my own people’: even a very poor person of generally low perceived social status may have friends in high places who can offer benefits or positions. Being able to gain such access is the key that separates the destitute from the rest.

Major discrimination is practised between boys and girls, men and women. Most families pray for a boy to be born, because, according to Hindu tradition, he will look after the parents when they are old, while daughters move to the husband’s home and look after his parents. This is one reason many Hindu families still choose not to invest in education for girls. The strong wish for a son can also be explained by the Hindu tradition that when a parent dies the cremation pyre must be lit by a son to ensure that the departed will enter heaven.

The ‘People’s War’ of 1996–2006 challenged many traditional social barriers and differences. However, people’s attitudes have remained very traditional and paternalistic. Women and girls receive poorer schooling, poorer food, poorer health services, and they have to work far harder than men. There is a general aura of shame around being a woman. One major contributing factor is that women are regarded as ritually *impure* during their menstrual period and during and after childbirth. Particularly in western Nepal, they are forced to sleep in the animal sheds or stay in designated huts, called *chhaupati goths*. Girls, who already get less

schooling, do not attend school during this time, and some female teachers have been banned from teaching when menstruating. The lack of toilet facilities at many rural schools is part of the problem.

Refugees in Nepal

Nepal has no legislation concerning refugees, nor has it signed international treaties protecting refugees. And yet, refugees from Bhutan and Tibet are living in Nepal, and an increasing number of refugees from other countries see Nepal as a transit place to other destinations.

Bhutanese refugees

In the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, several thousand people moved from Nepal to southern Bhutan where they started tilling the land. They are called Lhotsampa, 'people from the southern border'. During the 1980s the Bhutanese government gradually restricted access to land, education, jobs and citizenship. By the early 1990s, life had become difficult for the Lhotsampas. As a result, by 2000, some 108,000 Nepali-speaking people had fled or had been forced into India, from where they were transported to the UN-run refugee camps in the Jhapa and Morang districts of eastern Nepal. Since neither India nor Nepal wanted to grant

them collective settlement status, many of them have gradually been settled in other countries, mostly the USA. Others have, through marriage and business, filtered into Nepali society.

Tibetan refugees

About 20,000 Tibetans live in Nepal, mainly in Kathmandu and Pokhara. There are also a few other refugee communities closer to the Tibetan border. The majority sought asylum on political or humanitarian grounds after the Chinese takeover of Tibet in the 1950s. They still trickle in, to escape persecution. Tibetan refugees are subject to restrictions and arrest, and the Nepali authorities have even closed the offices of some of the organisations that have helped these refugees, including the office of the Dalai Lama. Tibetan refugees are denied official asylum, formal residence and social benefits.

Tibetan refugees in Nepal are highly visible. Their cultural and social institutions, and the religious centres of the Tibetan Buddhist (primarily *Vajrayana*) traditions attract many visitors from abroad. Tibetan food has gained a following, and Tibetan arts and crafts are very popular among Nepalis and foreign visitors alike. The Red Cross has established centres in Kathmandu and Pokhara, where Tibetan refugees weave carpets and sell the finished products.



Young Tibetans in Kathmandu.

Political History

Important historical events

Pre-historic Nepal	The first pre-historic traces of early but unknown modern human settlers in Nepal have been found in Inner Terai valleys and the adjacent Siwalik Hills. The finds appear to be Early Stone Age, showing that early settlers came into the forested valleys of today's Nepal. There is archaeological evidence of settlements in the Kathmandu Valley as far back as 11,000 years ago.
Ancient Nepal	Western parts of Nepal were originally populated by indigenous Himalayan tribes. During the 2nd millennium BC people moved from northern India to this area. There are interesting convergences in science, scripture and mythology on the early settlement history. One of the first known historical persons of Nepal was Gautama Buddha, generally held to have been born 563 BC in Lumbini in the Terai. Recent research dates his birth to around 480 BC.
Historical Nepal begins	In 268 BC the Indian Emperor Ashoka established an empire in northern India that lasted until 231 BC, strongly influencing Nepal, and was instrumental in bringing Buddhism into Nepal. Four Ashokan stupas are located in Patan in the Kathmandu Valley, indicating that the Emperor visited in the third century BC.
7th century BC–3rd century AD	The Kirati dynasty, originally an Eastern Himalayan indigenous group, created the earliest documented state formation in Nepal. At their peak they controlled much of what is Nepal today. Successive waves of Khas immigrants from northwestern parts of the subcontinent and the formation of small states in the west confronted the Kiratis and they withdrew to their current areas of Eastern Nepal. The Swayambhunath stupa in Kathmandu was built during this period.
3th–9th centuries	The Licchavi period introduced a north Indian-Nepali monarchic state, bringing high Indian culture to the Kathmandu Valley. The first properly documented history of Nepal stems from the Licchavis.
9th century –1350	Khas Thakuri Malla Kingdoms, centred on Sinja in western Nepal, were warring against each other during this period. The Nepali language developed, and Hinduism took hold in the western half of the country.
1350–1768	The Malla dynasty period is recognised as the golden cultural era of Nepal, when the pagoda architecture and urban arts and polity were further developed. The Malla period left us the three city-states of the Kathmandu Valley, with their Durbars (palace squares): Kathmandu/Basantapur, Patan/Lalitpur and Bhaktapur.
1768	King Prithvi Narayan Shah from Gorkha in Central Nepal completed his campaign of conquering and uniting various small states, resulting in the formation of Nepal. The Shah dynasty was ambitious, and by the late 18th century, Nepal covered a far larger territory than it has today.
1814	The Gorkha Kingdom reached its maximum size, stretching from the Bhutan border in the east to the border of Kashmir in the west. A decisive battle at Kangra Fort in today's Himachal Pradesh marked the end of this expansion and Nepali forces withdrew slowly.
1816	Nepal was defeated in a war with the British, who controlled India, and the Sugauli Peace Agreement defined today's borders. After signing the agreement, Nepal closed its borders to foreigners, and remained in virtual isolation until 1951.

1846	The young general Jung Bahadur Rana took over power after a bloody coup, the Kot Massacre. He established the Rana prime minister dynasty, filling every important post with his own family members. The royal Shah family were placed under house arrest as mere figureheads.
1850	As the first Rana Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur visited Europe. The trip manifested his personal power position and increased Nepal's prestige abroad.
1854	<i>Muluki Ain</i> – the Civil Code of Nepal – placed ethnic groups in five hierarchy levels depending on their educational level, work, eating practices, and 'ritual purity'.
1934	On 15 January, Nepal was hit by the Great Bihar Earthquake, M8.1 on the Richter Scale; many buildings and monuments were destroyed, and thousands were killed.
1950–51	In 1950, with Indian assistance, King Tribhuvan managed to escape from his Rana-imposed house arrest and fled to India. The King agreed to hold elections, and the political opposition backed him so he was able to return to Nepal. The Rana regime collapsed and the Shah monarchy was re-instated. Nepal opened its borders again to foreigners in 1951.
1959	King Mahendra, Tribhuvan's son, experimented with a form of mild democracy and established the first elected multi-party government. Dissatisfied with this, he established the <i>Panchayat</i> system in 1962. The <i>Panchayat</i> consisted of a series of five-man-committees at local, district and national level. The committees were loyal to the King, political gatherings needed special permission, and political parties and political organisations were banned.
1980	A referendum was held to choose between a reformed <i>Panchayat</i> system or a multi-party system. The result went narrowly in favor of continuing the <i>Panchayat</i> system.
1990	From the mid-1980s, people protested against the <i>Panchayat</i> system and illegal parties became active. General strikes (<i>bandh</i>) became the weapon of choice, and led to an uprising where King Birendra in 1990 had to disband the <i>Panchayat</i> system and re-introduce multi-party democracy, allowing also civil society organisations.
1996	The 1990 revolution did not lead to much economic or social improvement, but forged a liberalisation that has lived on. In February 1996, the small Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) presented 40 demands to the government. Lack of serious response led the Maoists to start what became known as the People's War. Over 17,000 people were killed, thousands displaced, and many are still unaccounted for. Atrocities were committed on both sides.
2001	On the evening of 1 June, Crown Prince Dipendra killed nine members of his family, including his father, King Birendra, and mother. Dipendra was shot or he shot himself, and died two days later. His uncle, Gyanendra, became the new king. The armed conflict with the Maoists escalated.
2002–2005	Disagreement between the King and the Government increased. In 2005 King Gyanendra dissolved the Parliament and took control of the army and the country. Seven opposition parties then reached a twelve-point agreement with the Maoists, the two main points being: 1) the King, being autocratic, is blocking the peace process and must be removed; 2) the Parliament must be reconvened as a Constituent Assembly (CA) that can write a new Constitution.
2006	Violent demonstrations led to King Gyanendra abdicating, and the Parliament being reinstated. A peace agreement was signed on 21 November.

2008	Elections to the Constituent Assembly (CA) resulted in the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) becoming the largest party, with the party leader, Pushpa Kamal Dahal (called Prachanda [‘fierce’] during the armed conflict 1996-2006) becoming Prime Minister. The monarchy was abolished, and Nepal was declared a republic. The CA decided to write a new constitution. Hinduism was abandoned as the official state religion, and Nepal became a secular republic.
2009	The Maoist Prime Minister resigned after President Yadav, confirmed by the Supreme Court, ruled that it was the country’s President, not the Prime Minister, who controls the Army Chief. Madhav Kumar Nepal of the Communist Party of Nepal/Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML), became the new Prime Minister.
2013	After being postponed repeatedly, the elections to the Constituent Assembly were held on 19 November. Nepal Congress (NC) and CPN (UML) won the largest number of seats, while the Maoists suffered considerable losses. Since then the Maoist party has split several times and declined in influence.
2015 April–May	Nepal was hit by disastrous earthquake events: on 25 April 25 (M7.9 on the Richter scale), with the epicentre in Gorkha between Kathmandu and Pokhara, followed by a severe aftershock on 12 May (M7.3 on the Richter scale), the epicentre being in the Dolakha District, with many other aftershocks. At least 9,000 people died, 19,000 were seriously injured, and some 750,000 houses wholly or partly destroyed.
2015 September	On 22 September, the Constituent Assembly ratified the new Constitution. Nepal was divided into 7 federal provinces, settling the federal issue. A few days later some Madhesi parties held demonstrations in the areas bordering India and an unofficial blockade of border crossings began. This prevented the import of essential goods such as petrol, diesel, cooking gas and medicines.
2016	In mid-February, the blockade was lifted. Distribution of promised government support to victims of the 2015 earthquake has been proceeding very slowly. The political transition is still underway. The Maoists have repeatedly split into factions, some of which merge again. In August, the coalition government again shifted, now with the past Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal as the new Prime Minister. Local elections are promised for spring 2017.

Most of the written history of Nepal deals with what is today the Kathmandu Valley, previously called the Nepal Valley. Historically, small kingdoms, religious centres and cultures in other parts of Nepal have received less attention, although they are described in some written documents and books.

Ever since Nepal was consolidated into one nation in 1768, its political affairs have had to balance between the interests of China and India, and, for a significant period, also the British East India Company. However, Nepal never became a colony. Actually, during the 18th century, Nepal expanded dramatically to encompass Sikkim in the east to Himachal Pradesh in India in the

west. It was then gradually forced to retreat to approximately the borders of today, culminating with the Sugauli Settlement with the British in 1816. Minor wars have also been fought with Tibet. Internal conflicts and rivalries between families, clans and dynasties throughout history have resulted in an unstable political system that has been unable to secure good living conditions for the population.

During the *Panchayat* era from the 1950s to 1990, the state leaders, primarily Chhetri and Brahmin, focused on national pride and nation building, under the motto ‘*one land, one dress, one language*’ This policy was based on the culture of the powerful Hill Chhetri and Brahmin

people. Other ethnic groups felt excluded, especially the Tibeto-Burman groups and the Madhesis, the large group of people of Indian origin, and indigenous people living in the Terai region. The massive migration from the Hills to the Terai and harsh agricultural labour practices fuelled feelings of exclusion, and in the process many Madhesis and Tharus lost their land. Today's unrest in the Terai has its roots in these events and policies.

The re-introduction of democracy in 1990 improved people's rights and participation in civic affairs, but not living conditions. The country was divided into 75 districts, each split into Village Development Committees (VDC) (some 4,000 in total), which in turn consisted of several wards. With no signs of change and a sense of marginalisation, the situation offered fertile ground for the Maoist mobilisation in Nepal's remote western districts, eventually leading to the armed conflict that lasted from 1996 to 2006. The Maoists began negotiations with the government, and various Terai-based parties demanded fairer representation in the political institutions in Kathmandu. Many agreements with the government were not implemented, leading to frustration, demonstrations and fighting.

Throughout the country, ethnic groups became more assertive and active in the 'New Nepal' movement, demanding recognition as well as political and economic influence. The Maoists secured a strong following among marginalised ethnic groups, and won a majority in the Constituent Assembly election in 2008. Optimism ruled at first, but slowly it became apparent that a Maoist-led government was no guarantee for change.

Bickering and power plays have resulted in a country without strong leadership, even after the Constituent Assembly Elections in November 2013. After ten years of armed conflict, then some nine years of peace, power struggles among the political parties delayed the drafting of a new constitution. The major issue was whether a federal Nepal should be based on ethnicity or

on geographic areas. The April and May 2015 earthquakes and aftershocks helped to make possible an all-party coalition and settlement of several key disputed issues. On 22 September 2015, the Constituent Assembly ratified a new Constitution, making Nepal a democratic federal republic consisting of seven provinces. The functions and boundaries of the provinces have been decided. The Government plans to merge local administrative units, and local elections are planned for spring 2017. However, political power remains concentrated in Kathmandu. Currently, the three largest parties in Parliament are Nepal Congress (NC), Communist Party of Nepal (UML), and Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists). As there are some 28 other political parties in Parliament, politics in Nepal is complicated, and decision-making processes move very slowly. State affairs are taken care of by the government ministries in Kathmandu in collaboration with the appointed – not elected – members of the public administration at the district and local level.

The government has been reluctant to instigate inquiry into atrocities committed during the armed conflict that ended in 2006. Finally, in February 2015, it constituted the five-member Truth and Reconciliation Commission mandated to identify human rights violations committed during the conflict, to create an environment conducive to sustainable peace and reconciliation, to recommend legal actions against those involved in such violations and to recommend compensation for the victims and their families.

There is a broad popular recognition of the need for longer-term perspectives for achieving the universal values of democracy, equity, justice and morality.



Morning worship in Bhaktapur.

📷 Marit Bakke

Culture

Nepal's cultural heritage dates back thousands of years, with Stone Age objects found in the Kathmandu Valley, and early Stone Age remains found in the Inner Terai. Most of Nepal's cultural material originates from between the 3rd and 9th centuries AD, and from the Malla period (1350–1768), which is regarded as Nepal's golden age of culture. In 1482, King Yaksha Malla's three sons established three city-kingdoms in what are today known as Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur. The political rivalry among the sons split up the unity achieved under Yaksha, but also manifested itself in the construction of opulent temples and palaces. The Durbar (palace) Squares sustained considerable damage during the April 2015 earthquake and aftershocks, but many organisations, among them the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (www.kvptnepal.org) and UNESCO, are working hard to repair the many temples and buildings by mobilising skilled artisans as well as donors.

The first Shah monarchy (reigned 1768–1775) devoted more time to fighting for the unification of Nepal than to endowing the arts. King Prithvi Narayan Shah's decision to make Nepal a pure Hindu nation meant that Nepalese traditions and products were held in high esteem while everything foreign represented a threat and was to be kept out. Except at the royal court and among the elite, this 'closed door' policy lasted until 1951. While the rest of the Nepali population were kept isolated from foreign influence, the Rana family who ruled *de facto* (technically speaking, they held the post of Prime Minister) from 1846 to 1950, used foreign goods and specialists (including medical doctors)

not available to the ordinary people, and thus distinguishing themselves.

The Terai remained quite isolated from the Middle Hills until the 1950s, and has been culturally close to the bordering Indian states. The traditional Maithili and Tharu artforms from areas in the Terai are still practised in the eastern Terai, and are increasingly gaining recognition elsewhere. The beautiful temple in Janakpur is one example of Maithili culture. The Tharu people are deeply proud of their culture, with colourful festivals and dress. This long-neglected part of Nepal's cultural heritage is now receiving well-deserved attention.

For more than one thousand years, Nepal has produced colourful textiles, carpets, drawings, sculptures, statues and paintings. The scroll paintings, called *thangka* (the corresponding Newari artform is known as *paubha*), were originally painted by Tibetans according to specific rules for religious motifs and mandalas. Today, also other groups are involved in modern *thangka* painting, with Tamangs doing much of the basic work. Newars have worked with metal, statue casting using the 'lost wax' process for centuries; they also make jewelry, bowls and jugs from precious metal such as silver. Newari metal workers were famed throughout the Himalayas for their skills. They are also



Mask making.

📷 Tordis Korvald

known for their architecture and woodcarving, especially windows, doors and frames, a skill that originated in the 13th century and is passed on from father to son. Tradition holds that the Newari architecture known as Arniko (as in the Arniko Highway that links Nepal with Tibet) introduced the pagoda to Cathay under the Great Kublai Khan.

At the core of traditional Hill culture has been the close integration between religion and the head of state. For centuries, the king was seen as a reincarnation of the god Vishnu, and throughout the Kathmandu Valley there are sculptures portraying the image of king and god combined. Particularly during the Malla period this merging of identities gave the king secular prestige and political power.

Under the Rana regime many works of art were neglected and many temples fell into decay. When Nepal opened its borders in 1951, foreign archeologists and cultural heritage experts were invited by the government to survey historical objects and sites in the Kathmandu Valley, in the northern regions toward Tibet, and around Lumbini (the birthplace of the Buddha) in the Terai. The restoration task was immense and costly, and the government lacked money. UNESCO and foreign government agencies played a major professional and financial role until the government in the mid-1960s became more active, realising the value that the nation's rich cultural heritage had for tourism and economic development.

By 1997, UNESCO had listed ten World Heritage Sites in Nepal: Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest),



Bhairav Dance.

© HMM

Chitwan National Park, the ancient Malla palaces of Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Patan, the religious complexes of Boudhanath and Swayambhunath (both Buddhist), Lumbini and the prominent Hindu sites of Changu Narayan and Pashupatinath. Nepal has entered the Sinja Valley, the seat of the Khas Malla kingdom in the west, and several other sites on the UNESCO Heritage tentative list.

Festivals are an important part of Nepal's cultural identity, binding families and local societies together. The annual dates for these festivals vary according to the phase of the moon. Dashain and Tihar are the major events; at those times people fill the buses and planes to travel to their home village to celebrate together with their families. Be prepared that most public offices are closed during these two festivals. In addition to the major festivals listed below there are numerous local events throughout the year, not least in the northerly Buddhist areas.



Newari musical parade 1957, Sunakothi, Patan.

© Knut Palmstøm

Important festivals in Nepal

January/ February	Lhosar	Tibetan New Year. Mountain People's New Year.
February/ March	Shivaratri	Hindus (also from outside Nepal) congregate at Pashupatinath to celebrate the birthday of the Lord Shiva.
March/April	Rato Machhindranath Bisket Jatra Holi	Held in Patan to honour the rain god and for good harvest. New Year celebration held in Bhaktapur. Hindu spring celebration, also called the Festival of Colors.
Mid-April	Nepali New Year	Many families celebrate with a picnic.
May	Buddha Jyanti (Buddha Purnima)	Full-moon festival to honour the birth of the historical Buddha. Special celebration at the World Heritage site in Lumbini.
August	Janai Purnima	A countrywide full-moon festival involving both Hindus and ethnic groups. Pilgrims and northern villagers go to mountain lakes.
August/ September	Gai Jatra	Newar festival to commemorate the deceased.
August/ September	Teej	Married Hindu women fast and celebrate in honour of men and their families.
Late August/ September	Indra Jatra	Held at the end of the monsoon season to celebrate the rain god Indra. A major holiday in the Kathmandu Valley, where wagons and masks are displayed in the streets.
September	Godawari Festival	Celebrated every 12th year (2003, 2015 ...) at Godawari, on the rim of the Kathmandu Valley.
September/ October	Dashain	Nepal's major festival (15 days) honouring the victory of the goddess Durga over the demon Miahisasur.
October/ November	Tihar (Dipawali)	Brilliant five-day Hindu festival of lights.
October/ November	Chhat Parba	Four-day festival in the Terai celebrated by Madhesi peoples and Tharus, honouring the sun.

Nepalis cherish their cultural heritage, be it the old temples, folk dances, ceremonial foods, *thangka* scroll paintings and handicrafts. In recent years, various new secular festivals have been established, like JazzMandu, the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival, Nepal

Music Festival, and Circus Kathmandu. They document and present traditional culture as well as producing innovative expressions, often in collaboration with foreign artists. These festivals also offer an arena for voicing social justice and raising political awareness.

Religion

Nepal has a unique religious blend that reflects the varied population groups and their interactions. It is a sign of tolerance that Hindus (some 80% of the population), Buddhists (ca. 10%), Muslims (4.4%), and Christians (1.4%) tend to live in relative harmony, despite calls from conservative Hindus to reinstate Hinduism as a state religion. When Toni Hagen visited the Swayambhunath stupa in Kathmandu in the early 1950s, he was surprised to find effigies of Christ and Gandhi next to Hindu divinities and Buddha. When asked why, the Nepali accompanying him simply replied: 'All the same, sir'.

Nepal was declared a secular state in 2008, and the new Constitution upholds Nepal's freedom of religion. This unique synthesis is especially visible in the Kathmandu Valley. Among some ethnic groups – Tamangs, Gurungs, Rais, Newars, and others – there is an interesting blend of Hinduism and its calendar of events with ancestor worship, animist practices, and Buddhist deities and ceremonies.

Hinduism is based on the four Vedas (divine wisdom) that explain the endless process

between life and death through reincarnation with the aim of attaining *moksha* or *nirvana* as the completion of the circle of existence. Movement through various reincarnations is determined by one's *karma*, a store of good deeds accumulated during life. Among the countless deities there are three central today: Brahma (the original creator), Vishnu (power of light/goodness and preservation) and Shiva (darkness and destruction, but thereby opening for new creation). Even after Hinduism was abolished as Nepal's official religion, it remains dominant, especially in the populous south and central parts of the country. Buddhism dominates more and more the further north you travel, as can be seen by the five colourful Tibetan flags flapping in the wind, representing the five elements:

Blue for ether/sky
White for wind/air
Red for fire
Green for water
Yellow for earth

Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, was born ca 563 BC, in Lumbini in the Terai, near to the current border with India. The title is Sanskrit and means 'the enlightened one'. According to



Buddhist monks in Bhaktapur.

tradition, he grew up as a prince in a wealthy royal family and, because of a prophecy at his birth, was protected from the realities of the world. However, on brief excursions outside the palace, he witnessed poverty and death, and this led him to leave his home and family and seek the meaning of life. Legend says he wandered for years, engaging in various ascetic practices and finally gaining enlightenment at the age of 35 while sitting under a tree by the banks of the river Nerajara. The rest of his 45 years on earth he wandered around what is today India, living and preaching the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, showing people how to gain liberation from a necessarily impermanent and unsatisfactory worldly existence by renouncing trivial pleasures and focusing on leading a reflective, disciplined and mindful life.

Christians have been a small minority in Nepal because, until 2008, conversion was forbidden and it was illegal to conduct missionary work although several reputable Christian-based schools had been established in the Kathmandu Valley and elsewhere. With Hinduism no longer the official religion, increasing numbers among the poor and disadvantaged are joining the

Christian churches. In one way, this represents a breakdown of established religion and culture, and at great speed; on the other hand, it is a clear signal that people can now choose their own religion.

Islam has had a slight foothold in Western Terai, centred on Nepalgunj in particular, with some Muslim villages dotted around the Middle Hills. Nepalgunj is also home to Nepal's first female Muslim lawyer, Mohna Ansar, known for her human rights work.

Kirat is a natural spiritual religion practised mainly in eastern Nepal. Animism plays a key role, and the shaman is a central person in the followers' daily lives. Sickness for both people and animals is the work of evil spirits and it is the shaman who can cure. This belief often results in long delays before patients eventually visit a modern medical facility. Of late, doctors and shamans have begun working together to create medical teams. In addition, many local shamanistic traditions are practised around the country. They are sometimes incorporated into Hindu or Buddhist beliefs, but generally maintain a low profile.



Funeral pyre.

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Ceremony at Shechen monastery

© Marit Bakke

Part II

A VULNERABLE COUNTRY

Population: 28.1 million, 18% living in urban areas. An additional 2.2 – 2.5 million Nepalis live outside the country as migrant workers.

Area: 147,181 km². Borders Tibet (China) to the north and India to the south, east and west.

Largest cities (2015): Kathmandu (1.4 million), Pokhara (200,000), Patan (183,310), Biratnagar (182,324), Birganj (133,238), Bharatpur (107,157), Janakpur (93,767), Dhangarhi (92,294), Butwal (91,733) (www.worldpopulationreview.com).

Language: Officially, there are more than 92 recognised languages/dialects in Nepal, but the official language is Nepali. It is the major language of 45% of the total population. It is written in the Devangari script, as is Hindi. Hindi is understood in the Indian border areas and in business; Hindi films and TV series are very popular in Nepal. English is taught in most schools as the first foreign language, but its use is limited to some foreign-linked state institutions, businesses and education facilities, and in the hotel and tourist industry.

Labour force: Agriculture 81%, services (incl. hotels and restaurants) 16%, industry 3%.

Unemployment rate: 38% (2012 estimate).

Average household size: 4.9 (2011).

Production

Agriculture and forestry

Less than a fifth of Nepal's land area is suitable for agriculture and half of that is in the Terai. With 80% of the population living in rural areas, farming is a major occupation and contributes one third of the country's gross national product.

Rice, maize, millet and legumes are the main crops; wheat, barley, rye, potatoes, vegetables, sugar cane, and a wide range of vegetables and fruits are also grown. Significant elevation differences and climate variations mean that the production and access to crops vary considerably from district to districts, leading to extensive trade. Many households have domestic animals like buffaloes, cows, goats, sheep, pigs, hens and ducks. The majority of people practise subsistence farming, with any excess produce sold or exchanged for goods and other farm produce. Cardamon, ginger, mustard, turmeric, broom grass, apples, citrus, cotton, tea and coffee have become significant cash crops. In the mountain areas, grazing animals wander over large areas, usually managed from small seasonal farms where butter and cheese are produced. Both the buffalo and nak (female yak) provide milk, and buffalo as well as the male yak can be used for ploughing fields. Yak, nak and zopko (cross between yak and cow), Himalayan horses, donkeys, mules and even goats and sheep are used to carry goods.



Rice harvest in Bhaktapur.

© Marit Bakke

The contrasts are great: at high elevations, animal husbandry is spread over large areas, whereas domestic animals are often stabled and fed for milk and meat in the Middle Hills and lowlands. Recent years have seen a general improvement in irrigation systems, better choice of seed types to suit local conditions, and extra emphasis on vegetables, often using greenhouse technologies, especially around market towns and in areas where roads make it possible to grow vegetables for sale further away.

Women are often referred to as ‘housewives’. In fact, because their men are often abroad as migrant workers, they also increasingly manage the farm. Many people are landless and work for others on a share-basis or as day-labourers. In the northerly Himalayan areas, the women have traditionally had many responsibilities because the men were away on long-distance trading expeditions for much of the year.

Nepalis who live near rivers or lakes eat some fish found especially in larger rivers, lakes and in the Terai – and it is expensive. Fish is used in religious ceremonies. Lately, trout and carp farms have been established near main towns. Nepal suffers from deforestation, caused by extensive cutting in many areas for kitchen fires, house construction, furniture, and as a cash crop often exported to India. This has led to serious erosion in some areas. Reforestation programmes have been successful, for example in the hills around Kathmandu and Pokhara. Villages and towns of any size often have a community forest system, a form of cooperative that in many areas has led to reduced deforestation and sharing of benefits from forestry. However, illegal and non-

regulated tree felling remains a major problem. Timber felling and smuggling to Tibet affect the vulnerable high-altitude forests. Tree-cutting can be reduced in the trekking areas if tourists do not insist on hot showers (except at lodges with passive solar heating for water) and groups order the same food, to reduce the use of fuel.

Industry and trade

Traditional industrial production in Nepal has been within the fields of textiles, cement, alcohol, tobacco, jute, stone, metal and brick. Tea and coffee are now produced on an industrial scale for export. Industry is generally uncontrolled and factories have caused major problems like deforestation and pollution, buying up fertile agricultural land, and dumping chemicals in landfills and rivers. Brick factories have provided employment for large groups of people, but often under appalling working conditions.

Ten years of armed conflict and ever-changing governments (1996-2006) put a stop to industrial development. Maoist extortion of vast sums from factories and businesses forced many to close, leaving empty eyesores and industrial wastelands. Even after ten years of peace the investment climate has remained poor, partly owing to political uncertainty and corruption. Large-scale industrialisation in Nepal will not be a realistic proposition until there is stable and sufficient electric power, better transport infrastructure, appropriate investment legislation and less corruption.

In any case, foreign investors need to be aware of several cultural issues when dealing with Nepali partners. It is essential to remain patient



Kiln with bricks.

© Viggo Bruun

during the often very slow decision processes, one should not show anger, and should always avoid potentially embarrassing situations where Nepalis may lose face – for instance, because they don't have the correct facts. Traditionally, in Nepal as in many other countries, higher education has been regarded primarily as a means to obtain a position with a regular salary, where one does the minimum of necessary tasks and avoids chores beneath one's dignity. At a work site, expect that higher-level staff, like engineers, will avoid manual work. Part III includes a more detailed description of norms to heed in everyday life in Nepal.

Despite these difficulties some foreign companies have invested in hydropower and road construction in Nepal during the past decade. Niche products like handicrafts, agro-industry, graphic products, computing services, and health services all have growth potential.

Domestic trade is mainly in the agriculture sector, while foreign trade involves massive imports from India and China, the only two countries with land borders to Nepal. Main export partners in 2013 were India (56%), the USA (19%), and Germany (4% in 2012), while main import partners were India (51%) and China (35% in 2012). Nepal's chief exports to India are hydropower, textiles, fruits and nuts, herbs, metals and leather products; and to China, wood, mineral and metal products, textiles, chemicals, rubber and plastic. The European Union is increasingly importing clothing made in Nepal, which now accounts for 46% of the country's garment exports.

Tourism

Tourism is a key industry, contributing about 4% of the national product. It offers full- or part-time employment to over two million people, about half of them in mountaineering and trekking, enabling people to gain an income from hotels and restaurants in hubs like Kathmandu and Pokhara, selling equipment and handicraft souvenirs, and providing accommodation and meals to tourists along the trails in rural areas. Tourism also means work for porters, and extra income to farmers and fishermen. With a rising Nepali middle economic class, domestic tourism is also increasing sharply.



Thamserku on the trail to Everest. © Dag Norling

Pictures of snow-capped mountains, ancient temples, verdant rice fields, and often stunningly costumed people abound in guidebooks, brochures, and websites about Nepal. Mt. Everest features prominently as Nepal's number one icon. No doubt this 'branding' has great potential for attracting ever more visitors, particularly if it can create awareness of the less-known parts of Nepal and of activities besides mountaineering and trekking, such as thermal hot springs, mountain biking, river rafting, places for health and meditation as well as cultural and religious sites. In addition to the national parks there are conservation areas that cover large parts of Nepal, the oldest one being the Annapurna Conservation Area.

The 2015 earthquakes destroyed much of the tourism infrastructure (trails, teahouses, lodges) in several popular trekking areas, including Gorkha, Sindhupalchok, and Rasuwa (with Langtang National Park) and Dolakha (with the Gauri Shankar Conservation Area). Repair work is underway, but you should check first before setting out to any of these areas.

Social conditions

Life expectancy:

In 2015: 69.2 years. (Female: 70.8; male 67.7)

In 2000: 60.8 female; 60.2 male

In 1980: 48.2 female; 48.7 male

In 1960: 38.4 for females; 39.0 for males

Districts with the lowest life expectancy:

Dolpo, Humla, Bajura, Kalikot, Mugu,
Dhanusa, Rautahat, Sarlahi.

Districts with the highest life expectancy:

Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Kaski,
Parbat.

Adult literacy rate: 58%.

Youth (15-24 years) literacy rate: 89.2%,
for males; 77.5% for females.

Poverty: 24.8% of the population was
registered as being below the international
poverty line (USD 1.25 per day). The
percentage is expected to rise after the
earthquake disasters in April and May 2015.

Child labour (average 2002-2012): 37.8% for
females; 30.2% for males.

Access to improved drinking water sources
(2011): 87.6%.

Access to improved sanitation facilities
(2011): 35.4%.

(Sources: Unicef Nepal; Population and
Housing Census of Nepal 2011).

Standard of living

Since 1990, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has operated with a *Human Development Index* (HDI) for the countries of the world, published in annual Human Development Reports. The Index was created to emphasise that development should not be measured solely in terms of economic indicators, but should include factors like life expectancy, average years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more, expected years of schooling for children, and gross national income per capita (www.hdr.undp.org).

The UN Human Development Report for Nepal has been published since 1998. In 2015, Nepal's Human Development Index (HDI) was 0.548, placing it among the world's 15 poorest countries. In comparison, Norway had an HDI of 0.944, Great Britain 0.907, and India 0.609. A simple Human Poverty Index (HPI) for Nepal involves estimating how many months per year people eat two full meals daily. There is chronic food insecurity in the Karnali River watershed, in parts of the Siwalik Hills, and in the Terai. Since the peace agreement and the 2008 and 2013 elections, people increasingly believe that it will be easier to get a job and to make investments. Nevertheless, Nepal failed to achieve the UN Millennium Goal of halving the number of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.

The average HDI measure for Nepal obscures the great contrasts within the country. Outside the Kathmandu area, living conditions change



Syanda village, Humla.

© Olav Myrholm

from being of average, even high standard in urban areas, to poor in rural areas not far from the Valley, and very poor in the most remote districts in Nepal. Also within most districts there are significant differences between people who can enjoy decent living conditions and those who struggle. The lower castes – the Dalits – and some ethnic groups living in remote valleys and the Terai constitute the poorest parts of Nepal's population. The armed conflict 1996-2006 forced many people to flee the countryside and seek refuge in the cities, Kathmandu in particular, where lack of job opportunities and housing created slum areas. Then came the 2015 earthquakes, which worsened the living conditions for thousands of people. Reconstruction work has been slow, adding to the difficulties experienced by the Nepali population.

For centuries, people have migrated for work and trading within Nepal and to India. The Gorkha soldiers are the best-known migratory group, competitively recruited for the Indian and British Armies and also in UN-led peace keeping operations throughout the world. The number of migrant workers increased drastically during the 1996-2006 armed conflict. Today, it is estimated that about one of four adult male Nepalese is working abroad: about two million in India, and about one million in the Gulf countries, in Lebanon, Malaysia, and in Europe. Despite low wages, they earn more than in Nepal, and the money they send home to their families represents a major share of Nepal's foreign income and contributes to poverty reduction. Nepal is one of the world's highest recipients of remittances, about USD 5.1 billion in 2012. Almost 80% of the money sent home by the migrant workers is used for daily consumption; 7% goes to loan repayment, and less than 3% is invested in capital formation.

It is the extended family, not the government, that provides social and economic security. Responsibility for government-supported programmes is split among various ministries, departments and agencies, which has led the World Bank to argue for better coordination. Local philanthropists and entrepreneurs have established private services like hospitals,

homes for the sick and elderly, kindergardens, orphanages, schools and other social services. The institutions for savings and loans, including micro-finance, are increasingly offering families an economic safety net. It is particularly the women who create small businesses by saving, offering credit and training to local people: in fact, two-thirds of the 60,000 members of the National Micro-Entrepreneurs Federation Nepal (<http://www.nmefen.com.np>) are women. Also government and private banks have started giving micro-loans and have established a savings and loan system that can be accessed through mobile phones. As a result many banks have been returning to the rural districts that they fled during the conflict. Today, a person's social position is increasingly determined more by economic status than by position in the traditional caste system.

When a family's income exceeds the amount spent on basic needs, the money generally is used for the children's education and for constructing a brick house with a solid roof – in Nepali a *pakka ghar*, 'proper home'. Extra money also enables people to realise their dream of moving to the city, although urban life does not always live up to expectations. Most migrants, abroad and to urban areas in Nepal, are men. When trekking you often pass through villages with very few residents and those still living there are either women or elderly people.

Education

According to UNICEF, 64% among the girls and 78% among the boys in Nepal attend secondary school. The adult literacy rate is 58%, among youth aged 15 to 24 it is 80%. Many adults who



School children.

did not have the opportunity to learn to read and write as children now have such opportunities through adult education programmes.

Children attending state-run schools are taught in Nepali, while private schools also teach in English. The proportion of students who pass the decisive 10th grade exam for the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) is higher in private schools than in state-run ones. The latter are, in principle, supposed to be free, but when government funding is not sufficient to pay teachers' salaries, the only solution is to have the parents contribute. Both state-run and private schools emphasise discipline and rote learning rather than creativity and a critical mind. As from 2016, the SLC exam has been changed to a less elitist point system.

Many Nepali children work, especially helping with farm chores such like fetching water, and collecting wood for cooking and fodder grass for the animals. Girls often look after their siblings as well as preparing breakfast and dinner, and attending school during daytime. Many children do not attend school at all – in the countryside because they are doing farm work, in the cities because they are working in factories or as servants in well-off households. Child labour is a complex issue in Nepal. Many children have to work to supplement the family income, so no one benefits from keeping children away from the factories as long as there are no alternative ways to support their families. Some organisations are doing an excellent job here, assisting the families with rice and other types of food and also paying for the children to attend school.

Partly through foreign aid, the school system is steadily improving, confirmed by Nepal having achieved the UN Millenium Goal of every child registered in school by 2015. An important reason is that, in rural areas, schools are increasingly seen as a key institution. Where government funding is absent, parents collaborate with the rest of the local community to establish, finance and run community schools. However, in addition to the damages suffered during the ten-year conflict, the 2015 earthquakes destroyed 35,000 classrooms, making school attendance and teaching in these areas very difficult.



Emergency room, Necha Hospital. © Kine Homelien

Health

Public health facilities

Hospitals at the central level : 11
(mostly within the Kathmandu Valley)
Regional/zonal hospitals: 16
District hospitals: 75

Health Posts: 1,559
Sub-Health Posts: 2,247

Private hospitals: around 400

(Source: Annual Report (2013-2014)
Department of Health Services, Government
of Nepal).

Doctors / nurses per 1,000 inhabitants:
0.17 / 0.50

(Source: Human resources for Health (HRH)
Country Profile for Nepal, 2013).

Under-five mortality: 38 per 1000 live births
Infant mortality rate: 29 per 1,000 live births
(Source: Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster
Survey, UNESCO 2015).

Most prevalent diseases: Dysentery,
tuberculosis, hepatitis and HIV/AIDS.

Causes of mortality: Respiratory infections,
coronary heart disease, stroke, perinatal
conditions.

The earthquakes that hit Nepal in April and May 2015 and the many aftershocks revealed a health system that could not cope with the thousands of casualties. To make matters even worse, the earthquake destroyed approximately 1,100 health care facilities (402 completely and 683 partially) in 14 districts (as reported by the World Health Organisation on 26 May 2015). Poorly constructed houses collapsed during the major quakes and smaller aftershocks,



Newborn baby.

© Erlend Berge

leaving people dead or injured under the rubble. Although access to health facilities has improved during the last ten years, Nepal has never had medical services sufficient to meet people's needs, particularly in rural and remote districts. The earthquakes definitely worsened the conditions. The reader should be aware that this section mostly describes the situation before the earthquakes.

According to government reports, health facilities at the local, district and national levels are quite good, but the reality is quite different. Local healthcare facilities, especially in remote areas, often lack technical equipment as well as qualified nurses, midwives and medical doctors. Medical doctors, even government doctors who have a duty to serve in the districts, are reluctant to live in remote areas.

With specialist medical services, the situation is even worse. Simple illnesses and injuries that normally could be handled easily are not treated in time, the consequence often being that patients become disabled or even die unnecessarily. Conditions can be illustrated by quoting a foreign medical doctor who recently tutored medical students during their rural posting in a district just outside the Kathmandu Valley: 'I don't understand why Nepal trains so many doctors and then places them in inadequately equipped facilities where their skills are wasted?!?!'

There is a wide disparity in the quality in the medical services provided by government-run hospitals, and many people resort to expensive private hospitals, sometimes taking up expensive loans. Many visit local drug shops

where the unqualified staff sell medicines over the counter based on the symptoms described by the customers. This has led to overuse of antibiotics and many wrong diagnoses with serious consequences.

Childbirth entails high risks in Nepal. Many women die giving birth: they receive poor healthcare, are married off young, work right up to delivery and right after, and have many children – all of which contribute to a high rate of *uterine prolapse*. This, in turn, leads to pain, infections, further birth complications, social stigma, death and suicide: Nepal ranks as number seven among the top 10 countries for suicide among women aged 15-50. Maternal mortality remains high: according to World Bank estimates for 2015, 258 deaths per 100,000 live births – a great improvement from 1990 (901 per 100,000 live births), but still above the South Asia average of 182. The government now pays for pregnant women to be brought to the nearest healthcare facility for delivery where they can be cared for by the professional health workers.

There is a social stigma attached to mental illness, which is regarded as a condition that cannot be cured and is often seen as a divine punishment. Family members do not recognise the symptoms and, given their continued struggle for physical survival, having a family member with mental problems is a burden. The afflicted person is left alone or even mistreated, sometimes chained up. Sadly, some mentally ill may see no other solution than to commit suicide. The ten years of armed conflict increased the number of people with mental illnesses. Health services are still limited to one psychiatrist per one million inhabitants – also here, most medical professionals are located in the Kathmandu area.

Children of stature small for their age are a common sight in Nepal. This is usually caused by under-nutrition, malnutrition and serious infections. Also alcoholism and drug abuse create significant health problems: between 15% and 30% of all hospital admissions are related to alcohol and drug abuse.

In this rather bleak picture we can note one significant success story. Throughout the country



Drinking cool water from a spout.

©Punya

there are about 52,000 Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHV) who, despite not receiving a regular salary and having inadequate facilities, do a marvellous job informing villagers about health issues and family planning, treating patients and referring more serious cases to the local health post or clinic. Their work has contributed to reducing drastically infant and maternal mortality.

The whole population has benefitted from large-scale vaccination programmes, with those for polio and tetanus so far the most successful. Nevertheless, malnutrition, not old age, is still the major reason for death in Nepal, particularly in rural and remote areas.

Infrastructure

Water and sanitation

For centuries, access to water has created arguments and quarrels. Indeed it is a challenge to provide clean and reliable drinking water supplies to Nepal's population in both urban and rural areas. Water for use in the households and for agriculture is scarce and must often be carried long distances. Whenever you take a shower in

your hotel in Kathmandu, bear in mind that the water may have been brought in a tanker lorry from the hills nearby.

Ancient royal engineers constructed an impressive hydraulic system via underground channels and stone waterspouts. Sadly, many of these traditional waterspouts in the cities have dried up. It appears that the 2015 earthquakes also shifted underground water sources. In rural areas, however, conditions have improved in recent decades with the construction of water posts at various sites in the villages.

The quality of drinking water is generally poor – major reasons being polluted ground water in the Kathmandu area and polluted surface water elsewhere, arsenic in the ground water in the Terai and in Pokhara, and poorly secured pipelines and water posts where water leaks into the ground. Polluted water is a serious health risk, despite various purification attempts. Due to public inefficiency and costly projects gone astray partly due to corruption, water provision has been privatised. Regardless of who is in charge, water will remain a salient political and social issue in Nepal – as in many other countries.

Throughout much of Nepal you will see – and smell – huge piles of rubbish. In the cities, households bring their rubbish to a designated site: in rural areas it often is simply dropped in front of the house or down a nearby slope. The rubbish collection system in urban areas is poor and even worse during the occasional strikes. There is little awareness of the health risks that these piles create. There are, however, positive signs. Ilam Bazaar in far eastern Nepal, Hetauda in the central part and Nepalgunj in far western Nepal are all aiming at becoming model cities by implementing regulations for collecting, sorting and handling garbage. Plastic bags are forbidden there and in some other cities in Nepal, and public toilets have been constructed. In 2011-2012, a major campaign focusing on local training for long-term refuse management (including recycling and safe incineration) was implemented in the Everest region.

Roads

An important factor that has lured trekkers to Nepal is the quiet surroundings and the absence of noise and pollution from cars. However, people living in the hills and mountains have not shared this view, being forced for centuries to carry food, construction materials and fodder on their own backs or by using horses, mules and yaks. Their very existence has depended on everyone, children and adults alike, sharing this burden. Some of these trails have been major caravan routes for transporting salt from Tibet to Nepal and India, returning with rice from Nepal to Tibet. If you are lucky, you can still meet one of these caravans with horses and mules decorated in bright colours and merrily ringing bells.

Trekkers may lament it, but most Nepalis welcome the roads that have been built since the 1950s, beginning in the Kathmandu Valley and then throughout the country. The first road from India to Kathmandu opened in 1956, and in 1967 came a road connection between Kathmandu and Lhasa (it suffered major damage during the 2015 earthquakes). China is planning to open a railway line to Nepal's northern border in 2020. The ten-year long armed conflict destroyed some 80% of Village Development Committee (VDC) buildings and many bridges. Reconstruction has been slow, but today vast amounts of money and human labour are put into building roads, particularly in rural areas, to enable farmers to get their products to the market, also making access to schools, medical facilities and public offices easier.

Telecommunication

The liberalisation of telecommunications in Nepal has made mobile phones very popular. The country moved straight to digital services, dropping the stage with telephone poles and landlines. Internet-based bank services are on the rise and broadband networks and fiber-optic cables are expanding – enabling, for instance, the use of telemedicine. In particular, mobile telecommunications have enhanced women's communication possibilities and trade involvement, and provided access to banking, social services and consultations with medical services and peers.

Electricity

The country's six thousand rivers have been called 'Nepal's white coal' because they can be harnessed to produce electricity. Hydropower in Nepal dates back to 1911, when the Pharping power station just south of Kathmandu was constructed, producing 500 kW. Much has been done since, but the sand and silt that follows the waterflow has always been a strain on the turbines, which must be repaired and renewed regularly. Major power stations are located in Butwal, Khimti, Upper Karnali, Koshi, Kali Gandaki,, Trishuli and along the Marsyangdi River. Small power stations are being built throughout the country, providing the villagers with electricity, if only for a few hours in the evening. In many villages you can see solar-powered home systems, often financed with small bank loans.

Development entails growing demands for energy. Around 70% of Nepal's population has access to electricity – but in reality shortages force the Nepal Electricity Company (NEA) to practise load-shedding. In Kathmandu, for instance, a rotating system cuts off electricity within designated areas for several hours. At its worst, during the dry season, Kathmandu has electricity for perhaps 6 to 10 out of 24 hours, sometimes only at night. Electricity shortage in Nepal is indeed a paradox, as the rivers offer one of the world's largest potentials for hydropower. If used to its full potential, hydropower could enable Nepal to be self-sufficient and also earn money by selling electricity to India. The armed conflict put a stop to investments in the hydropower industry; and after the peace settlement in 2006, continuing political instability, bureaucratic obstacles and corruption have slowed developments significantly. However, some hydropower projects are in progress, partly supported with foreign aid and investments.



© Butwal Power Company

Hydropower construction Jhimruk Power station.



© United Mission to Nepal

Hydropower construction Andhikhola.

Development in Nepal

Frameworks for development

Travelling around in Nepal, you realise that development is more than an economic issue. Perceptions of a 'good life' differ greatly from those in Western countries – for instance, concerning the quality of houses and roads, sanitation and ways to stay healthy, and gender equality. Also, the traditional Nepali way of seeing time as cyclic (and not linear) may create confusion and frustration among foreigners. For Hindus, time is a continuous flow, while Buddhists see time as always growing and not being spent and gone forever. Foreign visitors should be prepared for Nepalis arriving late for appointments, although the situation is changing among people working in tourism.

Between 1816 and 1951 Nepal's borders were closed to foreigners. The Rana dynasty and the ruling political elite had little concern for the common people and their living conditions. When visitors and various experts began arriving in the early 1950s they found a country with very poor health facilities, very few teachers and medical doctors as well as no electricity in rural areas, poor housing, and a cultural heritage in decay, as described in section I. The government of Nepal was unable to finance the reconstruction of the country. The solution was foreign aid, which began in the early 1950s and is still crucial for development in Nepal. The first countries to get involved were the USA and India, largely for strategic reasons. Later China, Japan and several

European countries came in, as well as UN organisations. There are various government-to-government collaboration agreements aimed at developing specific sectors, like hydropower, roads, health, primary education and good governance. About 10% of Nepal's 2013-2014 Federal Budget was based on grants from foreign governments and international organisations.

Development projects are coordinated through national and international organisations and institutions. The National Planning Commission is the most important national body, preparing overall plans together with various ministries. The Social Welfare Council coordinates the work done by voluntary organisations and civil society, aiming to ensure compatibility with long-term strategies for meeting people's needs. The most active international partners are the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the European Union.

Does development aid work?

Traditionally, people in Nepal have viewed government and public institutions negatively. This is understandable, since well into the 20th century, the primary function of the state was taxation, leaving socio-economic needs to be taken care of by the extended family, the own ethnic group or the village. In order to encourage a change in the government's sense of responsibility toward its citizens, and also in how people view the state, international donors have

focused on good governance by promoting a more efficient and less corrupt public administration and by training people, particularly women, in good democratic processes.

Unfortunately, implementation of development programmes have been very slow. As of 2016, official partners like the District Development Committees (DDC) and the Village Development Committees (VDC) are not functioning well, because local elections of representatives have not been held since 1997. Therefore, civil society, community based organisations and human rights organisations have become important for development at the local level – after the peace agreement in 2006, increasingly in partnership with the private sector.

Nepal has been a test case for various theories about development and best practice, resulting in failures but also many successes. Foreign aid programmes must take care, right from the planning stage, to consider the difficult natural conditions, the highly complex culture within the many ethnic groups, and the unstable social and political circumstances. In *Nepal: Dimensions of Development (Bikas-Binas)*, published in 1984 by, Harka Gurung, a distinguished Nepali geographer who sadly died in a helicopter accident in 2006, described the close relationship between the two terms development (*bikas*) and destruction (*binas*). *Fatalism and Development*, published in 1991, presented the Nepali anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista's harsh criticism of the Hindu elites' control of the society, and how foreign aid often, through ignorance or unintentionally, supported this system. Bista disappeared after the book was published and his whereabouts are still unknown.

Grounds for optimism

There are also positive signs. The 2006 peace agreement and the Constituent Assembly elections in 2008 and 2013 were significant successes, bringing representatives from the whole country and from ethnic groups and minorities, not only the Kathmandu elite, into the Parliament. Finally, in September 2015, the Constituent Assembly ratified the new

Constitution, making Nepal a federal state. Madhesis living in the Terai region along the Indian border were displeased with the decision not to establish a separate state for Madhesis, and initiated demonstrations and a five-month long import blockade of petrol, gas and medicines from India to Nepal. Although the government agreed to revise some paragraphs in the new Constitution, many Madhesis, along with other ethnic groups, remain dissatisfied and discussions continue (as of September 2016).

The past ten years have seen marked improvements in freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The country-wide expansion of FM radio has facilitated public information and education, the creation of trust between former enemies from the armed conflict, and also, slowly, between the people and the government. Local broadcasting has put local social, political and cultural issues on the agenda, communicated in local ethnic dialects.

Community forestry has been a notable success, and has served as a model for other parts of the world. In hundreds of thousands of kitchens, open-fire cooking has been replaced by closed stoves and chimneys that channel smoke safely up and out, improving respiratory health considerably. Solar energy for indoor light is expanding rapidly, and micro-hydropower stations are being built for villages not linked to the national electricity grid.

More children, girls in particular, are now attending primary school and completing secondary and higher education levels. Education and improved local health facilities have contributed to a better understanding of why people become ill and how they can be treated. Extensive vaccination programmes have been conducted. Many taboos related to female health and conditions have been broken, making safe assistance during childbirth possible, and reducing maternal and infant mortality significantly.



Barausya village, Humla.

📷 Olav Myrholt



Serving the local dinner “Dhindo”.

📷 HMH



Your local partners during the trek.

📷 HMH



Traders on the Kailash Trail, Humla.

📷 Olav Myrholt

Part III

GOOD TO KNOW

Good to know before departure

Some people prefer to head off to another country without any planning, and of course that is possible for a visit to Nepal. However, a little advance planning can make your stay much more enjoyable, as well as saving you time, money and some frustrations.

First of all: consider what type of tourist you want to be and how long you can stay. Second: try to learn something about everyday life in Nepal and trekking ethics – so that you can meet people with respect and behave in a way that protects Nepal's vulnerable nature and contributes to sustainable development.

The last and largest section of this book will, we hope, assist you in choosing among more than one hundred treks and adventures. There is no such thing as the best trek, the best adventure, or the best temples. Choose what suits *you* best – and remember that an adventure is what you make it to be.

We have arranged the treks and adventures according to the length of stay, with the following information on each: Location in Nepal; How to get there and back; Route; Things of special interest; Connecting activities; Difficulty; Lodging; Provisions available; Mode of trekking; Formalities; Special advice.

Please be aware that the information given here is insufficient for detailed planning. It is meant

as an appetiser, a general introduction before you buy specific guidebooks and maps according to your chosen adventure. This is particularly important if you intend to go trekking.

What type of tourist?

Tourists in Nepal can be grouped into five broad categories:

Low-budget tourists are usually young and adventurous; they may be round-the-world travelers, or long-term visitors. They tend to spend a fairly long time in Nepal, and go trekking and do other nature-based activities outside Kathmandu, and return to Kathmandu or Pokhara for rest and urban activities. They may also return repeatedly, having developed a special affinity for the country, particular places and people, and may spend months in Nepal.

Medium-budget tourists tend to visit Nepal as part of a group; they are often active adults, middle-aged visitors looking for scenery, historical sites, the Terai national parks and cultural experiences. Their stays tend to be short, defined by the tour group arrangement. Some tours cater for special interests – birds, butterflies, flowers, specific cultural aspects, architecture.

Mountaineers, high-altitude trekkers, rafters and other extreme sport enthusiasts pay a premium to get to the mountains and rivers.

They are focused, often staying a long time, and can be high spenders. They also tend to return to Nepal again and again for more adrenalin-charged adventures.

Religious tourists and pilgrims mainly come through package tourism from India to pilgrimage points in Nepal, notably Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu, Muktinath in lower Mustang, and Mt. Kailash in Tibet. Buddhist-oriented visitors – mostly package tourists from China, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, and Korea – tend to go to the birthplace of Buddha in Lumbini and sites in the Kathmandu Valley. Moreover, significant numbers of religious adherents from the West visit sacred sites in Nepal.

Short-term visitors include the small but growing number of tourists on their way to somewhere else, or perhaps taking a respite from India. They rarely get far beyond Kathmandu, but might throw in an Everest attraction flight or a short trek, a visit to Pokhara, Chitwan or Lumbini. Some visitors in this category prefer to travel, stay and trek in comfort. Many people from neighbouring nations come to sample the urban pleasures of Nepal such as casinos (regulations

are currently disputed) and for luxury shopping with a mountain backdrop.

Adventure trekking has changed drastically over the last ten years. More and more people go trekking, and many of today's trekkers have little experience of high altitude activity, have less time available, and often seek low budget experiences. Roads are being built to higher and more remote areas. This has led to stiff competition among agencies, which offer lower prices by reducing the number of days on the trek. As a result trekkers may go too high too fast, developing altitude-related problems that force them to return before reaching their goal, and sometimes necessitating helicopter evacuation.

Here we can mention the sad phenomenon of visitors from southern India who, with limited physical ability and little available time, helicopter into high elevations to jump-start a pilgrimage trip. Equally bad is the pressure that the competition among tour operators puts on porters and other tour staff. The general quality of tourism also suffers from this trend of going cheaper and cheaper to win the razor-sharp competition for customers. Be a generous guest!



Trekking in the Everest region.

Length of stay

How much time do you have? The length of your stay is important in determining what you are going to do in Nepal.

One–two days: Easy day-trips, city adventures, mountain-view walks and excursions.

Three–four days: You can have a rewarding holiday in Nepal in less than a week, but trying to do too much in that short time is counter-productive. From Kathmandu, you can take day-trips, strolling through the three Malla cities of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan, have a sunset walk and a sunrise breakfast on the Valley rim, explore temples, stupas and monasteries, and take a bicycle ride to villages on the outskirts of the capital.

Five–ten days: Within this time-frame, forget embarking on a long trek or walking up to the high mountains beyond what you can accomplish in maximum three to seven days. You can still see the mountains and try out extreme sports on rivers, trails or in the air, but it is perhaps better to focus on the cultural and natural aspects of Nepal closer at hand. In the course of one week you can visit the main attractions in Kathmandu, view the mountains from the Valley rim, do a short trek in the vicinity of Kathmandu or Pokhara, visit a national park for an elephant ride, tiger and rhino safari, or relax in Pokhara with the Annapurnas as a backdrop. However, you will have to fly between places to manage this, especially as regards national parks in the Terai.

Ten–fourteen days: You can have an amazing taste of much of what Nepal has to offer. You can take a short trek for 4 or 5 days and add cultural sightseeing or a jungle stay, or for 8–10 days go further into the mountains, and wind up your stay with sightseeing and activities in Kathmandu or Pokhara.

Two–three weeks: Consider yourself lucky – you can choose among the famous and iconic treks in Nepal, like Everest or Annapurna Base Camp, or Mustang – or, as we strongly recommend, less crowded destinations – and still enjoy a bit of

the national parks in the Terai, or urban Nepal, its food and culture. Even better, you can head for somewhere really remote and take your time on the trail as you pass through spectacular landscapes and over high passes.

Three weeks or longer: You can take the long-distance treks, such as parts of the Great Himalayan Trail, loops in the Kanchenjunga area, remote treks and jungle visits in far western Nepal, or climbing expeditions. Combining treks and other adventures is definitely possible.

Trek Length Index

One–two days



Three–four days



Five–ten days



Eleven–fourteen days



Two–three weeks



Three weeks or longer



When to go

The best season is from October until early December: the temperatures are comfortable and the weather reasonably stable. Clear skies and fresh clean air – what more can you ask for? March to April can also be pleasant, with rhododendrons in bloom, although mountain views are not always as clear as in the autumn. During the winter, from December to end of February, high-altitude trekking is difficult due to the cold temperatures and snow-covered passes; many lodges and other services close for the season. However, the midland and lowland locations in the Himalayan foothills, the Mahabharat or in the little visited Siwalik and Chure Mountains provide better conditions and mountain vistas for winter trekking.

With careful planning and route choice it is possible to trek and enjoy fantastic adventures in both the monsoon period and in the midst of winter, usually at lower elevations. Advantages include less crowds and lower costs. June to the



Rhododendron trail.

© HMMH

end of September is monsoon time – with clouds and heavy rain the norm. Climbers prefer the late spring, just before the monsoon. If you want to go trekking during the monsoon time, be prepared for the worst, or head for the Inner Himalaya, in the rain shadow of the big mountains where temperatures are comfortable, the chance of sunshine is good and there is much less rain. And you will have the place to yourself. Some areas, like those behind the Annapurna range, are in the rain shadow and worth a visit, although heavy rains may mean landslides that block access roads and paths.

Leeches are active in the rainy season, and can drive anyone crazy – they suck your blood, get bloated and fall off before you notice. Do not scratch the sores, as this can lead to infections: use antiseptics on open bites – irritating but not painful or dangerous. Try tucking your trousers into your socks. Your guide will often be able to beat off leeches by going first, with a stout stick ...

Arranging your visit in advance or not

You can arrange your trip to Nepal via a tour operator in your home country. This might cost more than if you do all by yourself, but will relieve you of the responsibilities and make life easier. Most tour operators have professional partners in Nepal. You can extend and personalise your visit by arranging to stay behind after the organised tour. Most tour operators are willing to assist with hotel reservations and suggest possible activities.

If you want to arrange a visit by yourself and can handle the added stress of having all the responsibility, it is easy to contact one of the more than 2,000 registered tour operators or specialist agencies in Nepal prior to your departure from home. They will, naturally, try to offer their specialties, so be convinced, stick to your plans and ask for this, or find another operator.

It is also possible to arrive in Nepal on your own with just a backpack, and get everything organised there. However, that is an option perhaps better for your second trip, once you have gained some experience.

Visitors and tourists generally find Nepal much easier to handle than India, but there are still some cultural hitches and formalities to be aware of. For instance, understanding the bureaucracy involved in getting permits and knowing the ever-changing situation with regard to access is difficult, and here it is helpful to have the services of a tour agency. Mountaineering or a complex, expedition-style trek in remote terrain requires meticulous pre-departure organisation to secure permits, time slots and equipment. The same goes if you have limited time. Even if you arrive on a privately pre-booked arrangement, delays and difficulties may still occur.

It has now become safe to buy domestic airline tickets online with some Nepali airlines. This might save you time and trouble in Nepal, particularly during the major holidays when Nepalis want to visit family and relatives in their home villages, and during the high trekking seasons when the competition for seats is fierce. For a short and active stay, you should seriously consider asking a travel agency at home or in

Nepal (online) to book events, treks, bus tickets, flights and hotel accommodations prior to your departure for Nepal. Online hotel booking is possible, but always bring a hard copy to show the reception.

You can pay in advance in your home country, pay a deposit only, or order and pay in Nepal. Some arrangements require paying a hefty deposit. You can save time if a travel agency at home assists with organising and paying for the services you want and need in Nepal. However, that means that Nepalis will get less of the money, and your home agency might not be able to offer much in terms of advice regarding attractions and current updates.

In any case, it is worth adding a few days, especially at the end of the trip, for unexpected delays, like bus strikes, mechanical troubles, avalanches blocking a road, or bad weather that stops flights. This is true whether you are organising the tour yourself or using an agent. A good tour agency will always operate with delay margins. A basic general rule is *to fly in, trek out* – and not the reverse. Too many travellers have found themselves stranded at mountain airstrips due to bad weather, and have missed their flight home.

Consider your capabilities

Be realistic – plan your travel and trekking according to your capabilities. Define your status, time and physical tolerance, and what you really are searching for. If you want to go high – as many do – it is essential to choose the right time. The winter season can be tough even for the locals. Take into consideration the elevation gained and lost each day as well as the highest altitude you want to reach to ensure that your planned route and itinerary matches your level of fitness, and acclimatisation.

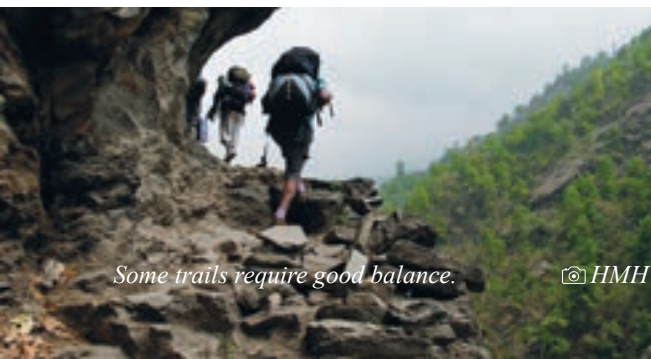
Going with a group, or on your own

Most visitors to Nepal come in a group, the tour being organised in advance by an agency in the home country or by an agency in Nepal. The advantage is that you do not have to spend time on practical matters; getting Trekking Information Management System (TIMS) cards and national park entry permits, hiring guides and porters, arranging onward transport, etc.

If you intend to go alone, we advise you to contact a travel agent in Kathmandu or Pokhara. Nepal is a demanding country until you get better acquainted with the set-up, both for safety's sake and in terms of getting things done and finding out things – including trails. Tour agencies and bulletin boards at hotels are good ways of searching for various options. For instance, a tour might announce that there is room for more people, guides might offer their services (make sure the person comes with credible recommendations), a seat on a long-distance jeep might be available, and so on. Tourists share in Nepal. If you slog it alone, be aware of the responsibility that you carry, for yourself and for others. Obey the legal rules and heed the warnings given to single travellers.

The use of a personal guide is a debated issue. It represents an extra cost, for wages, transport, food and accommodation. Not all guides speak good English, nor do they always have in-depth knowledge about their own country, or specific areas where you want to go, the local culture, or about altitude-related sickness symptoms. In addition, it can be bothersome having an unknown person along at all meals, in the evenings, etc. Much depends on where you are going and if you are sure you can manage by yourself. An updated blog on how to hire a guide by yourself is: <http://www.thelongestwayhome.com/resources/howtohireaguideinnepal.html>

Most trekkers will certainly find their way along the popular trekking paths. Having said that, some guides are articulate and can provide interesting information about routes, flora and fauna and local cultures along the way. They can translate when necessary, fix the night's accommodation, provide a certain level of



Some trails require good balance.

© HMMH

safety and take administrative burdens off your shoulders. By contrast, a porter usually does not speak English, and in principle only carries your luggage. A popular compromise is a guide who can function also as a porter, carrying some of your baggage. This solution offers added value: if the guide or porter comes from the area you are visiting you will probably end up staying in his/her home, meeting the family, and experiencing the ‘real Nepal’. In addition, the wages earned are an important addition to the family economy. However, make sure in advance how much your guide *will* carry for you!

Transport

The majority of overseas tourists arrive by air, but there are also many who cross the border from India or from Tibet, by bus or jeep. Note that you may buy a bus ticket to Nepal, thinking that it means all the way to Kathmandu or Pokhara, but at the border you will have to change buses and buy a new ticket – this can take time, so be prepared for hassles.



Room for one more.

© Marit Bakke

Nepal's only international airport is in Kathmandu. The country is well served by a number of domestic airlines, with the cities and most key towns having their own airport. However, flights are not always dependable, and mountain weather conditions are notoriously fickle. For internal transport the country is also well served by regular, cheap local buses. For the main roads there are usually private bus companies that offer a high standard of safety and comfort. Aside from travel by bus or domestic flight, hiring a private car or jeep (with driver) or a taxi is not so expensive, especially if there are several of you to share costs.

Kathmandu is the biggest communication node, with airline and bus connections to much of the country. Another node is Pokhara, where you can access the mountains without much effort or expenses. A mountain node is Lukla/ Namche in the Everest area with many mountain trekking options.

In eastern Nepal, Biratnagar serves as a transport node, with trekking options fanning out from Tehrathum and Taplejung. In the central Terai, the twin cities of Bharatpur and Narayanghat are functional nodes for east–west and north–south travel, and to Chitwan National Park. The sixth node, Nepalgunj is the transport hub for the mountains of western Nepal, and the Bardiya National Park. Dhanghadi further west in the Terai serves the areas of Nepal closest to India.

Most of the popular areas – like Everest, the Annapurnas, Langtang, and Manaslu – are fairly easy to reach by road or air, offering a network of trails and paths that are reasonably well maintained. These trail ‘highways’ connect the villages, the majority of which have one or more lodges of varying standards that provide food and lodging. However, some areas require tents and full kitchen support as well as a guide. More remote locations might require group travel only, and special permits. This is clarified in the treks and adventures in Part IV.

Visa and contact information

A standard visa can be ordered reasonably easy over the Internet. You can also get a visa at your local Nepali embassy, or at the point of entry. Getting it from the embassy is costly and cumbersome and takes time. At time of writing it is still necessary to pay at the point of arrival in Nepal, not online, even with a completed online visa application. Most overseas visitors arrive at Tribhuvan International Airport (KTM) in Kathmandu. The price of a visa depends on the length of stay in Nepal, and currently varies between USD 25 and 100, payable in cash or with credit card. It is always a good idea to have a few extra passport photos on hand. The latest updated information is available on www.nepalimmigration.gov.np/

Many foreign embassies recommend that you register your visit there in person or via a specific web link. Leave an itinerary, as accurate as possible, with the name of travel or tour agency and the hotel(s) where you will be staying, names of next of kin and personal details including travel insurance and passport number. This makes it easier to begin searching in case you are reported missing. It is also advisable to send this information to family and friends back home. Do let them know when you return safely. You should not set an exact time for when you will call home from anywhere, even towns, in Nepal to say everything is fine. It is highly likely that you will not be able to keep such promises and that can cause worries at the other end.

Luggage, passport, valuables, money

Most hotels let you leave your luggage there when you are trekking – sometimes for a small fee. Some hotels have a safe-deposit box for your passport, tickets, etc. Note that your TIMS card functions as a passport in the countryside when you are in Nepal.

The national currency is the Nepali rupee (NPR). Travellers' cheques no longer exist; since most towns have functional ATMs and many shops take credit cards, do take along your credit card(s) as well as cash. Some card withdrawals have a surcharge for each withdrawal, which is usually communicated at the ATM. Be aware that ATM withdrawals are normally allowed up to a maximum amount, or your credit limit, and that there can be a surcharge on each. At the bank and exchange office counter, however, it is your card's limit and home bank limit that sets the maximum amount. Hotels exchange cash, although they usually have less favourable rates than the banks, or currency exchange offices. The latter are found in all main tourist towns, and exchange is at the official rate, with no surcharge.

You cannot count on finding ATMs outside the cities, so bring one credit card, one debit card, and some cash in Nepali rupees, dollars or euros. The currency market in Nepal is free (a negligible black market rate), and the Nepali rupee is currently tied to the Indian rupee at 160 NPR to 100 INR.

Never travel without insurance, and be sure you are completely covered. If you suddenly decide to go trekking or do other adventures in Nepal, good insurance for independent travellers is available at <https://www.worldnomads.com/travel-insurance/>.

Where to stay

In the big towns there are hotels in all price categories, from international 5-star chain hotels to boutique hotels (fancy and expensive), simple family-run hotels and guesthouses, and a dollar-a-night rat holes near the bottom. A number of resorts have sprung up, usually on the outskirts of the main population areas, often at a high elevation, offering peace and quiet, clean air and views of the Himalayas as the main attractions. Canoe and rafting camps have also become more and more popular, and along a few rivers you combine this with a jungle safari.

When trekking you can choose between tents or using the lodges in the villages along the trails. These trekking paths are in principle the major 'road' in many areas. Some years ago travellers could stay in private homes; since that time the owners have built more tourist-focused lodges where today's trekkers generally stay.

Many lodges offer simple accommodation but others have high standards. Many agents still call this 'teahouse' trekking, but that is not quite true today. With real teahouse trekking you stay in a *pasal* where there is simple food and a simple bed, often a matter of putting your mattress on



Campsite in Humla.

📷 Jon Teigland

the floor in the dining room. This is an ideal way to meet the local people as well as other tourists. A recent trend is 'homestays', where you stay with the local families. Such accommodation is often situated in a national park or nature reserves where a central management body does the marketing, bookings, training of family members, and offers a form of quality control. You eat with the family, usually in the kitchen, and are offered a very simple bed. This is growing in popularity, and does help to distribute the income from tourism more widely. Surely, there is no better way to meet Nepal and its people!

With the spread of mobile telephones, it is now possible to book lodges in advance, if you know the phone number. Often one lodge owner will tell you about another for the next night. If you go with a large group, it is a good idea to send the guide ahead to book rooms. At some lodges there is no lock in the door, but a padlock – so it is a good idea to have your own. We recommend a small chain lock for your baggage, especially for bus travel. A few plastic rubbish bags or a cargo bag as used for trekking can be used to wrap your rucksack: travel by plane or bus causes wear and tear, and you also reduce impulse theft. It is always good to have your own clean sleeping bag: if you are using lodge blankets, we recommend having your own personal sleep-sheet.

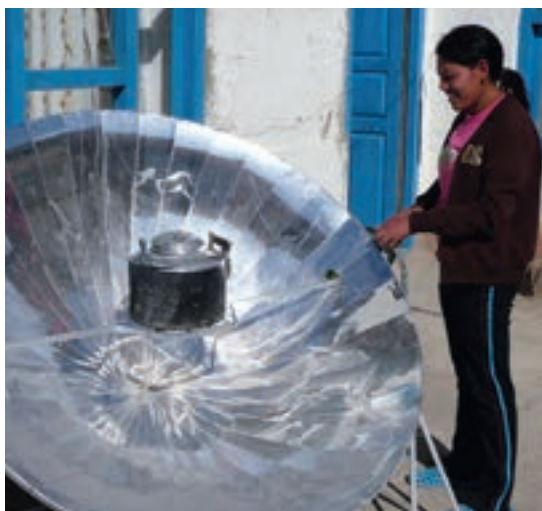
It gets dark early in Nepal, and the electricity seems to be turned off just when you need it. So a small torch, perhaps a hands-free head torch, is useful, and if you are going out at night in the town a reflex band makes you more visible to car and motorcycle drivers. Showers and toilets are not especially appealing – be it in a lodge or a private home – so plastic slippers are handy. An all-purpose sink plug can also be handy.

Do not expect up-to-date Western standards in all hotels and lodges, in restaurants or on buses. Comfort and efficiency are not always similar to what we are accustomed to: it takes time to get things done, and details may not be so important. Keen your sense of humour, and everything will work out. Being irritated and stressed are utterly contrary to the Nepali spirit.



Village water post.

© HMH



Solar heater in Kagbeni.

© Dag Norling



Baking buckwheat pancakes.

© Olav Myrholm

Trekking fees

Some visitors want to go cheap and wish to avoid the official fees involved in a trekking tour. That is not a good idea. The fees are there for a reason and are sensible. For organised, pre-paid treks the fees are usually calculated into the total cost. Check this in advance!

Trekkers Information Management System (TIMS) is a small ‘passport’ and includes personal information and your trekking itinerary. Whenever you pass a checkpoint the date is written into your TIMS. This is essential for your own safety. In the next section we specify whenever a TIMS is required.

National Park and Conservation Area fees. Both national parks and conservation areas charge you cash for entering the protected areas. The fee is meant to cover the area’s maintenance, some tourism infrastructure, and information, guidance and advice in brochures and on signposts along the trails. Several cultural heritage sites charge entry fee. Keep your receipts for the duration of the trek. This system also adds to the TIMS safety checks.

Local community fees. Some communities with high tourism impact now charge money for managing trails and viewpoints, for road use, etc. These fees are low, often charged per vehicle.

Remote Area fees. This fee is charged in areas that are considered remote, vulnerable and with an exotic lure, typically Trans-Himalayan areas like Upper Mustang or Limi. The fee is much disputed, as it is pocketed by the government, leaving little to the local people who are actually impacted by tourism. Still, you should follow the rules.

Trekking Peak fees. Payable if you climb a ‘trekking peak’, which can be done with a guide and without much prior mountaineering experience.

Link to the Great Himalayan Trail fees:

<http://greathimalayatrails.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/TIMS-and-Permits-overview.pdf>

Equipment

Trekking in Himalaya requires equipment and footwear according to the season and the location. A single trek can start in the warm and humid climate in the lowlands, and bring you to passes above 5,000 m. Solid trainers (‘sneakers’) are adequate on most trails, but bring sturdy boots for crossing passes that may be covered with snow. Climbing expeditions requires special equipment. Sandals and flip-flops are practical for evenings in lodges or in camp. You can buy any kind of footwear in Nepal.

No, it is not possible to live off the land in Nepal. You cannot just set off into the woods with a little money, a basket and a fishing rod and expect to manage on your own. Not only is the vegetation where there are fruit, wild herbs and other wild edibles limited, private or community owned, but fish is sparse, and hunting is forbidden. It can also be difficult to buy food locally due to scarcity or poverty. People might want to sell, but might well have nothing to sell or share.



Good equipment required.

Traveller's health in Nepal

Nepal is not what you are used to at home, and this makes you vulnerable to various travellers' problems. Most of the issues you can avoid by giving some thought to what and how you eat and drink, and being especially careful with hand hygiene. There are plenty of travellers' health tips online; and for Nepal-specific information you can check the home page of the Travel Medicine Center in Kathmandu (www.ciwec-clinic.com) and the Travel and Mountain Medicine Centre (NIC), close to the Narayanhiti Palace Museum. The good news is that the chances of catching something really awful are slim, and generally avoidable with vaccines and taking precautions.

The worst problem is traffic accidents. That brings us to issues of safety and personal behaviour, and the one fundamental thing for all travellers: travel insurance. Don't leave home without it. If you are considering trekking or climbing above 4,000 m, make sure your travel insurance is valid at such altitudes and includes air evacuation within Nepal, not only back to your home country.

Many visitors experience minor stomach ailments or respiratory problems, but these rarely last long. The most common serious illnesses are related to upper and lower airways infections, diarrheal diseases and diseases for which there are vaccinations. A very easy way of water purification is by silver chloride pills, which, however, are not always effective against giardia.

You can also ensure safe drinking water by boiling it or adding iodine. Be aware that the sterilising effect of boiling water diminishes with higher altitude, where the boiling point is lower. In addition, boiling water uses precious fuel. If you do not like the taste of iodine, bring vitamin C tablets to neutralise the iodine taste; note that you must wait and let the iodine do its work before you add the vitamin or flavouring.

Many treks in Nepal take you about 4,000 and 5,000 m. Already at 2,500 – 3,000 m it is quite normal to feel slight headache or nausea, or to be short of breath. This is not dangerous, but you should heed such symptoms. Otherwise



Herbal treatment.

© Marit Bakke

altitude sickness may force you to descend to lower elevations for a day or two, or you have to break off the trek and return to your lowland starting point or Kathmandu. The way to prevent altitude sickness is to respect the maximum elevation gain each day, walk slowly, drink plenty of fluid like water, soft drinks, tea, etc. – preferably at least one litre for every 1,000 m of elevation gain – and avoid drinking alcohol. If the symptoms persist, the only cure is to descend to a lower elevation. As a general rule when above 3,000 m, ascend an average maximum of 300 m per day and have regular resting days. You can go higher during the day, for instance crossing a pass, but should descend to a lower elevation for sleep. Note also that headache is a typical symptom of dehydration, not necessarily altitude sickness. Make sure to drink enough!

'High altitude dry cough' is a well-known expression in the Himalaya and other high altitude areas. The altitude itself may cause coughing, but so can also dust on heavily trafficked roads, and windy, exposed trails. A light scarf or Buff is useful.

Richard Dawood's *Travellers' Health. How to stay healthy abroad* is too comprehensive to bring along, but a few photocopied pages might do. Another, smaller book is *Pocket First Aid and Wilderness Medicine*, by Jim Duff and Peter Gormly. In Nepal there are handbooks, small and large, on travellers' medicine and altitude sickness and other trekking-related ailments in every serious bookshop.

Commonly prevalent illnesses in Nepal

Malaria	Caused by mosquito bites, mostly in the evening and at night. During a short stay in malaria-prone areas (generally in the Terai, not the mountain areas) you get sufficient protection by wearing slacks, shirts with long sleeves, and using insect repellent and nets. Prophylaxis is recommended for stays in malaria-prone areas, particularly in the Terai, during the monsoon season.
Diarrhoea:	Diarrhoea is quite common in Nepal, caused by poor hygiene and microbiological pollution of water or food. Drink only water from sealed bottles or water that has been boiled or otherwise purified. It is usually safe to eat well cooked <i>daal bhat</i> , peelable fruits and vegetables, but avoid salads, fresh vegetable, ice cream and buffet food.
Kala Azaar:	A seasonal sand fly-borne infection you can catch in the Terai lowlands, especially by walking bare-foot or barelegged. It is curable, but there is no vaccination.
Dengue:	A mosquito-borne disease associated with still water, in tropical areas like the Terai, typically in settings with a lot of garbage. Vaccine was approved by the WHO in April 2016. While waiting for it to become commonly available, note that prevention is as for malaria.
Tick-born diseases:	TBDs occur in Nepal. Visitors have caught tick-born diseases in national parks and brush areas in Terai.
Parasites:	Hookworm, roundworm, other intestinal parasites. The microbial parasites that initially cause diaorrhea often come due to poor food and toilet hygiene. Hookworm can be avoided by never walking barefoot on wet soil: other worm-like parasites can be avoided by good hand hygiene, especially around dogs and cats, and by not eating undercooked meat and fish.
Altitude sickness:	(See above) is caused by you ascending too fast to higher elevations. It is easy to prevent: gain elevation slowly according to a defined formula fitted to the terrain. Altitude sickness has several, and seen in context, easily discernible symptoms. The only cure is to descend to a lower elevation. Diamox is an often-used medicine that eases the symptoms, but is no cure – it may even mask the symptoms of the serious, and potentially deadly versions of altitude sickness, AMS and HAPE. Before trekking in high altitudes in Nepal, check: http://www.altitude.org/altitude sickness . This web site is good, easy to read and understand, and it is non-commercial.

It is strongly recommended that you, in good time before your travelling, contact your local doctor or a clinic that specialises in travel medicine. Note that the vaccinations needed will

depend on where you will go in Nepal and at what time of the year, what you intend to do, and whether you will be around farm animals.

Vaccinations recommended for Nepal

Polio, Diphtheria, Tetanus, and whooping cough	Absolutely, often given as a combination vaccine
Typhoid	Absolutely
Japanese Encephalitis	Necessary in season and when in prolonged contact with farm animals. Mosquito-borne, rare, but dangerous.
Cholera	Useful against diarrhoea, not necessarily cholera
Hepatitis A	Absolutely
Hepatitis B	Long term stay only
Meningococcus ACWY	Absolutely when going outside Kathmandu
Mumps, measles and rubella	Necessary if not taken previously as a standard vaccine
Rabies	Necessary for long-term stay in risk areas (wildlife, farm animals) and in the countryside. All mammals – also dogs and monkeys – can be carriers.
Dengue	Vaccine is becoming available.

Some general health recommendations

Remember to bring any medicines you take regularly in your carry-on luggage. Also bring a list of their generic names in case you should lose the medicine or you need extra supplies. Bring an extra set of glasses or contact lenses and the prescription. Note that in the high, cold, dusty and dry air (as in Mustang) glassed may be better than contact lenses.

- Sanitary napkins are available in Kathmandu and major cities, but not in rural areas.
- Bring contraceptives from home.
- If you plan to trek at higher elevations and for an extended time, we recommend a dental check prior to your departure.
- Bring a small medical kit for respiratory problems, stomach ailments (e.g. diarrhoea), headache, and some plasters.
- If you are treated at a hospital, be aware that you can catch multi-resistant bacteria.





The Famous Peacock Window after the earthquake in Bhaktapur.

© Marit Bakke

Language

There are about 90 different languages and many dialects in Nepal. Because Nepal has never been a colony of a foreign power, most people speak Nepali, the country's official language. Nepali is similar to Hindi and Punjabi, so many people in Nepal and India can understand each other quite well. English is spoken in most tourist areas, so communication is rarely a serious problem. The rising numbers of Chinese travellers have also led to an increase in Chinese being spoken in the main tourist areas, and Nepalese tourism workers can take intensive courses to learn Chinese. In Kathmandu and Pokhara there are intensive courses in Nepali for foreigners, and a pocket phrase book can definitely be useful for everyday use on trek.

Crime

Compared with many other countries Nepal has little crime. You can walk safely almost everywhere, but you should to be careful in tourist areas in Kathmandu and other cities. Do not display money or valuables openly: carry them in a wallet close to your body. Another precaution is to lock your luggage when it is stored at a hotel or during transportation by air or bus. Avoid tenting close to roads: stay at lodges until you reach villages without road access.

Earthquake

The strong earthquake that hit Nepal in spring 2015 and the many aftershocks provided a tragic reminder of how vulnerable the country is to such disasters. Before coming to Nepal, read the recommendations for how to behave during and after an earthquake, for instance, on your home country embassy's website or on www.earthquakecountry.org. As a general rule always take along money, your passport, water, glasses, and a warm jacket/sweater, even on short walks.

Behaviour in everyday life

Irrespective of what type of trip you are planning, be it relaxing by Phewa Lake in Pokhara, trekking in western Nepal or climbing an 8,000 m peak, it is crucial to understand and respect the country's cultural traditions and norms. It takes weeks and months to really understand what is going on, but you can quickly learn some basic rules. Before you leave home, read up on Nepal's history, geography, culture and people. You may not remember everything, but as you travel through the country, the pieces will begin to fall into place.

The tourism industry, so important for the national economy, is faced with a dilemma:

the thousands of foreigners who are lured by Nepal's marvellous cultural heritage and beautiful hills and mountains also, by their sheer presence, represent a challenge, indeed a threat, to the country's traditions. Young Nepalis see visitors as rich and successful, and many leave the countryside, attracted by what appears to be an exotic and better life in cities or in foreign countries. You cannot stop this tide, but try to be humble when meeting the Nepalis, and don't flaunt your relative wealth. Showing respect for local life-styles and cultures may assist coming generations in understanding and accepting what a marvellous culture they have – one to be fostered, honoured and protected.

Religion and cultural heritage

Respecting all life is important for both Hindus and Buddhists. Avoid disturbing religious sites and rites. On entering a Buddhist monastery (*gompa*) always remove your shoes. Walk clockwise within a temple or around a stupa or *mani* wall. Rules for Hindu temples vary; some temples non-Hindus may not enter at all, at others, you must remove your shoes and all leather items. It is highly insulting to sit with the soles of your feet facing a holy image or persons. Take care when sitting with your legs crossed. Never smoke, or whistle, in sacred precincts. Please respect all local rules and signs.

It is illegal to remove art works from religious or cultural heritage sites or even to buy very old objects. We encourage you to support local craftspeople and the economy by buying locally made souvenirs, paying a fair price. Do not buy anything made from threatened flora and/or fauna, for instance souvenirs containing ivory.



Monk at Swayambhunath, Kathmandu.

Dressing and social rules

Nepalis, particularly women, generally wear local dress. This is often colourful, cover most of the body, and may be simple or elaborate, depending on the occasion. *Long and loose* is the general rule. The dress code is less strict in the larger cities and in tourist areas than in the countryside. In tourist areas women may wear long shorts and T-shirts with short sleeves, whereas long, loose slacks or skirts reaching below the knees are recommended in temples and monasteries, when visiting a private home or public offices. For both sexes, bare shoulders and upper arms and tight, 'revealing' tops are often considered unacceptable.

The traditional strict code for social relationships between males and females is less heeded today among young people living in urban areas. Usually, women and men have their separate social spheres. Girls and boys holding hands in public areas are not necessarily sweethearts, but may be just good friends. Men holding hands with men and women holding hands with women also indicates simple friendship. Intimate behaviour, for instance kissing, in public is disapproved and should also be avoided.

Nepalis greet each other with the traditional *Namaste*, folding their hands in prayer-like position in front of the chest (or higher up, to show even greater respect). Sometimes they will shake hands, especially if they are working in the tourist sector, but in general you should avoid touching people, especially of the opposite sex. When offering payments and/or gifts it is respectful to use your right hand or both hands, or while touching your left hand to your right elbow. The left hand as such is considered impure. Do not argue in public, be loud, drink excessively or fight. Demonstrations of anger are considered an embarrassing loss of face on your part.

Always be polite to hotel employees, staff in agencies, road toll collectors, guides, porters, lodge personnel, village performers and restaurant staff. Never put your legs on the table, nor turn the soles of your shoes toward another person. Nepal does not have a good apparatus

for handling problems related to alcohol and drugs. Therefore, be careful not to involve young people in drinking or in using drugs. Possession, use and sale of drugs/narcotics are illegal in Nepal and jail terms are handed down to those caught.

Nepalis find it difficult to understand travellers' individualism and our wish to be alone in quiet surroundings. Being alone means being lonely, therefore, Nepalis want to keep us company all the time when we are their guests. You may find this frustrating at times, but keep in mind that it offers wonderful opportunities to learn about other people and their everyday lives. Some such encounters may even develop into long-lasting friendships. On the other hand, if you really do need peace and quiet, simply say you wish to meditate – and then do so.

Private property

When camping in inhabited areas, always seek permission from the landowners. Many trails pass through the gardens and fields of village houses – show the same respect for private property that you would at home. It is acceptable to cross private property without permission where public land is otherwise inaccessible, as long as safety and conservation regulations are observed. When you enter a private home, remove your shoes and place them neatly with the other footwear.

Pure and impure

Religion, Hinduism in particular, and deep-rooted culture affect the Nepali perceptions of 'pure' and 'impure'. This entails behaviour that may seem incomprehensible to foreigners. For instance, many Nepalis would object to using a bathtub, toilet paper or a handkerchief. On the other hand, rinsing used dishes, cutlery, cups and glasses in cold, murky and definitely polluted water may be considered fine due to the perceived purifying qualities of water as such and the act of rinsing. Tourists may be puzzled to find that the toilet is a hole in the floor, while Nepalis are equally puzzled that we should even consider sitting on a toilet seat that is used by others. Hindus are concerned that food should not be touched by others, especially people

belonging to a lower caste or another religion. In Nepal, as throughout much of the Middle East and Asia, the left hand is regarded as impure – quite reasonably so, because it is used, together with water, instead of toilet paper. The cooking area in a house is sacred, so never enter a kitchen without being invited. And throwing things into the fireplace or stove may pollute the flame.

Hindus consider menstruating women to be impure, and they can be excluded from social life, cooking, and contact with animals and plants. Menstruation is a taboo subject, so never ask further if a man tells you that his wife is 'not well'. Be discreet when using sanitary napkins or tampons.

Food and eating practices

You can buy most of the food you are used to in the traditional open air markets, in small shops or in supermarkets. Restaurants in the major cities have menus to satisfy almost any visitor. However, we assume that you have not travelled all the way to Nepal to eat hamburgers and hot dogs. We encourage you to buy locally produced goods and pay a fair price, and to eat in local restaurants where you can taste local cuisine.

Nepal's staple food consists of rice, millet, lentils and a variety of beans, green vegetables and potatoes. In the Terai, breads like chapatti are popular. Access to vegetables is seasonal and depends on what can grow nearby. Vegetarianism is widespread. Meat is generally too expensive for most people, but pieces of chicken, sheep, goat, buffalo, yak and pig are available, particularly on special occasions and festivals. Despite the religious restrictions, most



Dindho daal tarkari.

© Olav Myrholt

Nepalis are pragmatic regarding meat, as long as others have done the slaughtering, with beef the usual exception.

You will soon be acquainted with *daal bhat tarkari*, the staple dish consisting of a main course of lentils, rice and vegetables (usually spinach), with side dishes of condiments (*achaar*), perhaps eggs, meat, fish or fried, curried or boiled vegetables. Although this dish can seem repetitive, it comes in a thousand varieties – sample the subtle differences, local and seasonal characteristics. When invited for a meal with a Nepali family, the host always puts the food on your plate. When eating with your fingers or touching food, remember to use the right hand. Never touch food you are not eating yourself. If you are travelling in a group, try to order the same dishes at the same time, encouraging the lodges to do all the cooking in one go in order to reduce the amount of fuel used.

Social issues

Most Nepalis, the poor in particular, cannot distinguish between a backpacker and someone staying at a five-star hotel. Taking a holiday is in itself unusual for local people. In addition, foreign visitors bring along equipment worth more than many Nepalis can expect to earn in a lifetime. Take care not to display objects that might be perceived as showing off your wealth. Pay a fair amount for services and goods, but do not splurge with money and gifts.

Do not pass out pens, sweets or other items to village children, as it encourages them to beg. Nepalis themselves do not like to see children and others begging. Handing out sweets (*mitai* or *bonbons*) to children who never clean their teeth is irresponsible. Giving money to small children in return for picked flowers is illegal in all National Parks. A much better way to contribute to development in rural areas is to offer pencils, notebooks and other useful things, for instance, to a teacher at the local school. Or make a donation to a foundation or a person who is in a position to do something useful for the community.

Taking photos

Unless you can do so at a long and discreet distance, always ask before taking photos of people, also children. Avoid photographing people bathing and at funerals. If possible, make contact with your subjects-to-be and, to give something in return, ask for an address to send photos. An easy solution is to bring envelopes and write down the address immediately. Do not make promises you will not keep! At religious sites you may be asked to make a small donation for taking photos, or simply money in a tip box, which is considered very proper.



Ask nicely before you take a photo. © Olav Myrholt



Some people are poor.

© Jon Teigland

Good to know during the tour

General recommendations

- Do not bring anything along that you cannot afford to lose.
- Bring or buy in Nepal an unbreakable water flask, purification tablets, sun-cream, lip salve, blister cream, foot-cream, dental floss and hand sanitiser.
- For long, dark nights bring a good sleeping bag, headlamp, and a good book.
- For food, hygiene, repairs bring a Swiss army knife or equivalent multi-tool.
- Essential: Long underwear, fleece jacket, neck buff or scarf, sun-hat, sunglasses.
- Trails can be crowded especially in steep or narrow sections. A common courtesy is to give way to people walking uphill. Always give way to people at work – like porters, who are already struggling enough with their heavy loads!
- You are fully dependent on those who assist you. Treat them well, and share and include them in your experiences.
- Learn what good and polite Nepali behaviour means and act accordingly.
- Take care of your feet, they are your tyres: bring foot-cream, sports tape, camp/ toilet slippers. Keep your feet clean and dry; wearing flip-flops in camp lets your feet breathe.

Safe trekking

You may already know general rules for making trekking safe and enjoyable. As the authors are Norwegian, we wish to present a code from our home country to illustrate such rules.



Porters in Langtang.

📷 Marit Bakke



Drugs are not good for you.

📷 Olav Myrholm



Porters have right of way.

📷 Ken Ross

The Norwegian Mountain Code

Let people know where you are going: Tell your dear ones where you are trekking by mail, SMS or social media. Leave notes with route information. Trekking agents, hotels and other lodgings often have notice boards and books where you can leave information on your planned route.

Do not go alone: If you venture out alone, there will be nobody to give first aid or notify the rescue services in an emergency.

Do not set off on a long trip unless you are in good shape: Be sufficiently experienced, fit and equipped for your intended trip. Before leaving home, take time to practise hiking in boots and with a backpack off the trail, even if conditions are poor.

Show respect for the weather and weather forecast: Always heed forecasts of bad weather, and do not rely completely on forecasts of good weather.

Be equipped for bad weather and cold, even on short trips: Regardless of the forecast, be prepared for bad weather.

Always take a backpack and appropriate gear: Put on more clothing if you see bad weather approaching or if the temperature drops. Roomy wind- and waterproof shell jacket, trousers, mittens and a warm hat or cap are good outer clothing. Use long woollen or fleece underwear and middle layers. Bring, and use, a survival bag for additional protection.

Listen to experienced trekkers: Heed advice from people with experience, including locals.

Use a map and compass or GPS: Bring and learn how to use a map and compass. Study the map in advance and trace your route as you walk. Always know where you are, and note your surroundings. Bear in mind that GPS may not be reliable in all areas.

Turn back in time – sensible retreat is no disgrace: If conditions deteriorate seriously, turn around and return in time. Use common sense. If you change your destination, notify the people who are expecting you.

Conserve energy and build a shelter if necessary: The stronger the wind, the tougher the hiking. Suit your speed to the weakest member of the party. Eat and drink frequently. Insufficient food and drink lead to lethargy. Start building a shelter *before* you are exhausted.

Travel and trekking ethics

Responsible travel means minimising any negative effects of your visit on the local culture and the environment. One of the best things trekkers can do to reduce their impact is to lead by example. Recall the famed motto: *Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints.*

Vulnerable nature

The increasing number of visitors to Nepal has affected negatively nature and the environment. Awareness and responsibility are crucial on trek. Bear in mind that your example affects local attitudes toward culture and the environment. Please apply these rules not only to yourself, but also remind your tour fellows, trekking staff, and other visitors of them.

Regulations to protect plants, birds, and other animals have been adopted in Nepal, and local regulations and specific park guidelines have been put in place, and are displayed at entrances to national parks, sanctuaries and conservation areas. In addition, there are sets of general guidelines applicable to trekkers and wildlife sanctuary visitors.

- The Himalayan Environment Trust has established a Himalayan Code of Conduct: <http://www.himalayanenvironment.org/himalayan-code-conduct.php> which is simple to follow and makes a difference.
- The Great Himalayan Trail Code of Conduct is much more comprehensive and is specifically oriented towards trekkers, see: <http://thegreathimalayatrail.org/the-ght/ght-code-of-conduct/>.
- The Nepal government's National Trust for Nature Conservation provides a Minimum Impact Code for trekkers in the Annapurna Conservation Area.

All these codes include similar rules for good behaviour when trekking in Nepal. For the UN International Year of Mountains 2002, the Kathmandu Declaration was issued: <http://www.nepalmountaineering.org/article-iy2002>, followed up by the UIAA declaration on mountain activities: <http://www.nepalmountaineering.org/article-Mountainact>. There is no shortage of declarations – what is needed is willingness to follow them.

Conserve the forest and plants

- Do not light campfires. At high altitude, ensure that all members of your group are outfitted with enough clothing so that fires are not needed for warmth.
- Choose lodges that have solar-heated water for showers and cooking stoves fuelled with biogas or kerosene as alternatives to wood.
- Stick to existing trails – walking off the track or taking short-cuts can damage plant life and expose new areas of ground to erosion.
- Do not trample or collect the flora.
- Firewood gathering is the main cause of deforestation in many areas, and wind-blown embers are a major cause of forest fires.

Stop pollution

Even small gestures can have big effects. By picking up rubbish that you find on trekking routes, you will provide an example to local people who might never have considered the environmental impact of dumping waste beside the trail. Until recently, there was no plastic waste in the mountains – today's massive litter problem is a direct consequence of demand from trekkers for water, soft drinks and snacks in plastic packets.

- Carry out what you carry in. Do not overlook easily forgotten items, such as foil, cigarette butts and plastic wrappers. Recall how long things take to degrade: aluminium cans take 80 to 100 years and plastic bottles take up to 450 years. Harmful chemicals then end up in the ground water.
- Do not use detergents or toothpaste (even biodegradable ones) in or near watercourses.
- For personal hygiene use biodegradable soap and a water container (or a lightweight, portable basin) placed at least 50 m (160 feet) away from a watercourse. Disperse waste-water widely to allow the soil to filter it fully.
- Wash cooking utensils 50 m (160 feet) away from watercourses using a scourer, sand, ash or snow instead of detergent.
- Buy only what cannot pollute, or carry it out. Purify water yourself instead of buying it bottled. If you are on the Annapurna Circuit Trek, carry a water bottle and refill it with water from Safe Drinking Water Stations along the trail.

- Bring used batteries back to your home country for proper disposal.
- Use toilets wherever possible. In the wild, stay at least 50 m away from water sources, and bury your waste.
- Encourage your porters to use toilet facilities.
- Toilet paper should be buried, or if possible, safely burned, not left to float around. If you can get used to the local ‘hand and water’ technique, even better. Use hand sanitiser.
- If you use a toilet in a lodge, put your used toilet paper in the container provided.
- Bring minimal packaging and no more food than you will need. Bring reusable containers or stuff sacks.
- Respect local regulations.

Protect wildlife

- Do not hurt or remove animals.
- Do not buy items made from wildlife, especially not from endangered species.
- Do not feed the wildlife. This can transmit diseases and lead to animals becoming dependent on handouts, which leads to unbalanced populations.
- Do not kill rodents or other ‘pests’ in huts or camps. In wild places, they are likely to be protected native animals.
- Discourage the presence of wildlife by not leaving food scraps behind you. Place gear out of reach and tie packs to rafters or trees.
- Do not engage in or encourage hunting.



One horned rhino.

© HMMH

Do's and don'ts in a wildlife sanctuary

The Forest is a hallowed temple of life. Respect it. Revere it and help protect it.

- Obtain permission before entering a park or sanctuary. Take a guide/naturalist and observe all rules.
- If driving, proceed very slowly. Then you will be able to hear, observe and enjoy without disturbing the animals in any way.
- Maintain a reasonable distance from all animals. Anything closer than ‘the critical distance’ will make them flee or attack.
- Listen to the jungle orchestra instead of electronic devices.
- Don't be disappointed if you don't sight a tiger; the jungle is an undiscovered world of small yet beautiful animals, birds, insects and plants.
- Dress in neutral colours that blend with the forests – khaki, brown and olive green are ideal.
- Wild animals have right of way.
- Guns are taboo.

(Source: www.himalayanenvironment.org)

Heeding the porters' needs and safety

Nepal's porters do their job without much fuss, so it is easy to take them for granted. However, it is essential to provide them with good, safe working conditions. Porters usually are poorly equipped regarding shoes, clothes and night-time covers. You must never accept poor treatment of porters or local staff, so make sure the agency is aware of your concern in this respect.

The International Porter Protection Group (IPPG) is a grassroots movement, established in 1997 by the Australian Dr. Jim Duff. Today, the IPPG has branches throughout the world, working to secure porters' rights, offer relevant training and to improve their safety and health conditions during treks and expeditions. The IPPG has focused particularly on porter protection in Nepal.

IPPG recommends the following guidelines

1. Clothing appropriate to season and altitude must be provided to porters for protection from cold, rain and snow. This may mean windproof jacket and trousers, fleece jacket, long johns, suitable footwear (boots in snow), socks, hat, gloves and sunglasses.
2. Above the tree line porters should have a dedicated shelter, either a room in a lodge or a tent (the trekkers' mess tent is no good as it is not available till late evening), a sleeping mat and a decent blanket or sleeping bag. They should be provided with food and warm drinks, or cooking equipment and fuel.
3. Porters should be provided with life insurance and the same standard of medical care as you would expect for yourself.
4. Porters should not be paid off because of illness or injury without the leader or the trekkers assessing their condition carefully. The person in charge of the porters, *sirdar*, must let foreign leaders or the trekkers know if a sick porter is about to be paid off. Failure to do this has resulted in many deaths. Sick or injured porters should never be sent back alone, but with someone who speaks their language and understands their problem, along with a letter describing their condition. Sufficient funds should be provided to cover the cost of rescue and treatment.
5. No porter should be asked to carry a load that is too heavy for his/her physical abilities (maximum: 20 kg on Kilimanjaro, 25 kg in Peru and Pakistan, 30 kg in Nepal). Weight limits may need to be adjusted for altitude, trail and weather conditions – experience is needed to make this decision. Child porters should not be employed.

(Source: www.ippg.net)

Good to know at the end of the tour

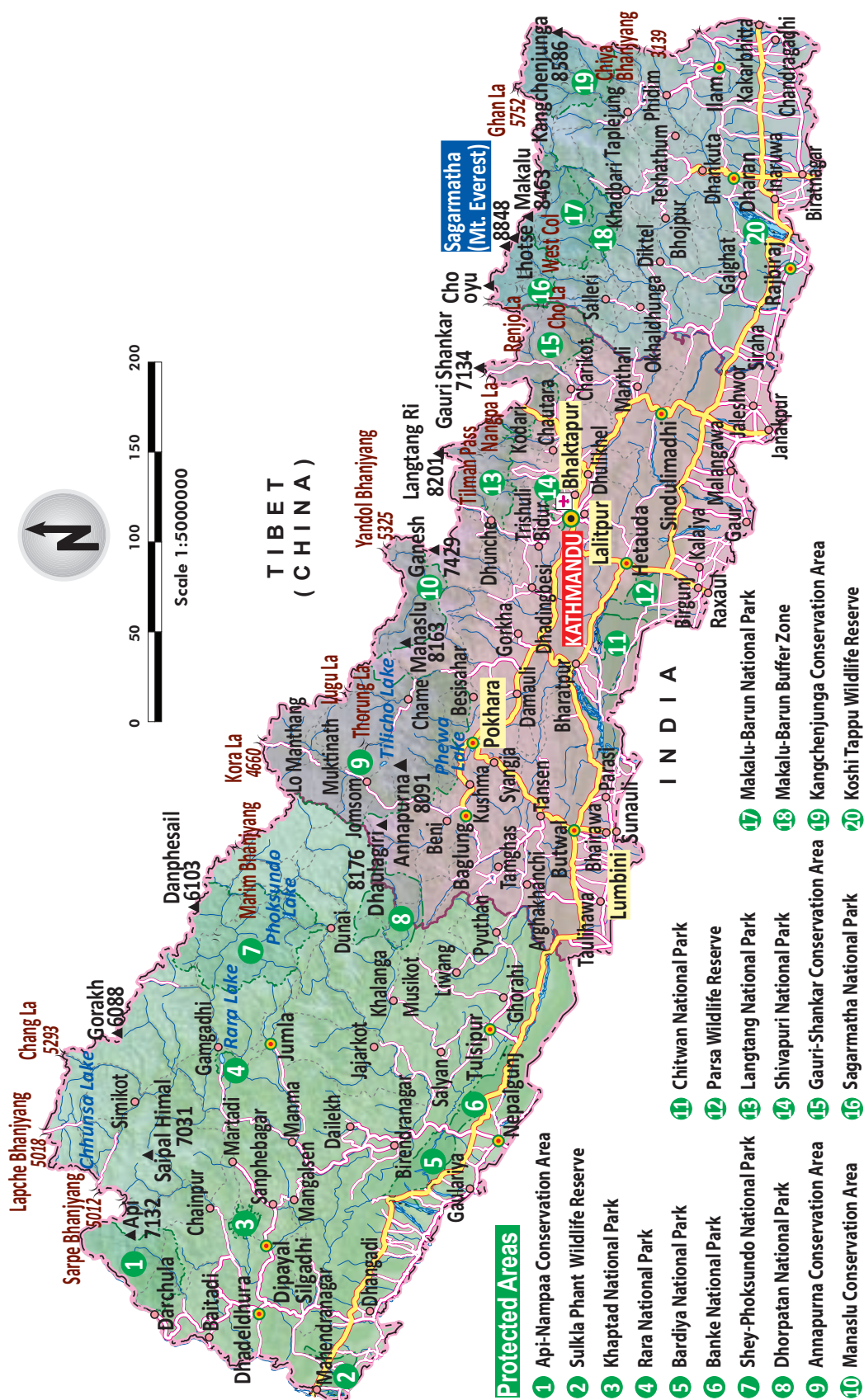
It is a pleasant tradition to have a final dinner together. Make sure to invite everyone who assisted with the tour – the contact person in the tour agency, guides, porters and the cooking team.

The tour operator will usually inform about procedures for tipping the support team – the amount per person and when and how to deliver it. This is often a point of tension between staff, the tour operator and the clients, and represents a practise that should be avoided, even eliminated. This cost should already be covered when paying for the trek, and you can convince the tour operator to do so. If you have organised a tour on your own, then be sure to tip the people who have assisted you, particularly guides and porters.

In addition to the usual tipping, it is common to donate equipment such as boots, down jackets or sleeping bags to be shared among the porters. If you are particularly pleased with the services of the company or individuals that assisted during the visit, do give them a written recommendation.



Porters on the move.



ADVENTURES IN NEPAL

General comments

- At the time of writing, the treks and activities presented below are commercially available.
- Route: Trails and routes are many and varied, and opinions differ as to which is the best, fastest, and safest. Nepalis do not mind extremely steep ups and downs and tend to be more interested in speed than scenery or hiking comfort. Trekking maps may be wrong as to trails, villages and physical features, so you will need to verify along the way. Generally, local people are not accustomed to mapreading; moreover, local place names may differ from the version printed on your maps. Don't expect villagers to be familiar with trails and topography far from their home areas and trading routes. Most routes and modes of trekking are strictly regulated. However, be aware of possibilities for detours and side-trips to suit your special interests and wishes.
- Difficulty: The grade of difficulty that we indicate might not apply for everyone. Make sure you are fit enough for challenges in Nepal.
- Lodging: Teahouses and local village lodges are normally very simple affairs. Homestays are increasingly popular and generally offer comfortable and clean accommodation. Guesthouses and lodges in traditional trekking areas tend to focus on the needs of foreign visitors, and are generally more sophisticated than teahouses and village lodges. Tented camps are temporary canvas 'lodges' on higher seasonal routes, but usually not during the winter and monsoon seasons. Camping typically means having a shared tent that is carried and set up for you every evening.
- Provisions: There are only limited options for buying food and supplies away from roads, major trail intersections, and places with special attractions. Village shops provide bottled soft drinks, biscuits, sweets, dry snacks, and noodles for the traveller, and otherwise mostly staple food, fuel, and cloth for local people.
- Mode of trekking: Indicates the best approach to these activities. Some routes are definitely not suited for solo trekking – for reasons ranging from cases of robbery to complex trail networks where you risk losing your way, danger of altitude sickness, or dangers like rockfalls, landslides, snowfall/ avalanche risk, and exposed trail sections.
- Language: Many dialects and local languages are spoken in Nepal, although most people know some Nepali. Place names on maps and names provided by guides and friendly helpers vary considerably, and may create some confusion.

Nepal's national parks

Nepal has many beautiful and important national parks, conservation areas, and other protected sites. Facilities for visitors are in place in the best-known ones. Protected areas can be visited in connection with treks, for instance the Everest, Annapurna and Mustang treks, while others lend themselves to Nepali-style safaris in the jungles of southern Nepal or to daywalks in the forest, as with Shivapuri on the Kathmandu Valley rim.

Trekking through national parks, conservation areas and designated trekking areas requires (prepaid) trekking fees and national park fees. You can leave this to an online travel agency or a travel agency in Nepal instead of trying to do it all yourself. Information about national parks and entry fees is available from the Department of Nature Protection and Wildlife Conservation <http://www.dnpwc.gov.np/> and http://www.visitnepal.com/nepal_information/nepalparks.php

Some parks are located in restricted areas close to sensitive borders or in very remote places. A groups-only policy exists for such places, see: <http://www.nepalimmigration.gov.np/download/app12.pdf>.

A note on distances

Due to the ups and downs, twists and turns, and frequent route changes, it does not make sense to measure treks in kilometers or miles – count hours and days instead. If you trek with pack animals, typical trek time on the trail is about 6 hours a day, including rests. The itineraries are adapted to the capabilities of the porters and/or pack animals. If you want to go faster and longer, you can choose treks and itinerary that fit your wishes, but never compromise on altitude considerations.

Characteristics of treks and activities

The following information on 126 treks and twelve special activities has been collected from Internet, operators' web pages, company brochures, tourism and travel research papers, newspapers and magazines, and our own

knowledge and experience. In some cases we have researched and created viable trek options to bridge gaps in existing overviews, or to indicate better routes. We have discussed and checked our information with Nepalese friends within and outside the tourism industry. The 2015 earthquake caused massive destruction in central Nepal, and rebuilding will be a lengthy, expensive process. Please check for updated information about your intended destinations before setting out.

Treks and activities vary in terms of routes, length and difficulty, and we have looked for common denominators to make a consistent presentation. Our goal has been to cover *all* of Nepal, presenting possibilities outside the iconic areas of Everest, Langtang and Annapurna, rarely mentioned in other books. Although we have researched every district in Nepal for tourism opportunities, and found a lot, there are still some blank spots on our map.







We focus on activities and experiences available to a wider public than the high-altitude, tough snow-and-ice ventures that have been in vogue – and probably will continue to be so. As only one in eight visitors to Nepal actually goes trekking or engages in similar physical activity, we have tried to stay true to our aim of presenting several easy and quite accessible non-motorised options that can be fun and interesting, while keeping you physically and mentally active.

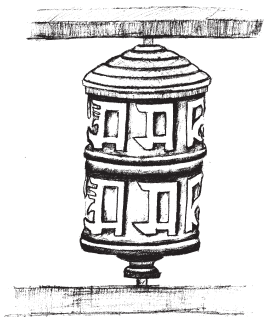
We have been precise when stating which routes require access and trekking permits, while being deliberately vague about which areas are open to independent, individual and unorganised trekking. Such areas are probably increasing, but the tourism authorities in Nepal try to be restrictive for reasons of revenues and safety. Remember, you are in a country with rugged terrain, difficult communications, and with an organised search and rescue system hardly worthy of the name. Moreover, if you get into trouble, there will be many people willing to volunteer and put their lives at risk to help. That makes you responsible for their lives if things go wrong.

Now it is up to you

After you have decided how long you can stay and which type of visitor you are, the basic information given in the following should help you to narrow the search down to specific possibilities, which you can then investigate further in more detailed guidebooks. Or search on the Internet – for instance, for ‘butterfly trekking in Nepal’ or ‘honey trekking in Nepal’. Besides the cost, all commercial tour and trek providers include the number of days from the moment you enter Nepal until the day you leave. In this book, we have counted only the days from the very first day you leave the bus or jeep at the trailhead and start walking until you are back at the roadhead. For the far northeast, as well as all of far western and western Nepal, add one and a half to two days from you leave Kathmandu before putting on your backpack. Other areas can be reached within one day. However, be assured: those days spent getting to the trailheads, remote airstrips and distant towns can have much to offer and be adventurous!

Trek Length Index

<i>One–two days</i>		<i>Eleven–fourteen days</i>	
<i>Three–four days</i>		<i>Two–three weeks</i>	
<i>Five–ten days</i>		<i>Three weeks or longer</i>	



Not interested in trekking? No problem! The final section presents options for a range of non-trekking activities, including bird watching, river rafting, horseback riding and honey hunting.

We wish you happy searches, and a wonderful time in Nepal!

How to use the information

We begin by describing some *hubs*: places where you can stay as short or long a time as you wish, taking long or short excursions from there. Then we present the trips and treks according to duration: (a) 1–2 days, (b) 3–4 days, (c) 5–10 days, (d) 11–14 days, (e) 2–3 weeks, (f) More than 3 weeks. Finally, we list some long distance treks. Within each length category, the options are presented in terms of geography: Western Nepal, Central Nepal, and Eastern Nepal. This works best logistically regarding airports and road access, for location reference, and it is independent of current or future changes in political/administrative divisions that also may affect district names and boundaries.

For instance, if you already are in India and want to take a three-day detour to Nepal, you would look for pages with green at the top.





Simikot, Humla.

📷 *Marit Bakke*

THE HUBS

Visitors from neighbouring countries in South Asia are generally interested in culture, scenic views and more sedate, road- and hotel-based travel. Also other types of foreign visitors, such as elderly people, may be less interested in strenuous trekking with very basic accommodation in lodges or tents. Staying in a hub can be a good alternative.

Tourism authorities and operators have been slow to reorient from classic touring and trekking to the opportunities available within or close to urban areas. Below we present some of these centres or hubs, from which you can easily explore cultural sites as well as wonderful scenery.

Simikot (2,900 m): Hub for Humla District in the northwestern corner of Nepal – with a colourful weekly market. From Simikot you can walk the Kailash Trail towards Tibet or take day-hikes or follow trails to cultural sites and scenic mountains.

The easiest and fastest way to Simikot is by plane from Nepalgunj. On foot it is a walk of three days from the nearest roadhead at Muchu, or at least six days from Kolti, Bajura.

Darchula (900 m): Located on the Mahakali River bordering India in far western Nepal, marking the western terminus, or the start, of the Great Himalayan Trail. From Darchula town, you can access the two Api Base Camps, walk to border passes to peek into Tibet, visit the new (as yet not developed) Api Nampa National Park and the southern slopes of Mt. Saipal.

There is no airport in Darchula, so access is by road from Dhangadhi.

Dhanghadhi (110 m): Located in the Kailali District in the extreme southwestern part of Nepal. Dhanghadhi is a hub for most road travel to the hills and towns east of the Karnali River, and the far western national parks of Suklaphanta, Khaptad and Api Nampa. There are many trekking options and unusual places to visit.

Access to Dhanghadhi is either by plane from Kathmandu or by road. Further to the northwest, Mahendranagar (Bhimdatta) has border crossing to India.

Gamgadhi (1,830 m): Located in the Mugu District, on the Great Himalayan Trail, a mere three hours' walk to Rara Lake and National

Park, this small town is rapidly turning into a minor hub. Since a jeep road was established to Jumla, Gamgadhi will merge with Jumla as a regional tourism hub. From Gamgadhi, day visits and short treks in the Rara area, looping treks and long-distance treks cover a multitude of interesting historical and cultural sites.

Access to Gamgadhi is by plane or bus from Nepalgunj.

Jumla (2,514 m): This historical town, located in the Jumla District in western Nepal, is known for its mountain and hill scenery, diverse high-elevation agriculture (one of the world's highest rice-growing areas), and Khas (ancient Brahmin/Chhetri) culture. There are several nearby cultural attractions and short trekking loops, access to short mountain treks with spectacular views of the Kanjiroba Himal, Patarasi Himal Base Camp and other high routes. Trekking routes fan out northward toward the Rara National Park and the Shey-Phoksundo National Park, eastward to Pokhara and in southerly directions.

There are flights from Nepalgunj with connections to Kathmandu. There is also road access via Kalikot and Surkhet to Nepalgunj.

Nepalgunj (490 m): A fair-sized city right on the border to India, Nepalgunj is the commercial and transport hub of Nepal's western Terai,

and the gateway to the Bardiya National Park, the Ghodagodi wetlands, the Bheri Valley and Surkhet areas, serving as a good transit stop on the East–West Highway. The city has Nepal's largest concentration of Muslims and, if you walk away from the main streets, offers varied architecture.

The airport has good connections to Kathmandu, and serves as a gateway to the mountain airstrips of western Nepal.

Jomsom (2,743 m): The district capital of Mustang is located north of the main Himalayan range, perfectly situated for a relaxing stay, short walks, day excursions and longer loops and treks. It is on the Great Himalayan Trail and the historical pilgrimage trail to Muktinath. Located in the Kali Gandaki Valley, the world's deepest gorge, Jomsom is a fascinating place and worth a visit. Within a day's walk from Jomsom, the villages of Jharkot and Khagbeni to the north, Thini due east across the river, and Marpha and Tukche to the south have more intact Thakali traditions. Accommodation is plentiful, and Thakali food and hospitality are famous.

There are regular flights from and to Pokhara. A rough road enables country buses and jeeps to drive to Jomsom from Pokhara via Beni.



Fields in Jharkot.



Braga village, Manang.

📷 : Aaditya Chand

Manang (3,529 m): As the crow flies, the capital of Manang District is not far from Jomsom or Pokhara, but is less accessible and more remote than other hubs. Manang is on the Great Himalayan Trail, located well above 3,000 m, nestled in an open valley with fantastic mountain scenery, making it a ‘must’ stop on the Annapurna Circuit route. Manang offers superb opportunities for day-walks to glaciers, glacier lakes and small villages, as well as for visiting monasteries and observing religious ceremonies. There are a few trekking peaks on the valley rim. West in the valley, the forested areas shift to high-altitude desert landscape. Accommodation and services are good.

Flights into Manang are erratic. Jeep transport is possible from Besisahar to the Manang Valley

villages, but road conditions are poor. A new trail that is routed away from the new road offers a good way to access Manang.

Bharatpur (183 m): The twin cities of Bharatpur and Naryanghat are busy transport hubs on the East–West Highway between Kathmandu and the Terai/India. Bharatpur is a good base for trekking in the Mahabharat Mountains and hills, for rafting and canoeing on the lower Trishuli, Marsyangdi and Kali Gandaki Rivers. It is generally more attractive and has better accommodation than Narayanghat. Proximity to the Chitwan National Park enables day-trips to the park and its buffer zones. Weekends and extended stays are recommended for exploring the area.

There are flights and frequent bus connections to Kathmandu.

Pokhara (830 m): Located in the Kaski District, Pokhara is Nepal’s second-largest city after Kathmandu, functioning as a regional hub for central Nepal’s mountain areas between Manaslu and Dhaulagiri, and surrounding districts. What Pokhara may lack in cultural riches, being a fairly new city, it makes up for in terms of natural attractions and services. The Pokhara Valley offers a multitude of walks, treks, excursions, cultural and social activities and events. Just outside the Valley, there are treks of all levels in the beautiful Annapurna foothills. The lakes offer boating and fishing, and you can bike in and out of the Valley.

The Immigration Department has an office in Pokhara. There are frequent flights to Kathmandu from the old airport, and a new airport is being built to accommodate international flights. Bus services run to Besisahar, Jomsom, Bharatpur, Baglung, Lumbini and Kathmandu.



Annapurna range from Pokhara area.

📷 HMMH



Lumbini.

© HMH

Lumbini (490 m): Lumbini, famed as the birthplace of the historical Buddha Siddhartha Gautama, is located in the Terai and has many good accommodations. The main attraction, the memorial of Buddha's birthplace, has been inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1977. Lumbini is a good starting point for visiting Bhairawa, the capital of the Rupandehi District. Close to Lumbini are several trails made for visitors, maintained by local people. You can also visit the coffee district of Gulmi and Palpa to the north, Tansen town, inner Terai and Siwalik in the Rapti River Valley (in the Dang District), and get acquainted with the Tharu culture. The western parts of Chitwan National Park can be reached by road from Lumbini, including the Tribeni Ghat, where the Narayani River enters the Indian plains.

Bhairawa airport serves Kathmandu, as do day and night buses in all directions. There are connections by railway and road across the border to India.

Dhadingbesi (600 m): Dhadingbesi is the district capital of Dhading, west of Kathmandu. With good road connections to the capital and its proximity to Ganesh Himal and the Manaslu Circuit, Dhadingbesi is rapidly becoming a centre for commerce and tourism. For things

to see and do, it cannot compete with Gorkha Bazaar, but is a great node for trekking, biking and excursions.

Dhadingbesi has no airport, but proximity to Kathmandu ensures quick road transport via Malekhu or Nuwakot.

Syabrubesi (1,460 m): Syabrubesi is a small town in the Rasuwa District, at the entrance to the Langtang National Park. Just north of the town is the Rasuwagadhi border post to Tibet. Due to the massive 2015 earthquake damage at the Tatopani border post on the Arniko Highway, Syabrubesi's importance as a hub is increasing. Not particularly attractive on its own, Syabrubesi functions mainly as a hub for trekking south towards Helambu and the Kathmandu Valley, east into the Langtang National Park, north to upper Rasuwa and the Tamang Heritage Trail, and westward on the Great Himalayan Trail into Ganesh and Manaslu Himal. The town is situated deep in a valley, so it might be worth while trying to find accommodation higher up in villages that are more interesting, have better views and are less noisy.

No airport, but reasonably good road connections via Trisuli Bazaar and Dhading.

Kathmandu Valley (ca 1,400 m): The capital area is the entry and exit point for all visitors flying into Nepal, the first stopping place for most travellers coming across the border from India, and the hub for domestic flights and buses. Visitor services and the main offices of tour operators are clustered in Kathmandu. Cultural attractions abound, including several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, museums, and annual film, music and theater festivals. Among the parks is the lovely Garden of Dreams (right by Thamel). In the old city quarters, you are immersed in people's everyday rounds, shopping for food, textiles, kitchen utensils, electronic equipment and much more. Small shrines are decked with auspicious yellow flowers and rice, with Hindu and Buddhist temples and monasteries tucked away just off the main streets. Sadly, urban decay and population pressures are evident, together with increasing numbers of high-rise business and apartment buildings, pollution and traffic noise. The northern and eastern rims of the Valley offer the best views. Nagarkot, Dhulikel, Hatiban and Kakani are alternative places to stay, offering cultural and spectacular natural attractions. They can all easily be reached by road.

Namche Bazaar (3,445 m): The town, in the Khumbu part of the Solu Khumbu District, serves the trekking and climbing activities in the Sagarmatha National Park and beyond. In 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay became the first to reach the top of Mt. Everest. Since then, Namche has developed into an established

hub with good accommodation and services. Climbing expeditions start and end at Namche or Lukla (2,880 m) as do the main trekking routes: north toward Mt. Everest, south past Lukla to Solu and beyond, west through Rolwaling and the Great Himalayan Trail. Several shorter loops, day-walks and excursions fan out from Namche Bazaar. This is the heart of the Sherpa country, with monasteries, gompas, festivals, a national park museum and a bustling weekly market.

There are daily early-morning flights from Kathmandu to Lukla airport, from which it is a two day hike to Namche and one day back down to Lukla. Nearest roadhead is Jiri and Shivalaya.

Taplejung (1,440 m): This eastern district capital is the main point of departure for several treks and routes in the eastern Himalaya, especially toward the Kanchenjunga Himal and the pilgrimage mountain Pathibhara. Less ambitious treks, day-trips and Kirati cultural activities are expanding quickly. Between Taplejung and Terhathum are several routes and attractions worth visiting, including Nepal's highest waterfall. The Milke Danda to the west is a fantastic ridge, in springtime covered with rhododendron in full bloom.

There is an airport at Suketar, east of Taplejung, with connections to Biratnagar and Kathmandu. You can go by road south through Phidim and Ilam to the Terai, and from there on to Kathmandu.

Ilam Bazaar (1,210 m): This hill town is the capital of the Ilam District in the far east of Nepal. It is a perfect and pleasant place for exploring the Middle Hills landscape. Green all year, Ilam has a bio-diversity and agro-diversity that surpasses anything in Nepal, with its tea gardens competing with Darjeeling. Ilam is not on any major trekking route, but there are several shorter treks originally established as trade routes, treks to pilgrimage peaks and other multi-day adventures nearby.

There is an airport at Bhadrapur in the Terai as well as bus services to Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Kakarbhitta and Taplejung.



Namche Bazaar.



Indrachowk, Kathmandu 2015. © Marit Bakke



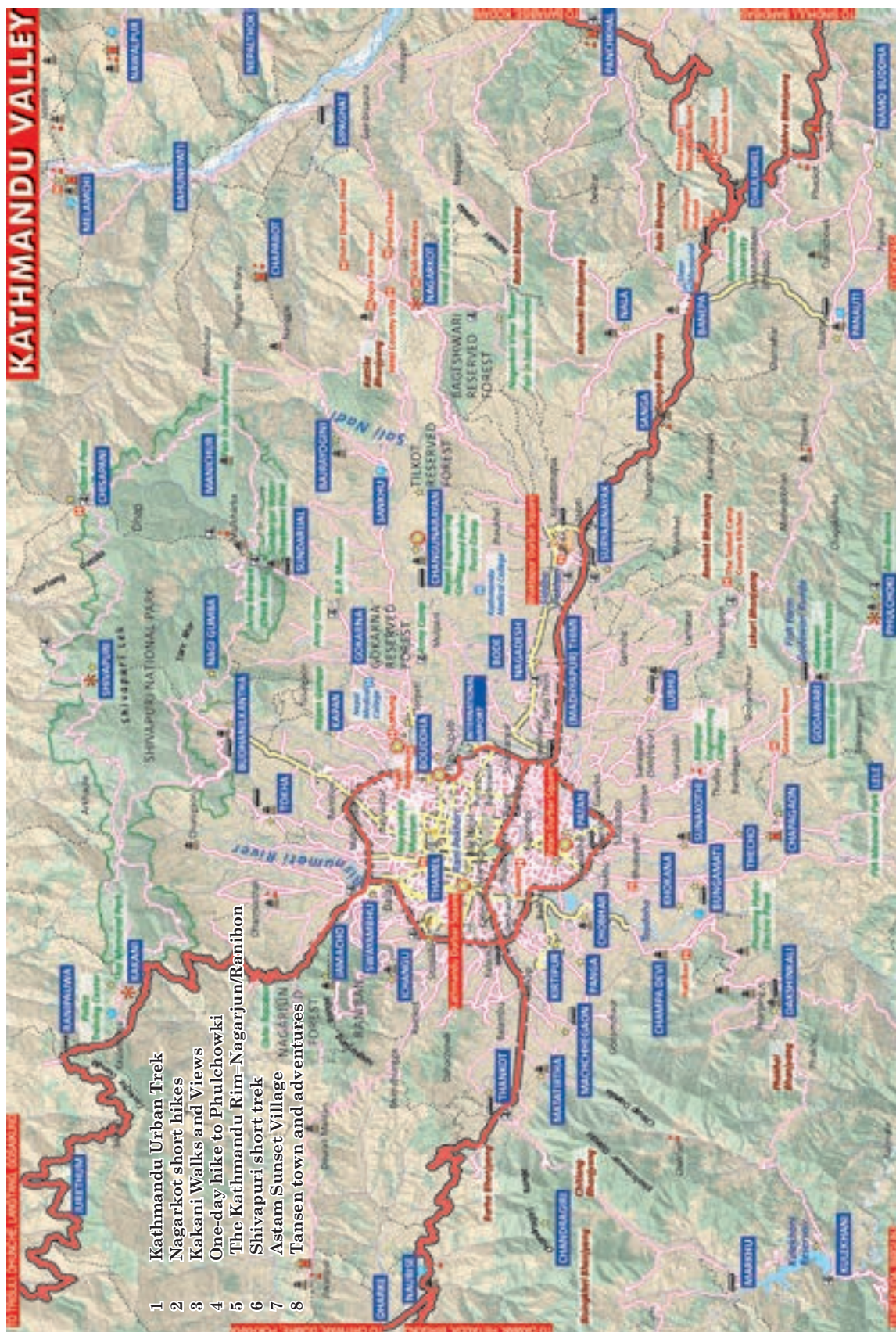
Indrachowk, Kathmandu 1957. © Knut Palmstøm



Lokeshor, Swayambhu. © HMH



Erotic temple decorations. © HMH



1-2 DAY TRIPS AND ADVENTURES

#1 Kathmandu Urban Trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Wide range of hotels and lodges.
Provisions	: Many shops and cafés.
Mode of trekking	: Single or in small groups. Large groups are impractical, apart from in Bhaktapur, due to spatial constraints, transport and traffic.
Formalities	: Entry fees are charged at all World Heritage Sites in Kathmandu, Patan, Boudha Stupa, Swayambhunath, Changu Narayan and Bhaktapur.

Location: Traditional old urban landscapes in the Kathmandu Valley.

Kathmandu city: Stroll along the trading roads in the old town centre around Asan Tole with the ancient Basantapur and Durbar Square temple and palace area; continue to the Bagmati Heritage Walkway's ghats and temples between Bagmati Bridge to Bisnumati River (under restoration).

Pasupatinath: The main Hindu temple and pilgrimage area just west of Kathmandu.

Bhaktapur: The most intact and largest cityscape of the Malla period, with the main squares with royal buildings and pagodas as the centrepieces. Not to be missed, worth a full day's outing. Please show respect when observing cremations and ceremonies, here as elsewhere.

Patan/Lalitpur: The old name, *Lalitpur*, can be translated as 'the beautiful city'. Temples around the central Durbar Square, and old city architecture make for a compact visit with a must-see urban traverse through a vibrant museum of artisan lanes, living quarters, and temples to the Patan Gate. Be sure to visit Patan Museum!

Kirtipur: Off the main track, the smallest of the Malla royal cities, in itself a living museum and less touched by tourism. It is located to the south of Kathmandu, near Tribhuvan University.

Bungamati: An old Newar village, known for its beautiful woodcarvings. Sadly, this charming village was badly hit by the April 2015 earthquake.

Boudhanath: The largest stupa in the world, Boudhanath is a respite from the busy urban

world outside its gates, and lends itself to contemplation and *kora* walks. The centre of Tibetan Buddhist life in the Kathmandu area, it is generally a more active place than Swayambhunath. Come before sunset and enjoy walking slowly around the stupa as the sky darkens and the place lights up.

Changu Narayan: A fair walk out from Bhaktapur or a bike ride from Sundarjal, this temple complex to Vishnu is amongst the oldest and finest in the Valley. Can be done as a part of a visit to Nagarkot as well.

Getting there and back: By local bus (cheap, but often crowded), a rented taxi for a day or two, hop-on-hop-off taxi or bicycle.

Routes: Several guidebooks describe walking routes and things to see and do in the Kathmandu Valley. The www.thelongestwayhome.com online guides are handy and always updated.

Special attractions: Temples and stupas from the Licchavi and Malla periods in Kathmandu, Patan, Changu Narayan, and Bhaktapur are World Heritage sites.

Pasupatinath is one of the most holy sites for Hindus, while Swayamunath and Boudhanath are among the top most prominent Buddhist sites in the world.

Special advice: Biking used to be a good way of getting to the attractions in Kathmandu, but is no longer a healthy option in the central areas of the Valley. Cycling to Kirtipur and Bhaktapur and especially Changu Narayan should be good if you avoid the main roads. Local biking associations can provide advice on cycling in Kathmandu. Otherwise, there are many handy guidebooks and online sources to information on local walks and attractions in Kathmandu.

#2 Nagarkot short hikes

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Several hotels and lodges in Nagarkot. Good food and services are available.
Provisions	: Several shops in the center of Nagarkot village.
Mode of trekking	: Individual, couples and small groups. A large group will be impractical.
Formalities	: None

Location: On the Kathmandu Valley eastern ridge.

Getting there and back: By car (one hour). On bicycle it is four hours from Kathmandu or three hours from Bhaktapur.

Route: Drive by car to Nagarkot, and walk back to the nearest road. Base yourself in a lodge and set out for half-day or full-day walks on the many trails in the area. Travel agencies and hotels in Kathmandu or Nagarkot should be able to provide maps, itineraries and guides, if wanted.

Special attractions: Spectacular view of the eastern Himalayas and the hills below. We

strongly recommend that you walk up to the watchtower above Nagarkot early in the morning to watch the sunrise over the peaks.

Connecting adventures: A visit to Nagarkot can be part of the Kathmandu Valley Rim Circuit (No. 5), also for bicycling and hiking to roadheads inside the valley.

Special advice: Nagarkot is ideal for families wishing a calm respite from the city. Be aware that young Nepalis gather in Nagarkot to party during weekends. Unless you want to join the fun avoid the weekends or visit Panauti on the other side of the Arniko Highway, also with good views and trails.

#3 Kakani Walks and Views

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy, short walks, and not so steep ridge terrain.
Lodging	: Good lodges at Kakani. Booking in advance is recommended.
Provisions	: In Kathmandu prior to departure. Hotels provide full meal services.
Mode of trekking	: No organised arrangement necessary, and reservations can be done directly to the lodges. Still, it is probably wise to ask your Kathmandu hotel for some assistance with bookings and advice. Kakani lends itself to families and couples and is also a suitable place for small seminars and reunions.
Formalities	: None

Location: Nuwakot District. Kakani is a hump on the western ridge of the Shivapuri ridge on the Kathmandu Valley's northern rim.

Getting there and back: By bus or car 29 km from Kathmandu to the Kakani bus stop on the road to Trishuli Bazaar, then about 2 km on foot from the main road.

Route: Drive (1 hour) or bike (2–3 hours) to Kakani (2,073 m). Base yourself in a lodge or restaurant and take walks for one, two or more

days. An attractive short trek is along the Aale Danda ridgetop eastward for as long as your time allows.

For the more intrepid, after an evening and night at Kakani, there is a pleasant hike or bike ride back into the Kathmandu Valley via Aale Danda, then descending into town at Budhanlikhanta temple complex. Alternatively, you can follow the Shivapuri watershed ridge to Dhap, stay overnight and continue all the way to Nagarkot on the rim.



Terrace farming.

© HMH

Special attractions: Kakani offers the best hotel-based views of the Himalayas anywhere near Kathmandu, with excellent sunrise views. The uninterrupted panorama stretches from the Annapurnas, Manaslu, Himalchuli massifs, the Ganesh, Langtang Himal, and into Jugal and the Gaurishankar area. There are also good views of the Mahabharat mountain ridges to the south. Kakani and the Shivapuri ridge eastwards is a hotspot for birds. Rainbow trout aquaculture in Nepal began here, so local people come to Kakani to eat trout.

Connecting adventures: Trek and bike from Kakani into Shivapuri National Park, (TIMS is required and you have to pay the Shivapuri National Park fee), and descend at a spot of your liking along the rim. Budhanlikhanta is an easy choice from where you can bike right into Kathmandu.

Special advice: Bring binoculars and a Himalayan mountain profile, and a bird book. Remember to get TIMS and other papers if you consider returning via Shivapuri National Park.

#4 One-day hike to Phulchowki

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate, but the steep trail can be slippery after rain.
Lodging	: None. However, you can stay overnight in your own tent.
Provisions	: In Kathmandu. There are some small eateries at Godawari for visitors to the shrine and to the Godawari Botanical Gardens.
Mode of trekking	: No organised arrangement necessary.
Formalities	: None

Location: Pulchowki is the highest point (2,762 m) on the Kathmandu Valley Rim.

Getting there and back: By bus, taxi or bicycle to Godawari, and return from the same place.

Route: Start from the end of the public road at Phulchowki Shrine. Follow instructions from your hotel or use a guidebook and a local map to find the correct trail to the telecom tower on the top, asking local people as you go. An early-morning start should get you to the top by lunch. Puelchowki can also be done as a mountain bike trip.

Special attractions: Phulchowki provides the best view of the Kathmandu Valley and the uninterrupted Himalayan range as far as the

horizon stretches from east to west. There is a fantastic diversity of plants, butterflies and birds, in fact much better than in Shivapuri National Park. Rhododendrons bloom in March and April. This is the best place to take night photographs of the Kathmandu Valley.

Connecting adventures: There is a trail along the Kathmandu Rim (No. 5), although rudimentary in places, which you can follow to Lele along the Tileswar Danda to the west, and down to Chapagaun for transport to Patan or Kakani, and a more diffuse route towards Panauti to the east.

Special advice: Bring binoculars, a Himalayan mountain profile, a map of the Valley and a bird book.

#5 The Kathmandu Rim–Nagarjun/Ranibon

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: None.
Provisions	: Bring your own: take plenty of water and food.
Mode of trekking	: Individuals and small groups. Travel agents, hotels or car rentals can organise this trek.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Northwest rim of Kathmandu Valley, above Balaju.

Getting there and back: By bus, car or bicycle. You can drive right to the top, but we recommend that you start your hike after a 15 minutes' walk up from the road to Trishuli.

Route: The walk from the access point on the main road to the top takes 3 hours. You can also make a traverse south and come down to the valley floor near Swayambhunath (3 hours).

Special attractions: Protected forest. Birdlife. There is a picnic area at the top with a view of the city but not of snowy mountains.

Connecting adventures: None particular.

Special advice: Individual hikers should be aware that petty crime has been reported in this area (wherever there is a motorable road). Note also that there might be a lot of unattractive food wrappers and other waste from picnickers.

#6 Shivapuri short trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy, depending somewhat on your ambitions.
Lodging	: None.
Provisions	: In Kathmandu and Sundarijal.
Mode of trekking	: Individual, family, small groups.
Formalities	: Shivapuri National Park fee, TIMS.

Location: The Shivapuri National Park is located on the northern rim of the Kathmandu.

Getting there and back: By bus, taxi or bicycle to the trailheads at Sundarijal.

Route: There are several one-day trip options from Sundarijal. Contact the park authorities, guidebooks or a bike shop for advice. You can do a loop and return via Kakani, Budhanlikhanta, Kopan or elsewhere.

Special attractions: Dense forests, varied plant and bird life. Views over Kathmandu, and from the top of Shivapuri you can see the Central Nepal Himalayas, especially the Helambu area, Ganesh Himal, Godainkunda Lekh, Langtang, Jugal, and Rolwaling Himal.

Connecting adventures: Treks into Helambu, connecting trails on the Kathmandu Valley Rim (No. 5).

Special advice: Individual hiking is discouraged, as crime have been reported in area.



Red-whiskered bulbul.

© HMMH



Oriental cuckoo.

© HMMH

#7 Astam Sunset Village

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Home stay.
Provisions	: Not really needed, but Pokhara is nearby.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, families, individuals, company outing. This is a very good option for those travelling with children.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Kaski, northwest of Pokhara.

Getting there and back: By bus or car from Pokhara to Mardi Pul.

Route: A short hike from Mardi Pul to Astam and return. If you stay overnight, you can experience the sunset and the next morning's sunrise.

Special attractions: Astam is a pleasant

village with good food and accommodations. You have panoramic views of the entire Annapurna Range.

Connecting adventures: The Annapurna Panorama trek (No. 22). From Astam you can start treks west towards the south of Annapurna South network and Mardi Himal west ridge.

Special advice: Bring camera, binoculars and a mountain profile.

#8 Tansen town and adventures

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Hotels, lodges, cottages.
Provisions	: In Tansen Bazaar, and Pokhara.
Mode of trekking	: Individuals, families, groups.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Palpa District. Tansen (1,371 m) is the administrative center, located between Pokhara and Butwal towns. It is an all-year destination with a balmy climate, suitable for a day's stopover or as a multiday destination.

Getting there and back: By bus or car from Bhairawa/Lumbini, Butwal or Pokhara.

Route: Several activities that can be done within one day.

Special attractions:

Historic Tansen: Like most Middle Hill towns, Tansen was built on Tibet-India trade. There is a pagoda temple from 1807 as part of a larger temple complex. The Bhagawati Temple was built in commemoration of the victory over invading British forces in 1814. Tansen Durbar palace was built during the Rana period and gives Tansen the atmosphere of a mini-Kathmandu. Magars dominate in the areas around Tansen, while Newar and Hill Chhetri and Bahun (Brahmin) culture dominate the urban area.

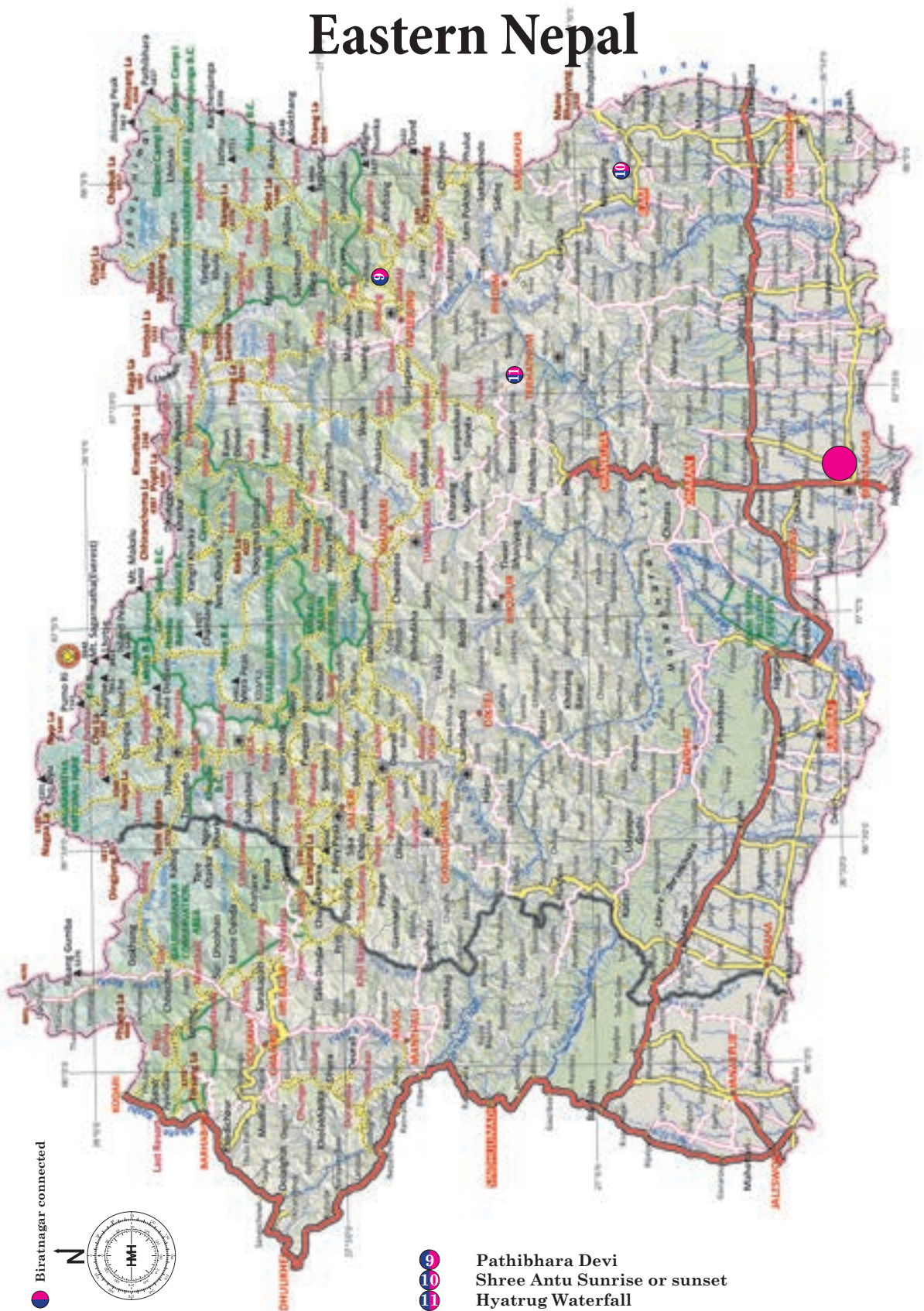
Coffee Tansen: Tansen is situated in the Middle Hills coffee belt: Palpa, Gulmi and Arghakhachi produce fine coffees. If you ask locally, you should be able to visit some producers and watch the production and processing of coffee. Tasting you can do back in Tansen town.

Panoramic views: Shreenagar Danda (1,524 m), a 30-minute hike up the hill from Tansen, has a fantastic view of Tansen town and its Durbar, the Inner Terai and Terai plains stretching into India, with a northerly backdrop of the Himalayas from Kanjiroba to Ganesh Himal and Langtang toward the east.

Short treks and outings from Tansen: To the Kali Gandaki River with Ranighat Palace, Ramdi Ghat, Rambhapani forest and the Satyawati Lake. There are many trails and excursion routes out of Shreenagar Danda.

Connecting adventures: Lumbini, Chitwan National Park.

Eastern Nepal



Difficulty	: Moderate.
Lodging	: Overnight facilities in Suketar and Taplejung.
Provisions	: Tea-stalls and simple teahouses catering to pilgrims.
Mode of trekking	: Single, in families or in groups.
Formalities	: Be prepared to spend some banknotes on top. Otherwise, there are no formalities.

Location: Taplejung District, far eastern Nepal.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu or Biratnagar to Taplejung Airstrip at Suketar.

Routes: Start from Suketar early in the morning and follow a well-defined trail for 5–6 hours to the top. Return the same way.

Special attractions: On the top of Pathibhara Hill there is a pagoda-shaped Hindu temple dedicated to the goddess Pathibhara, a manifestation of the divine feminine. It is among the nationally significant pilgrimage sites in Nepal, attracting also pilgrims from India. The

Kirat temple of Manghim was included in the mainstream Hinduism after the unification of Nepal. From the top there is a splendid view of Kanchenjunga.

Connecting adventures: This short trek is also the end-points of the Limbu Culture Trek for an exit at Basantapur (No. 69). Pathibhara Hill can also be linked up with Olanchung Gola Trek (No. 97), Milke Danda trek alternative ending in Taplejung (No. 98), or at the beginning or end of the Kanchenjunga treks (Nos. 111, 112).

Special advice: Bring plenty of water for the trail, and probably also some food. Dress conservatively: women should cover their heads when entering the temple; men will do well with a topi.



Pathibhara Devi.

© HMH



Pathibhara view.

© Pathibhara Mata

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: A new resort built and operated on sound environmental principles has been established on the ridge, with spectacular views. There are several small, simple hotels and guesthouses in Fikkal and Ilam Bazaar and in towns in Jhapa in the Terai.
Provisions	: Eastern Nepalis are traditional traders, and provisions are available in small towns and roadside stalls. Terai towns and Ilam Bazaar have wider choices.
Mode of trekking	: Individual, couples and small groups. Shree Antu is a pleasant place to visit with Nepalese friends.
Formalities	: None. Do not attempt to enter India from here; the nearest legal border crossing is Kakarbhitta.

Location: Ilam District, near the border to India.

Getting there and back: By bus or jeep from Jhapa, Ilam Bazaar or the small towns in southern Ilam district. From Fikkal, a country road marked Pashupatinagar also heads to Shree Antu Danda.

Route: Drive to the foot of Shree Antu Danda in Antu VDC. It is possible to drive all the way, but there are several trails to the top of the ridge, which has eastern Nepal's most famous viewpoint. You can reach Antu in a few hours from the eastern Jhapa towns of Kakarbhitta and Chandraghardi, but staying overnight is recommended.

Special attractions: From some angles Shree Antu Danda looks like a pyramid. From this ridge, close to the border to India, you can see India, Bangladesh and the Nepal Terai on a haze-free day. A short hike to a viewpoint offers a northeast panorama toward Kanchenjunga and

the mountains of Sikkim and Bhutan. Sunrise views are spectacular.

This is the tropical green corner of Nepal with very high biodiversity, attractive also during the dry season. The Antu Hill and ridges are covered in a nice mix of natural forest and tea gardens. Boating and fishing are possible in a lake at the top, and local trails provide pleasant excursions.

Connecting adventures: This trip can be done as part of an excursion in a multi-day stay in Ilam Bazaar. The visit to Shree Antu Danda can be done as a side-trip in conjunction with an exit travel from Nepal over the Kakarbhitta border.

Special advice: Visitors from India, Bangladesh and Nepal come here in droves to see the sunrise and sunset, frequently combining this with picnicking and visiting the tea gardens and places along the Jhapa–Ilam highway. They definitely create a festive mood.

Houses and tea plantations in Ilam.





One of the spectacular waterfalls in Nepal.

© HMH

#11 Hyatrug Waterfall

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Village teahouses, local guesthouses in Myaglung Bazaar.
Provisions	: In Dharan, Dhankuta, Myaglung Bazaar.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups and families.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Tehrathum District, Isibu and Samdu VDCs.

Getting there and back: By plane to either Taplejung/Suketar or Tumlingtar. You can also drive from Biratnagar via Dhankuta, Terhathum to Mynaglung Bazaar.

Route: This is a one-day walk from Myaglung Bazaar, passing through Guphapokhari, Srijung, and Pauthak.

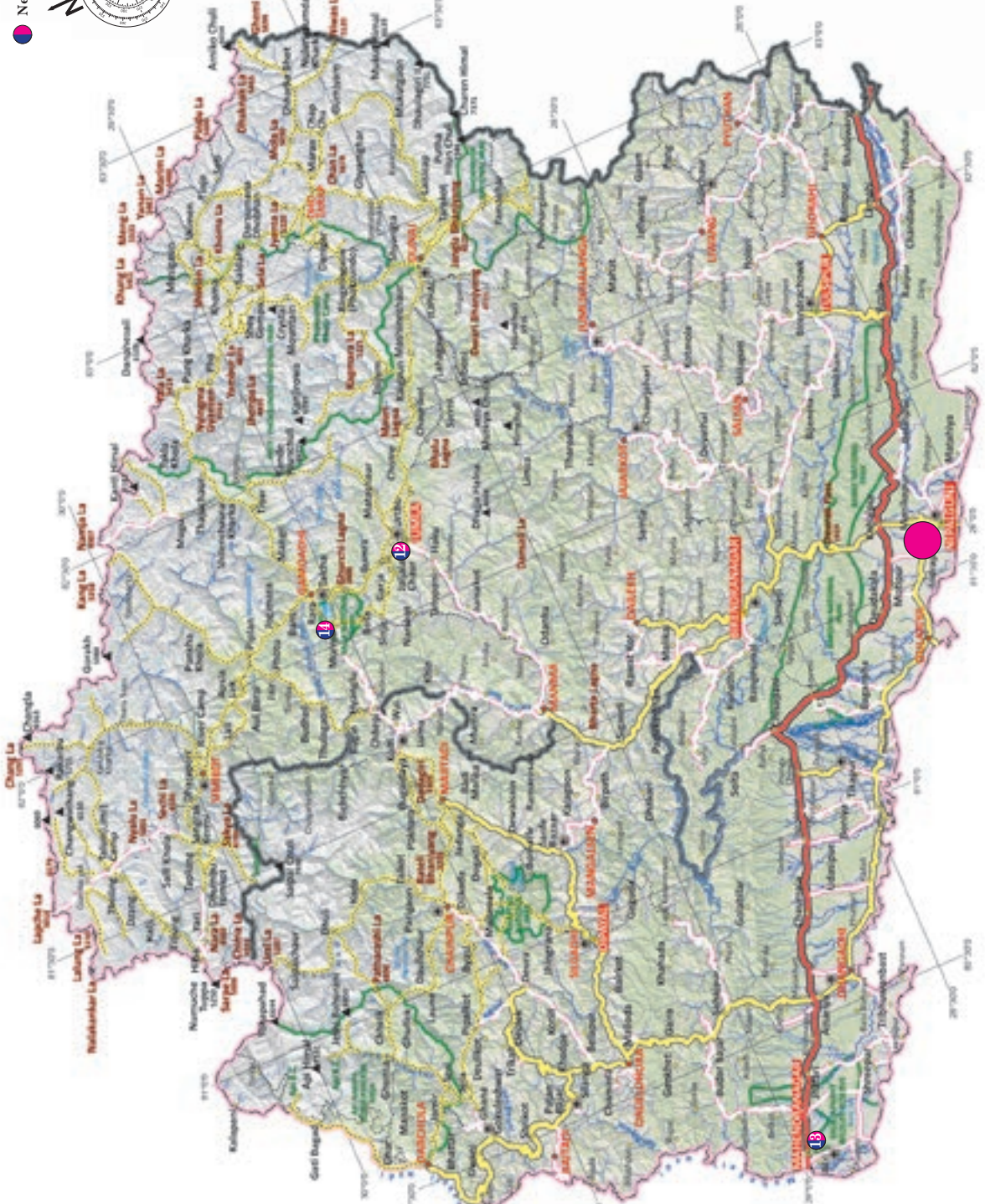
Special attractions: At 364 m, the Hyatrug Waterfall is officially registered as Nepal's highest. The Hyatrug Khola River is a tributary to the Tamur River. The population has an interesting ethnic mix, with Kiratis dominant.

Connecting adventures: Milke Danda Rhododendron trek (No. 98) and other local treks and activities.

Special advice: It makes sense to do this excursion in connection with a road trip to Dhankuta or Terhathum, or with a Milke Danda trek. A guide who speaks the Kirati languages and know the culture will be an advantage on this trip.



Western Nepal



Short adventures in Jumla
Sukla Phanta Wildlife Adventure
Rara Lake Short Circuit

3–4 DAYS TREKS AND ADVENTURES

#12 Short adventures in Jumla

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: From easy to strenuous – depending on time, weather conditions and fitness.
Lodging	: Several guesthouses and small hotels in Jumla Khalanga and in the Jumla Valley.
Provisions	: Jumla Khalanga is well stocked; otherwise, village shops have a rudimentary selection, mostly geared for the local market. Jumla has local travel and trekking agencies, guides and porters.
Mode of trekking	: Day excursions, teahouse-based treks, and camping treks. The further, higher and more remote you go, the more will you need assistance from local trekking operators.
Formalities	: Do register with the police in Jumla Khalanga and leave a copy of your itinerary with them. TIMS might be necessary, make sure to check in advance.

Location: Jumla is the Jumla District capital.

Getting there and back: By plane from Nepalgunj to Jumla. Or, if you are adventurous and have the time, you can spend several days on the road from Kathmandu via Nepalgunj, Surkhet, Dailekh and Kalikot to Jumla Khalanga.

Route: We suggest using Jumla Khalanga town as a base for lots of activities, ranging from short day excursions to treks and rambles lasting up to one week.

- One-day activities: Seasonal apple treks in and around the Jumla Valley; to the Gothermal Waterfall (70 m); to Chumchaur, partly by road, to the highest rice-growing valley in the world. All activities are easy.
- Overnight activities: Tatopani hot springs and ancient ruins in Boharagaun, Umgada and Lamra villages, and Godheymahadev, watching the swarming of wild Himalayan cliff bees and honey hunting, both easy. Chimara Malika with a mountain view towards Kanjiroba and Patrasi Himal mountains is moderate.
- Short camping treks: Thakurgyo, 3 days, 2 nights (moderate). Guchhi mushroom and herbal collection trek following villagers in and around Jumla (moderate). The Yarsagumba camping trek to the high kharkas above Jumla takes several days and is strenuous.

Special attractions: Travellers often ignore Jumla and surrounding areas, heading directly for towards Rara Lake instead. It is fascinating to visit villages and viewpoints, experience events and activities, and hike to the region's numerous high hills and mountains.

Connecting adventures: You can easily walk into Jumla from Rara/Talcha, Dailekh, the Guerilla Trek in Rolpa, from Dolpo, and connect with the Great Himalayan Trail, both the Cultural Route and the High Route (No. 126).

Special advice: Do not mistake Jumla for Humla, which is even further west. Note that flights are often delayed or cancelled due to weather conditions and logistic challenges. During the monsoon season the road from Kalikot might be closed for several days at a time.



Jumla Valley.



Chital deer.

© HMM

#13 Sukla Phanta Wildlife Adventure

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Lodges connected to the Wildlife Reserve.
Provisions	: In Mahendranagar and Dhanghadi. The lodges have full-service options.
Mode of trekking	: This is a lodge-based adventure, with day excursions, well suited for families, small groups and independent travellers.
Formalities	: Sukla Phanta National Park fee.

Location: Kanchanpur District, Far West Terai, between the cities Mahendranagar and Dhangadhi.

Getting there and back: By car from India or Kathmandu via Nepalgunj, or by plane either to Dhanghadi, Mahendranagar or Nepalgunj.

Route: 2–3 days. Elephant, jeep safaris, jungle treks within Sukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve, village walks visiting Tharu villages outside the park, and bicycling tours. As there are few visitors and excellent staff and personnel, it is possible to tailor a less motorised, more physically active program for visitors within and outside the park, without compromising safety and regulations.

Special attractions: Sukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve is one of the least known nature paradises

in Nepal, with few visitors. It is connected to a twin wildlife reserve across the border in India. It is known for its wetlands and tall grasslands, swamp deer, birds and elephants. There are also tigers and leopards.

Connecting adventures: Superbly suited to complete an end-of-trek in Nepal's far western hills and mountains. You can go on a Dhangadhi bicycle tour including a wildlife corridor that connects the Chure Hills with lower Terai and India. If you are entering/leaving from India, this is an excellent beginning or end of a stay in Nepal.

Special advice: Small children should not take part in jungle walks where sloth bears, rhinos and tigers may be found. Adults should always exert caution near wildlife.

Difficulty	: Easy circumambulation along the lakeside. Moderate if you take in some of the rim, including Chuchemara Peak (4,039 m), and the lesser peaks of Ruma Khand and Malika Khand. A walk-in from Jumla and onward connecting tours can be strenuous. Winter months are cold and snowy in this area.
Lodging	: Lodges in Gamghadi on arrival, and at the national park headquarters. Otherwise, simple teahouses, or bring your own tent.
Provisions	: In Kathmandu, Nepalgunj, and Jumla. Gamgadhi and local shops have limited supplies. Very few travellers visit this area, so do not expect special services or culinary treats.
Mode of trekking	: Couples, families, small groups with guide-porters, or full package trip from Kathmandu. Individual travellers are discouraged and might not be allowed to enter the National Park. Check beforehand.
Formalities	: TIMS and Rara National Park Fee. Go straight to the Rara Lake National Park for registration and other services.

Location: Mugu District. Jumla is the nearest major town.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj. Change for Talcha airport close to Gamgadhi district headquarter. By jeep via Jumla is possible. Trekking from Jumla (a major undertaking in itself) entails an additional three-day walk to the lake. Return the same way.

Route: 3 days from arrival at Talcha to complete a fast and simple circumambulation and return to Talcha. From Gamgadhi/Talcha, you can reach the lake on foot in three hours. There is an easy trail along the lake for a short and fine circumambulation. You can extend your visit with excursions to the rim of the lake valley, or by walking the high ridges.

Special attractions: Rara Lake National Park at 2,999 m offers quiet, pristine landscape views, as well as bird-watching opportunities. The deep-blue lake (the largest and deepest in the Nepal Himalayas) and surrounding coniferous forest form a stunning contrast to the snowy mountains.



Connecting adventures: Continue via Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) through Mugu towards Humla and the far western districts. Proceed south through the Sinja Valley (No. 44) and emerge at Surkhet.

Special advice: Rara is remote and you need to be self-supplied. Do not trek alone in this area. The wilderness begins just beyond the lake's edge. Watch out for Himalayan black bears. Few locals understand English. Talcha Airport is not for the faint-hearted.



Rara Lake.

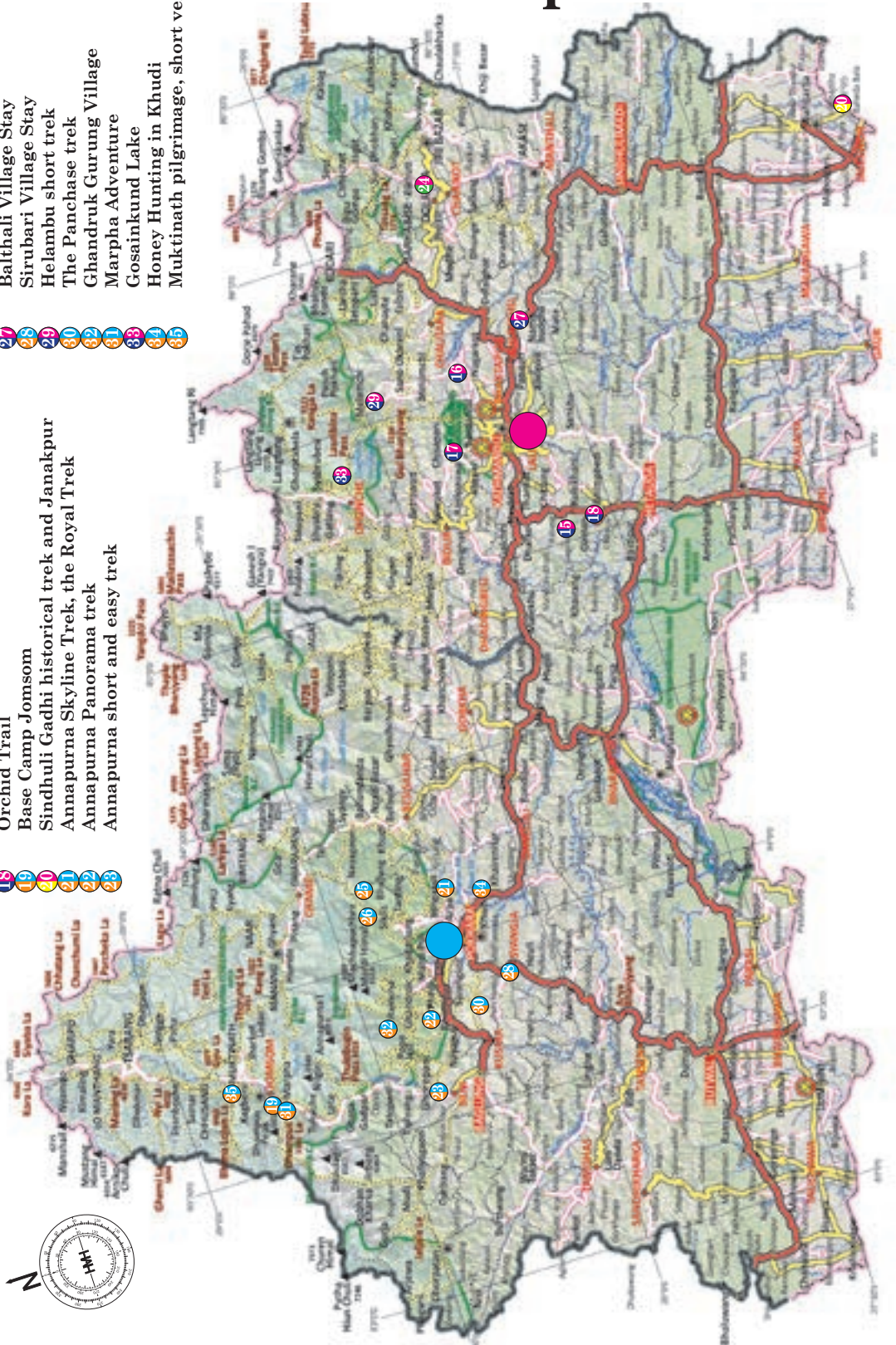
Central Nepal

-  Pokhara connected
-  Kathmandu connected



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#15 Into the wilds near Kathmandu

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate.
Lodging	: Small hotels at the start and beginning, teahouses and homestays.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Devighat, otherwise village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: None

Location: Kathmandu and Makwanpur Districts, southeast of Kathmandu city.

Getting there and back: By car (three hours) to Ranipauwa from Kathmandu. A new cable car is in operation and provides access from Thankot bottom station to Chandragiri Hill, 2,551 m. This makes access from the Kathmandu Valley floor easier.

Route: 2–3 days. One option is to walk for two days between the villages of Ranipauwa, Hiley, and Chinteshwor and to the top of Devighat. With a third day you can walk from Devighat to

Galchi, Dharke and Naubise.

Special attractions: Twisting forest trails in very hilly terrain, characterised by Tamang cultural and historical remains. The remote village of Maajhkharka is special. This is strawberry country; farmers also produce various other crops for the Kathmandu market. There are good views south toward the Terai.

Connecting adventures: Chitwan Jungle visit, Trishuli rafting tour, Chepang cultural trail.

#16 Nagarkot short treks

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Several hotels and lodges in Nagarkot.
Provisions	: Several shops in Nagarkot village.
Mode of trekking	: Single, independent or organised, small or big groups.
Formalities	: None

Special advice: None

Location: On the eastern Kathmandu Valley ridge.

Getting there and back: By car (one hour) or bicycle (three–four hours) from Kathmandu.

Route: For half or a full day you can walk on numerous trails on the Nagarkot ridge. If you are not returning by car, there are several trails that bring you back to the Kathmandu Valley.

Special sights: Spectacular overview of the Himalayas. They are distant, but stretch along the horizon from Langtang to beyond Everest. Walk to the watchtower above Nagarkot early in the morning to catch the sunrise.

Connecting adventures: With a longer stay, you can take various walks and treks on the Kathmandu Valley rim. Combine with visits to

Panauti, Namo Buddah and Dhulikhel.

Special advice: Bring a local map, or get one at Nagarkot.



View from Nagarkot.

© Marit Bakke

#17 Sundarijal, Nagarkot, Panauti Buddha Trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy, but quite long days.
Lodging	: Good lodges along the way.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Nagarkot, Panauti and Dhulikhel.
Mode of trekking	: Individual and independent, couples, families, organised group travel.
Formalities	: None

Location: On the Kathmandu Valley Rim and into Kavrepalanchowk district.

Getting there and back: By bus or taxi to Sundarijal, the trailhead for treks north and to the Kathmandu Valley Rim. Return by bus or taxi from Panauti on the Arniko Highway ('Tibet Road').

Route: 4 days. A fairly standard route is: (1) Sundarijal to Chisapani; (2): Chisapani to Nagarkot; (3): Nagarkot to Dhulikhel; (4): Dhulikhel to Namo Buddha, and on to Panauti. Without too much prior planning it is easy to alter this route, breaking off to stay longer in places of interest.

Special attractions: Views into the Kathmandu Valley from the Rim, northerly views of the Himalayas from Chisapani, views from Nagarkot and Dhulikhel toward the eastern hills and Himalayas. According to Nepalese tradition the Namo Buddha stupa is one of the eight Buddhist holy places that the believer must visit in a lifetime.

Connecting adventures: Other Kathmandu Valley Rim options (No. 5), and several alternative mountain bike rides.

Special advice: Finding the route might not be easy, so take along a guidebook and a good map.

#18 Orchid Trail

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Homestays with Tamangs, Newars and other ethnic groups.
Provisions	: Limited, bring your own. However, Markhu is a local market town.
Mode of trekking	: Individual, family, small groups.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Makwanpur District, southwest of Kathmandu.

Getting there and back: By bus or car from Kathmandu to Daman village on the Tribhuvan Rajpat road from Naubise toward Hetauda. Return by car from Chitlang.

Route: 3–4 days. This is an easy option close to Kathmandu. The 11 km-long route goes from Daman (2,320 m) to Markhu/Chitlang.

Special attractions: The trail is known for its profusion of orchids. There are options for cultural experiences, boat rides, and village

excursions. Indrasarovar Lake offers good fishing. Chitlang is a large, ancient village and people speak an archaic dialect of Nepali. There are protected rock inscriptions from the Licchavi period (3rd–9th century AD). Daman offers one of the best panoramic views of the Central Himalayas.

Connecting adventures: You can continue south from Daman past Hetauda and visit Parsa Wildlife Sanctuary or Chitwan National Park.

Special advice: Bring nature guidebooks for flowers and birds, binoculars and camera.



Kali Gandaki.

© Dag Norling

#19 Base Camp Jomsom

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy to moderate, depending on what you decide to do.
Lodging	: Hotels, guesthouses, teahouses, homestays, according to interest.
Provisions	: Jomsom is well stocked.
Mode of trekking	: Independent visitors, families with children, small groups.
Formalities	: For all visits to the north of the main street in Jomsom you need an ACAP fee and TIMS. A Mustang remote area permit is needed to travel north of Kagbeni.

Location: Jomsom and immediate surroundings in the Lower Mustang District.

Getting there and back: By plane (ca. 30 minutes) to/from Pokhara. By car or country bus from Pokhara/Beni to Jomsom takes one day. A very pleasant and traditional trek on foot from Pokhara is also possible.

Route: Spend 3–4 days in the area. Establish your personal ‘base camp’ in a hotel or guesthouse in Jomsom town. Take short treks and day visits to villages, viewpoints, temples and monasteries.

Special attractions:

- Marpha, 1½ hrs walk south from Jomsom, is the centre of apple production in the Kali Gandaki valley, and you can see processing and distilleries. Marpha has an important monastery, small shops and good restaurants (details in No. 31).
- Thini is a pleasant Thakali village across the valley, with good views back to Jomsom and toward the Dhaulagiri massif. Continue up to Dhumba Lake and enjoy the views from the teahouse on the water edge. Complete the day with a visit to the Kutsab Teranga Monastery.

- Mesokanto La (pass) is high and seemingly unreachable, but it is possible to walk beyond Thini and enjoy the forested valley and the lower slopes.

Connecting adventures: Muktinath, on the Annapurna Circuit (No. 107), can be reached directly via Eklobhatti, or along the western side of the Kali Gandaki, via Dhakarjung tower and Phalyak, then overnight in Kagbeni, and to Muktinath the next day. An alternative route visits the Bon-po village of Lupra and then up to Jharkot to Muktinath – local guide is recommended because the trail can be difficult. Jomsom is a good starting point for exploring the lower Kali Gandaki Valley and Upper Mustang (Nos. 89, 110).

Special advice: Extremely windy desert area; sandstorms can occur from midday to late afternoon. Flights between Pokhara and Jomsom run only in the morning. Sunglasses are essential, likewise windproofs, hat, thin gloves and neck covering. Jomsom is a great place to have a reunion, celebration, ‘walk and talk’ seminars and conferences.

Difficulty	: Easy, short hikes.
Lodging	: Fairly good, Nepali-style hotels in the area. Janakpur has good hotels and eateries.
Provisions	: Local markets, shops en route.
Mode of trekking	: Short excursions, one day or half-day trips.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Sindhuli district, in the Mahabharat Mountains east of Kathmandu, north of Janakpur.

Getting there and back: By car all the way either via Hetauda or via Dhulikhel, or by plane to Janakpur and a short drive over the Chure Hills, through the inner Terai, Sindhulimadi and into the mountains on the BP Koirala Highway.

Route: Spend 2–4 days in the area. There is a pleasant short hike from the BP Koirala Highway, or on a country road, to the ruins of the Sindhuli Gadhi fort. You can hike for one day to citrus farms in Junar and other locations in the area.

Special attractions: Sindhuli Gadhi is the fort where the Gorkha Army, in 1767, defeated the British forces of the East Indian Company that were trying to confine the Gorkha Kingdom's expansion and siege of the Kathmandu Valley. For both Nepalis and the British this site has

immense symbolic and historical significance. Good views of the Himalayas.

Be sure to visit historical Janakpur, with the Janaki Mandir and the Ram Sira Bibaha Mandir temples and the city ponds like the Danush Sagar and Ganga Sagar. Nepal's only railway runs for 53 km from the Janakpur Railway Station (a gem) through the Terai subtropical landscape to the Indian border

Connecting adventures: From Sindhuli Gadhi you can return to Kathmandu via Parsa Wildlife Reserve and Chitwan National Park. You can also visit Dhulikhel and Nagarkot (No. 2).

Special advice: This area is not really geared for visitors apart from British history buffs and Nepali tourists. Sindhuli Gadhi has a future potential, given its proximity to the east–west BP Koirala Highway.



Farmers harvesting millet.

#21 Annapurna Skyline Trek, the Royal Trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Mostly camping. There are good hotels and lodges at the end of the trails near Rupa and Begnas Lakes. Also informal homestays and a few small, little-known village lodges.
Provisions	: At Pokhara. Small and basic, but surprisingly well-stocked village shops along the route. You can buy very good home-cooked food.
Mode of trekking	: Couples, family trekking, small group with guide/porters. Individual trekking is possible, but quality of accommodation varies.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Kaski, northwest of Pokhara.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Pokhara (30 minutes), then by local bus or car one hour east from Pokhara to Kalikasthan, Majhthana or Tiwaridanda. Return by bus or car from Begnas Bazaar to Pokhara.

Route: 3 days. This trek loops around the watershed of Dipan, Begnas and Rupa Lakes. Begin at Kalikasthan, or at any small roadhead nearby, and follow good local trails on the ridge past Patle, Betyani, Lipeyani, Syaglung Danda, Ramkot, Mohoriya, Chisopani, then descending to the ridge between the Rupa and Begnas Lakes.

The trek can be done in three days, but also in one day by cutting down from the main ridge at Thumadanda, walking past Kotbari, through Begnas village and to Sundari Danda. The route can be used for trail-running.

Special attractions: Views of the

Annapurna–Lamjung Himal skyline and the eastern lakes of the Pokhara Valley. A small deviation from the trail brings you to the hilltop at Syaglung Danda. This hilltop and the Chisopani Thapla Danda offer superb views of the Annapurnas and Lamjung Himal. There are pleasant Gurung villages, fertile landscape around the lakes, and orchids, especially in the village of Sundari Danda.

Connecting adventures: This trek can form an extension of the Siklis Eco–Trail (No. 25) from Bhurjung via Siklis. You can walk on the Sundari Danda ridge and row, swim or fish in Rupa and Begnas lakes.

Special advice: This is a fairly sophisticated area, where many people, including former Gurkha soldiers, are familiar with trekkers and foreign cultures. In most villages there will be somebody with more than a basic understanding of English.

#22 Annapurna Panorama trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Homestay and lodges.
Provisions	: Not really needed, but Pokhara is nearby.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, families, individuals, company outing.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Kaski, northwest of Pokhara.

Getting there and back: By bus or car to Mardi Pul (30 minutes), and return from Phedi.

Route: 2–3 days. Hike from Mardi Pul to Astam and stay overnight, next day a slow ramble to the Australian Camp. Return via a second overnight at Dhampus to Phedi.

Special attractions: Pleasant villages with good services as regards food, comfort, and

accommodation. Panoramic views of the entire Annapurnas, each place in a different local environment. Good for bird watching.

Connecting adventures: This trek can serve as the starting point for any trek west towards trails south of Annapurna South and on the Mardi Himal west ridge.

Special advice: Bring camera, binoculars and a mountain profile.

#23 Annapurna short and easy trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Excellent lodges and teahouses.
Provisions	: Pokhara, trailside shops and lodges. The villages in this area are well stocked.
Mode of trekking	: Individuals, independent trekking, families, small groups.
Formalities	: TIMS and Annapurna Conservation Area fee.

Location: West of Pokhara in Kaski and Parbat Districts.

Getting there and back: By plane or car from Kathmandu to Pokhara. Continue by bus or car/taxi to Naya Pul on the Pokhara–Beinghat–Jomsom road. Return the same way.

Route: A 4-day itinerary: from Naya Pul the trail goes to Ghandruk Village, continues to Jhinudanda, the Austrian Camp, and back to Naya Pul, with return by vehicle to Pokhara. This trek can be extended in several directions and days. Trail-running is possible.

Special attractions: The southern Annapurnas and Machhapuchhare. Pleasant

Gurung and Magar villages, comfortable lodges and good food. Well-maintained trails. Suitable for families with small children. Families might enjoy trekking with pack animals.

Connecting adventures: Jomsom–Muktinath trail (No. 35), the Annapurna Base Camp Trail (No. 85), the Mardi Himal treks (Nos. 60, 67, 90), and several other possibilities. At the trail end you can trek for two more days to Dhampus and further toward the northern outskirts of Pokhara.

Special advice: Distances between teahouses and lodges are short, so advance planning is generally not necessary.



The Gurung village Ghandruk.



View from Kalinchowk.

© Sunil Karanjit

#24 Kalinchowk Ridge

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate. Walk slowly to accustom your body to altitudes on the ridge.
Lodging	: Camping. Due to the 2015 earthquake the lodges are defunct at the time of writing, with the exception of Kuri Village at the end of the road from Charikot.
Provisions	: Do not rely on finding shops on this route past Kuri, Barhabise, Charikot, and Singati. Check for post-earthquake updates.
Mode of trekking	: Tented, mixed with simple lodges – check regarding post-earthquake status.
Formalities	: TIMS and Gaurishankar Conservation Area fee.

Location: North of the Swiss road as you approach Charikot in the Dolakha district.

Getting there and back: By bus or car from Kathmandu to Charikot. Return either via Barhabise (bus to Kathmandu) or Singati (bus to Charikot, change for Kathmandu).

Route: 2–6 days, depending on the route chosen. The shortest way is a jeep drive up from Charikot, staying overnight in the village or in lodges at the trailhead, and heading to the top the next morning. Return the same way on the second day. This is the normal, short pilgrimage route.

Another option is to trek from Barhabise on the Arniko Highway to Tinsang La, and then walk to the eastern end of the Kalinchowk ridge, visit the temple site and descend to Charikot on day 4.

A third route takes 5–6 days, going by road past Charikot to Singati and trekking westward along the Singati Khola River to Bigu Gompa. From there you continue to Tinsang La from the eastern side, and turn left/southeast on the Kalinchowk ridge as described for the Barhabise–Charikot route.

Special attractions: The Kalinchowk Bhagwati Temple, a major Hindu pilgrimage site, is located at the highest point (3,800 m) at the eastern end of the ridge. The Janai Purnima festival (generally at Augsut full moon) is a major, and very crowded, occasion. Splendid mountain views of Chobo Bamare, Rolwaling and the Khumbu Himalaya. There are masses of rhododendrons, and the national bird, the Impeyan Pheasant (*Danphe*) can be sighted in this area. The route goes through communities with Sherpa, Tamang and Brahmin people.

Connecting adventures: Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126), especially towards the east into Rolwaling (No. 81) in the Gaurishankar Conservation Area, and Ramechhap.

Special advice: You need to carry a good water supply since the ridge has few water sources. Beware of altitude sickness on the quick route from Charikot. The whole area was severely hit by the 2015 earthquake and it will take some time before facilities return to normal.

Difficulty	: Moderate. It is easiest to trek from the Siklis side, but the Eco-trek route is planned for the opposite way.
Lodging	: Excellent lodges along the route and in Siklis.
Provisions	: Well-stocked village shops in Pokhara, Burjung, Siklis.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups. Trekking alone here is not recommended because it is very easy to get lost in the rhododendron forest.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Kaski District. Siklis is a delightful large Gurung village due north of Pokhara, on the flanks of the Central Annapurnas.

Getting there and back: By bus or taxi two hours from Pokhara to the roadhead at either Lhachok or Burjung. Return to Pokhara from Siklis.

Route: 3–4 days. This short eco-trek offers a real adventure, from Burjung to Siklis. Begin hiking half a day from the roadhead at Burjung or Ghalegaun in the Shardi Khola Valley, and cross the 2,700 m high ridge to Siklis the next day. However, it might be a good idea to stop one night after crossing the ridge before ascending 1,500 m from Ghalegaun to enjoy the attractions. Spend as much time as possible in well-managed, friendly Siklis before returning

to Pokhara by walking, or catching a taxi below the village.

Special attractions: You will come to welcoming Gurung villages, see beautiful rhododendron forests and scenic views of Machhapuchhare's east side, the Annapurna 2, and Lamjung Himal.

Connecting adventures: Siklis day excursions and short treks (No. 26), Annapurna Skyline Trek (No. 21).

Special advice: The rhododendron forest has a lot of leaf litter and the trail might become almost invisible. The ridges are also fog-prone. The 1,500 m ascent from Ghalegaun is hard on the knees. Lodges that are marked on some maps are only shelters with a simple roof.



Siklis village.



Terrace farming, Balthali village.

© HMH

#26 Siklis Adventure

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy to moderate. The excursion to Kapuche Ice Lake is strenuous due to the incomplete trail and total lack of facilities. Tent or at least a tarp required in Kapuche.
Lodging	: Excellent lodges and homestay options in Siklis. There is also an organised campground.
Provisions	: In Pokhara and Siklis.
Mode of trekking	: Group and family trekking, also independent and individual visits.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee and TIMS.

Location: Kaski District, north of Pokhara on the south flanks of Annapurna 2 and 5.

Getting there and back: By car from Pokhara, and on foot up a steep hill you reach Siklis in one day. There are some good hiking options from Pokhara Valley if you want to avoid using a vehicle or walking the dusty road. You can take the Siklis Eco-Trek (No. 25), via the attractive villages of Yangjakot and Tangting, or by following the village trails north from where the Pokhara roads end.

Route: Siklis is the largest Gurung village, delightful and sophisticated, and well worth a visit or stay. Return to Pokhara by walking or catching a taxi below Siklis.

A locally available village map shows where the attractions are. From the aptly named Landslide View, 1–2 hours walk above the village, you see and hear falling ice from Annapurna 2 glaciers. In the same area you can join herders on the *kharkas* (grazing lands on the ridges).

Make a looping trek to Tangting village across the valley, where you may stay overnight in a lodge or homestay. Another option is to take the difficult

trek through the wilderness to Kopuche Ice Lake with its glacier falls from Annapurna 5 and 2. This is the lowest spot with a view of glaciers in Nepal – at 2,500 m and a mere 12 km air distance from the lakeside dinner tables in Pokhara.

Special attractions: Gurung people: their lifestyle, everyday activities, their homes, and technical infrastructure. From the village there is a great view of the Lamjung Himal. The excursions proposed above offer close-up views of the Annapurnas and Lamjung Himal.

Connecting adventures: Annapurna Skyline trek (No. 21) and the Siklis Eco-Trek (No. 25). You can also trek to Lamjung Base Camp and Dudh Kunda, and descend to Yangjakot. You can also cross the Salt Pass from Siklis into Manang (No. 88).

Special advice: Easy to get lost on the high ridges, in the rhododendron forests and in the wilderness. Heavy rainfall, including dangerous hailstones, might be encountered in the late monsoon and pre-monsoon seasons. This is among the wettest areas in Nepal.

#27 Balthali Village Stay

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Homestay opportunities and a resort.
Provisions	: Not much is needed, Balthali village has what you need for your stay.
Mode of trekking	: This is a village-based option, with day excursions, very suitable for families, small groups and independent travellers.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Kavrepalanchowk District, at the junction of Roshi and Ladku Khola.

Getting there and back: By car 40 km east from Kathmandu to Namobuddha Monastery and a short walk to Balthali via Khopasi. Return the same way or combine with a trek back to the Kathmandu rim.

Route: For 2–3 days you can get acquainted with the rustic, yet well-maintained village. The surrounding landscape consists of undulating hills covered by luxuriant forests, with trails everywhere.

Special attractions: Excellent birdlife and other wildlife; ancient Hindu and Buddhist temples and monasteries within reasonable hiking distance. The neighbouring traditional Tamang village of Dada Gaun is equally welcoming. Another village, Pada Gaun, offers excellent views north toward the Himalayas and the Mahabharat forests.

Connecting adventures: None in particular.

Special advice: Good for children.

#28 Sirubari Village Stay

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Homestay only.
Provisions	: Sirubari village has what you need for your stay.
Mode of trekking	: Village-based with day excursions, very suitable for families, small groups and independent travellers.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Syangja District, southwest of Pokhara.

Getting there and back: By car from Pokhara to Arjunchupari (off the Pokhara–Tansen road) and a short walk.

Route: 2–3 days to enjoy this Gurung village and surroundings. A short day hike to Dahare Danda offers uninterrupted views of the Annapurnas, forested hills and scattered villages. Many trails connect neighbouring villages.

Special attractions: Visits with local people who will tell you about farming, animal husbandry, and other everyday chores. Your homestay host family will bring you into any

local festivals and events. The Gurungs are generally a very pleasant, friendly people, with fun ceremonies for welcomes and departures. Sirubari is close to one of Nepal's main coffee-producing areas, so enquire for an excursion to see how coffee is grown and produced.

Connecting adventures: Treks to Baglung village and Panchase near Pokhara. Sirubari is the mid-point if you travel between the end points of the Pokhara–Tansen highway. Continuing south on the main road to the Terai, you can visit Lumbini (one of the HUBS), the birthplace of the historical Buddha, and a UNESCO site.

Special advice: Good for children.

Difficulty	: Easy. The trekking infrastructure is well designed and supplied. The side options are moderate.
Lodging	: Teahouses and lodges.
Provisions	: Stock up on technical equipment in Kathmandu, while food and other trekkers' needs are catered for at lodges and village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Groups, families, individual independent trekking possible. Helambu is perfect for a first trek for families with small children.
Formalities	: TIMS. Crossing into Langtang National Park requires a national park fee.

Location: North of Kathmandu, from Sindhupalchowk District on the eastern end to Nuwakot District to the west.

Getting there and back: By taxi or bus from Kathmandu to Sundarijal. Return from the trek to Sundarijal, or descend to the road in the Melamchi valley to take the bus. Or, trek over the Gosainkund Lekh and return from Dhunche or Syabrubesi to Kathmandu by bus.

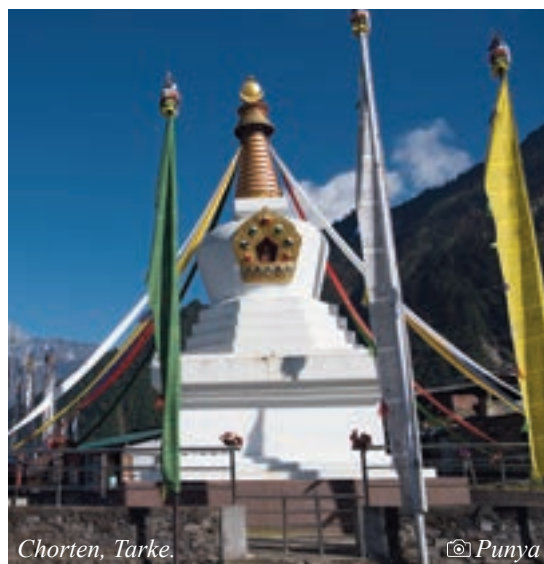
Route: 3–5 days. There are several trails and options. The main route follows the ridge north from Sundarijal to Tharkegyang, and returns via another ridge. Helambu offers a maze of other trail options.

Special attractions: Great views of the Himalayan massifs. The hospitable Helambu people, mostly Tamang, offer good food and services.

Connecting adventures: With a little more time available you can continue across the Gosainkund Lekh and descend into Langtang National Park and take the bus back to Kathmandu.

You can enter the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126), both east and west, the Langtang Valley trek (No. 54) from Syabrubesi, and Panch Pokhari Kunda trek (No. 51) in the Sindhupalchowk District.

Special advice: Petty crime has been noted in this area, so individual trekkers must take care. Inquire in advance about earthquake damage in the Langtang area.



Chorten, Tarke.

© Punya



Childhood in Helambu.

© Punya

#30 The Panchase trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Teahouses and some lodges on the way.
Provisions	: There are village shops at Pumdi Bhumdi, Badhaure, and Naudanda.
Mode of trekking	: Family trekking, small groups, individual trekking (but not alone), and mountain biking.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Kaski District. Panchase is the ridgeline (approximately 2,500 m) surrounding the western end of Phewa Lake in Pokhara.

Getting there and back: You can walk on foot from Pokhara and back. Most trekking groups take a vehicle to the Pumdi Bhumdi or Peace Pagoda roadhead and either walk all the way back to Pokhara or are picked up at Naudhanda or Sarangkot. You can also take a boat from Phewa Lake to Margi and hike up to the Peace Pagoda.

Route: 3–5 days on an easy circuit trek on good trails: Peace Pagoda or Pumdi Bhumdi village – Panchase Bhanyang – Panchase peak – Bhadaure – Naudanda ridge – Sarangkot and descend to Pokhara. The route can be cut short

at Badhaure and Naudanda, where there is a bus to Pokhara. An optional descent goes from Badhaure via Tamagi and Harpan to Phewa Lake.

Special attractions: Splendid views of the Annapurna range, Phewa Lake, and the Pokhara Valley. The beautiful forest covering Panchase is known for its orchids and birdlife. Panchase is a very special ecological hot spot and has been proposed as a nature preserve.

Connecting adventures: From below Naudanda, you can connect with the trail network south towards the Annapurnas.

Special advice: None

#31 Marpha Adventure

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy in the Marpha area. Side treks can be strenuous.
Lodging	: Several good lodges with standard Nepali food, Thakali specialities and crossover food.
Provisions	: Jomsom is well stocked, so are village shops and lodges.
Mode of trekking	: Lodge-based.
Formalities	: TIMS and Annapurna Conservation Area fee for areas north of Jomsom.

Location: South of Jomsom on the way to lower Mustang.

Getting there and back: By plane from Pokhara to Jomsom, and on foot to Marpha.

Route: 2–5 days for strolling in Marpha and hiking on trails in the vicinity, including Dhaulagiri Base Camp east and the Dhaulagiri Icefall, Upper Marpha Valley, Miri Valley, and the Tibetan camp. Or stroll down to the historical village of Tukche, central depot for the ancient salt trade with Tibet.

Special attractions: Marpha is famous for its architecture, delicious apples, and tasty apple brandy, produced at the local distillery. Spectacular views of Dhaulagiri and the Annapurnas, both with peaks above 8,000 m.

Scenic summer farm valleys and high grazing land with good views.

Connecting adventures: Hike northward to Kagbeni, where you enter lower Mustang. You can also walk up to Muktinath, a site holy to Hindus, Buddhists and Bön-po believers alike. There is the very strenuous hike up to the Thorung La (4,416 m) on the Annapurna Circuit trail (No. 107) – more safely approached from the Manang side. You can also follow the route in the Miri Valley that Maurice Herzog took when climbing the first 8,000 m peak, Annapurna I, in 1950.

Special advice: The quality of food, lodges, and neatness of the villages reflects civic pride and long history of communities along the Tibet/India trade route.



Marpha village.

© Olav Myrholt

#32 Ghandruk Gurung Village

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: This trek version is moderate, not easy, because it involves going quite fast from Naya Pul to Gandruk and back. The trail has several stone steps.
Lodging	: Good lodges with excellent food along the route.
Provisions	: Available in Pokhara and in village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Lodge trekking.
Formalities	: TIMS and Annapurna Conservation Area fee.

Location: Parbat District. The village is west of Pokhara and due south of Annapurna South.

Getting there and back: By bus or car from Pokhara to trekking start at Naya Pul.

Route: In 3–4 days you walk from Naya Pul on to Ghandruk, to Tolka, a pleasant village on the trail to Annapurna Base Camp, and back into the Pokhara Valley at Phedi.

Special attractions: Superb views of the surrounding landscapes, village architecture and the flanks of Annapurna South and

Machhapuchhare (the sacred ‘fish-tail’ mountain).

Connecting adventures: There are several options within the trail system around Ghandruk: to Ghorepani and Poon Hill (No. 58); Mulde Hill; Tatopani – Marpha – Jomsom – Muktinath in lower Mustang; Annapurna Base Camp (No. 85); treks further west.

Special advice: This is a very short excursion into the core area of what is considered a trekking paradise with many trail options, side trips, good lodges and excellent food.

Difficulty	: Moderate during the autumn and spring seasons, can be strenuous during monsoon and winter season. Ascending at the pace suggested here might cause altitude problems for some.
Lodging	: There are seasonal lodges and teahouses at Gosainkund during the main season. Bring a tent if you plan to spend a few days rambling around on the Gosainkund Lekh.
Provisions	: Dhunche, Syabrubesi and Sing Gompa lodges are well stocked.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, families, and individual, independent trekking.
Formalities	: Langtang National Park fee, TIMS.

Location: Rasuwa District. The lake is at an elevation of about 4,300 m on the Gosainkund Lekh ridge.

Getting there and back: By bus or car to Dhunche (easiest), Syabru or Syabrubesi. This takes one day. Return from the same place, or connect with the Helambu trek on foot back to Kathmandu.

Route: Gosainkund Lake can be a specific trek target in combination with other treks in the area or just for rambling along the ridge, or perhaps scaling the small peaks nearby.

For a 3–5-day trek you start from Dhunche or Syabru, hike up the obvious trails to Sing Gompa (3,500 m), stay overnight, and make a day excursion before coming back to Sing Gompa, or walk slowly to Chalang Pati or Laurebina Yak and stay overnight there. On the third day, move on to Gosainkund Lake. Spend as much time as you wish at the lake, and then down to Laurebina Yak, Chalangpati/Sing Gompa. Return down to Dhunche or Syabru the same way.

Special attractions: Gosainkund Lekh ridge is the first snowy ridge you see north of

Kathmandu. Gosainkund Lake is a pilgrimage site with annual festivals in June and August. It is a superb trekking destination with splendid views, rhododendron and pine forests. There are six lakes and a few more ponds situated at the top of the ridge.

Connecting adventures: By continuing past Gosainkund Lake and descending into Helambu, you can head for the Helambu trekking route (No. 29) back to Kathmandu or Melamchi, or follow the Great Himalayan High Trail (No. 126) east through Sindhupalchok.

Special advice: Possibility of altitude sickness – very easy to go too high too fast. There have been incidents of robbery in the Syabrubesi area. The last part of the trail from Laurebina Yak to Bhairab Kund Lake can be covered with hard snow and ice during winter, making it dangerous to cross. Severe danger, turn back. Trekkers have lost their way down to Helambu from the Laurebina La pass. The trail below Laurebina La between Phedi and Tharepati was damaged in a landslide caused by the 2015 earthquake. Check for updates.



Gosainkund (left) and Bhairavkunda (right).

#34 Honey Hunting in Khudi

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous, a long walk on rough jungle trails, requiring sturdy footwear and wind/rainproofs for protection against bees.
Lodging	: Khudi Bazaar.
Provisions	: Supplies are available in Besisahar and Khudi.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, individuals, both organised and independent trekking.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Lamjung District.

Getting there and back: By bus or car to Kudi via Dumre from either Kathmandu or Pokhara.

Route: 4–5 days. After an afternoon and evening in Khudi, continue the next day for 6 to 7 hours to the Gurung honey hunters' village. On the second day you can observe the honey hunters approaching the cliff, the ceremonies, and seasonal work in ropes off the cliffs. End by walking back to Khudi Bazaar before returning the next day toward Besisahar.

Special attractions: Honey hunting traditional style, learning about the old traditions and the Himalayan cliff bees. Bazaar life, local monastery, natural creek pools.

Connecting adventures: Can be undertaken as part of an Annapurna Circuit tour (No. 107).

Special advice: Rainproof gear for this fairly wet area. Bring antihistamines in case you get seriously stung. Not recommended for children. Read about the honey hunters and see the film by Eric Valli, 'Honey Hunters'.

#35 Muktinath pilgrimage, short version

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate.
Lodging	: Several lodges of various comfort categories provide food and accommodation.
Provisions	: Well-stocked shops in Jomsom, Kagbeni, Rani Pauwa.
Mode of trekking	: Individual trekking, small groups, families with children.
Formalities	: TIMS and Annapurna Conservation Area fee.

Location: Temple area on the Annapurna Circuit trail below the Thorong La pass and close to the entry point to Upper Mustang.

Getting there and back: By jeep or plane from Pokhara to Jomsom, preferably on foot to Kagbeni and via Jharkot to Muktinath. There is a gravel road from Jomsom to Muktinath for motorcycles and jeep taxis.

Route: 3–4 days. Walking on a good trail from Jomsom, there are three routes to choose among. We recommended a triangle trip: Jomsom–Kagbeni–Jharkot–Muktinath with either a Jharkot–Eklobatti–Jomsom return, or a longish

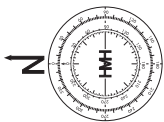
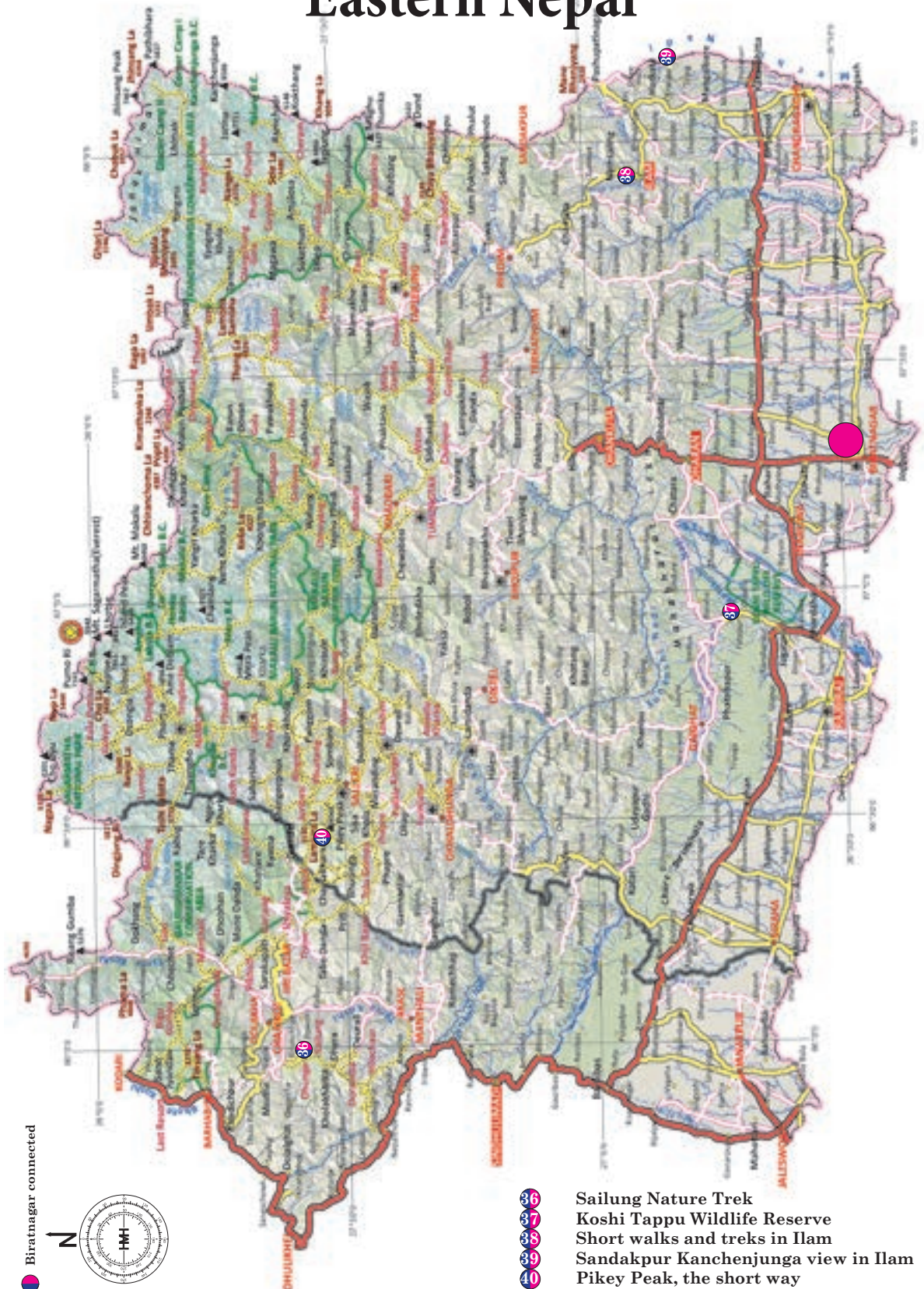
high route with an overnight stay in Lupra.

Special attractions: Famed, beautiful temple complex that is holy to Buddhist, Hindus and followers of the ancient Bön religion.

Connecting adventures: The Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) into Manang over the Thorung La. Into Upper Mustang (No. 110) and Lo Manthang via Jhong or Kagbeni.

Special advice: Very windy in the main valley, frequent mid-day sandstorms. The restaurants above Kagbeni/Eklobhatti do not serve meat.

Eastern Nepal



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Pilgrimage on the top of Sailung.

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#36 Sailung Nature Trek

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Camping.
Provisions	: At Kathmandu and Mude.
Mode of trekking	: Individuals, groups, independently or organised.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Dolakha District, southwest of Charikot.

Getting there and back: By bus or car to Dunge Bazaar on the Kathmandu–Jiri road. Return to Kathmandu from Charikot further east. You can also travel to Mude Bazaar in Sindhupalchowk (add one day).

Route: 3 days or more. The trek starts at Dunge Bazaar near Mude, and three hours later you reach Sailung (3,580 m). After an overnight stay at Sailung, catching both sunset and sunrise, descend to Managaun and Chaichhap for an

overnight stay. On the last day of undulating trekking you reach Charikot, the district capital of Dolakha.

Special attractions: A phenomenal viewpoint for seeing the Kathmandu Valley and the Himalayas from the Ganesh Himal to Kanchenjunga.

Connecting adventures: On the way to options further east, or on a return from Jiri/Charikot.

Special advice: Bring a Himalayan profile, binoculars and camera.

#37 Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy, comfortable.
Lodging	: Three lodges, the best-known is Koshi Tappu Wildlife Camp.
Provisions	: Bharatpur. Koshi Tappu Lodges.
Mode of trekking	: Day excursions in small groups with wildlife guides. Village walks.
Formalities	: Entry fee to the Wildlife Reserve.

Location: In Saptari, Sunsari and Udayapur Districts in the eastern Nepal Terai. The wildlife reserve stretches 24 km along the Sapta Koshi River.

Getting there and back: By bus or hired car to Koshi Tappu via Narayanghat and Itahari, or via Dhulikhel and Silghadi. Return to Kathmandu the same way. You can save time by flying from Kathmandu to Biratnagar airport. Driving on your own provides the opportunity to visit Parsi Wildlife Reserve and Chitwan National Park on the way.

Route: 3–4 days. The Wildlife Reserve covers 175 square km. Based in a lodge you can take various excursions, for instance, to the Koshi irrigation and flood barrier on the Indian border. The best birding sites are located between the Wildlife Reserve Camp and the barrage.

Special attractions: Koshi Tappu is home to the only remaining wild buffaloes in Nepal, and to most of its Gangetic dolphins. Phenomenal bird life with thousands of migratory and aquatic birds, some 450 species in all. Otters and gharial crocodiles seem to like the deep end of the dam. The plains around the river are flood-prone, and local people have adjusted by putting their houses on stilts, very different from elsewhere in Nepal. There are also beach and boating facilities.

Connecting adventures: Visiting Chitwan National Park and Parsa Wildlife Reserve can be places to stop on the way east or west. Also hill attractions in eastern Nepal.

Special advice: Good to visit during spring and autumn bird migration periods, in winter to see the wintering birds.



Lifestyle in Koshi.



Kanyam tea plantation, Ilam.

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#38 Short walks and treks in Ilam

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy, except for the moderate to difficult red panda excursions.
Lodging	: Commerical lodges in Ilam Bazaar, along the highway further north (Panchthar and Taplejung) and south to the Terai. Homestays can be arranged.
Provisions	: Special trekking goods should be brought from Kathmandu. Otherwise, Ilam Bazaar is well stocked and the village shops are good.
Mode of trekking	: Couples, in a small group with guide/porters. Mostly day-trips are listed here.
Formalities	: None; however, bring your passport for the border areas with India.

Location: Ilam District, Mahabharat Mountain belt bordering India.

Getting there and back: The bus ride from Kathmandu to Ilam Bazaar is very long, so a good alternative is plane from Kathmandu to Bhadrapur in Jhapa, then continue by bus or car 75 km to Ilam Bazaar (about four hours). Return the same way. From India you can cross the Kakarbhitta border point from Darjeeling/Siliguri and go by bus or car to Ilam Bazaar or intermediate points along the way.

Route: Stay 3–4 days for excursions to tea gardens and treks in sacred hills. Some options: Ilam Bazaar to roadheads for Mai Pokhari lake, Shree Antu hilltop; agro-tourism tours tailored for small groups, tea garden visits by arrangement along the Mechi Highway. Siddhi Thumka hilltop and Pathibhara Temple hill also receive visitors from India and Eastern Terai. The Pathibhara Temple on the Mechi Highway en route to Ilam Bazaar has a very steep and impressive stone slab access. Nearby is a fogwater collection system, producing water

from fog. Red panda day-treks can be organised by local conservation organisations.

Special attractions: This is the green corner of Nepal, more humid, lush, and mostly green throughout the year, and is reflected in its interesting architecture. Mai Pokhari Lake is the habitat of several endemic aquatic animal species. There are fabulous sunrise and sunset views from the Shree Antu hilltop and Siddhi Thumka with its temples and bazaar. Ilam is a good place to experience Nepal's ethnic mix and culinary variety. This is where the central and eastern Himalayan ecosystems overlap.

Connecting adventures: Trek to Sandakpur for Kanchenjunga views. Continue by crossing into India at Kakarbhitta, in the Jhapa District lowlands (3 hours). You can also visit lake areas in the Morang district. There are buses to Panchthar and Taplejung districts to the north.

Special advice: Foreigners are not allowed to cross into India at Pashupatinagar, only at Kakarbhitta in the Terai.

Difficulty	: Easy to moderate, depending on your route. Moderat to difficult if you choose to take a red panda excursion.
Lodging	: Commerical lodges in Ilam Bazaar and along the highway south to the Terai. Tourism infrastructure is beginning to develop, and good private lodges have been sprouting up.
Provisions	: Typical trekking goods in Kathmandu. Ilam Bazaar is well stocked with simple trekking equipment and the village shops are good. Cafés in the main villages serve local food.
Mode of trekking	: It is preferable to go in a small group with guides and porters. Guides will know how to secure lodging. Tent camping is also possible. On the Sandakpur summit itself there are several lodges, operated by both Nepalis and Indians.
Formalities	: Sandakpur summit straddles the border between India and Nepal. You can stay there, but not travel into India unless you have made special arrangements.

Location: Ilam District, in the Mahabharat mountain range. Sandakpur is a hilltop in the southern end of Singalila National Park, bordering on Sikkim and India.

Getting there and back: The bus ride from Kathmandu to Ilam Bazaar is very long, so a good alternative is by plane from Kathmandu to Bhadrapur in Jhapa, then continue by bus or car (75 km) to Ilam Bazaar (about four hours). Take a local taxi to Mabu or other villages in Majmajuwa with access trails to Sandakpur. Return the same way, but you can vary the pick-up point coming down from Sandakpur. Can also be accessed from Darjeeling in India, but although Sandakpur is basically shared territory, there is no official border crossing for foreigners.

Route: Four days. Trails are good, but it is a rugged ascent to the barren rolling top Sandakpur (3,636 m) from current roadheads. One overnight stop is necessary due to altitude and distance involved. From the north–south ridge called Singalila you have a view toward the southern parts of the Kanchenjunga massif. There are panoramic views of Everest in the west via Makalu, Kanchenjunga (splendid) and east to Chomolhari in Bhutan. Stay for a full day if the weather is good and the altitude is not a problem; enjoy the views at sunrise and sunset.

Return down to your chosen roadhead and to Ilam Bazaar on day four.

Special attractions: The humid Eastern Himalayan forest meets the Central Himalayan ecozone, creating a great diversity of plant and animal life. In the February–March season, this is a fabulous rhododendron area.

There are red panda habitats and community-run excursions from villages in the Sandakpur area, but request information on legality and impact first.

Connecting adventures: Continue by hiking north into Panchthar District and towards Kanchenjunga (No. 112) to connect with the trail network on the southern side. Another variant is to go from Ilam to Taplejung, where there are treks in several directions. There are plans to develop a trail from Sandakpur to Chhintapu (3,400 m) via Deurali and Maipatal.

You can also cross into India at Kakarbhitta, in the lowlands of Jhapa District (three hours from Ilam Bazaar).

Special advice: Foreigners are not allowed to cross into India. The only legal entry point is Kakarbhitta in the Terai. Check carefully if you need a TIMS. Official information is scarce, and the topography in this area is very confusing. Most visitors come from India.



Pikey peak.

© *Punya*

#40 Pikey Peak, the short way

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: The short and quick version will be strenuous. If you add days, scaling Pikey Peak is a moderate undertaking.
Lodging	: There are lodges along this route.
Provisions	: Available in Salleri, Benighat and Junbesi.
Mode of trekking	: Groups (tent camping), small groups, and families (lodge- and homestay-based). Independent and individual trekking is possible.
Formalities	: TIMS.

Location: In Solu, the southern part of Solukhumbu District. Pikey Peak lies due south of the Lamjura La pass on the Jiri–Lukla section of the Everest trail. It is essentially a high ridgetop surrounded by forested valleys and Sherpa villages lower down.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Phaplu, returning the same way.

Route: 4 days. There are several possible routes. This description focuses on the short trip, but requires prior acclimatisation to higher altitudes. By flying in and out of Phaplu airport you can cut your days to a minimum, but you miss out on the real fun. The trip can be done as

a trail-running trip Paphlu, Junbesi, Lamjura La, Pikey Peak, Phaplu, possibly along the Thawa Danda ridge.

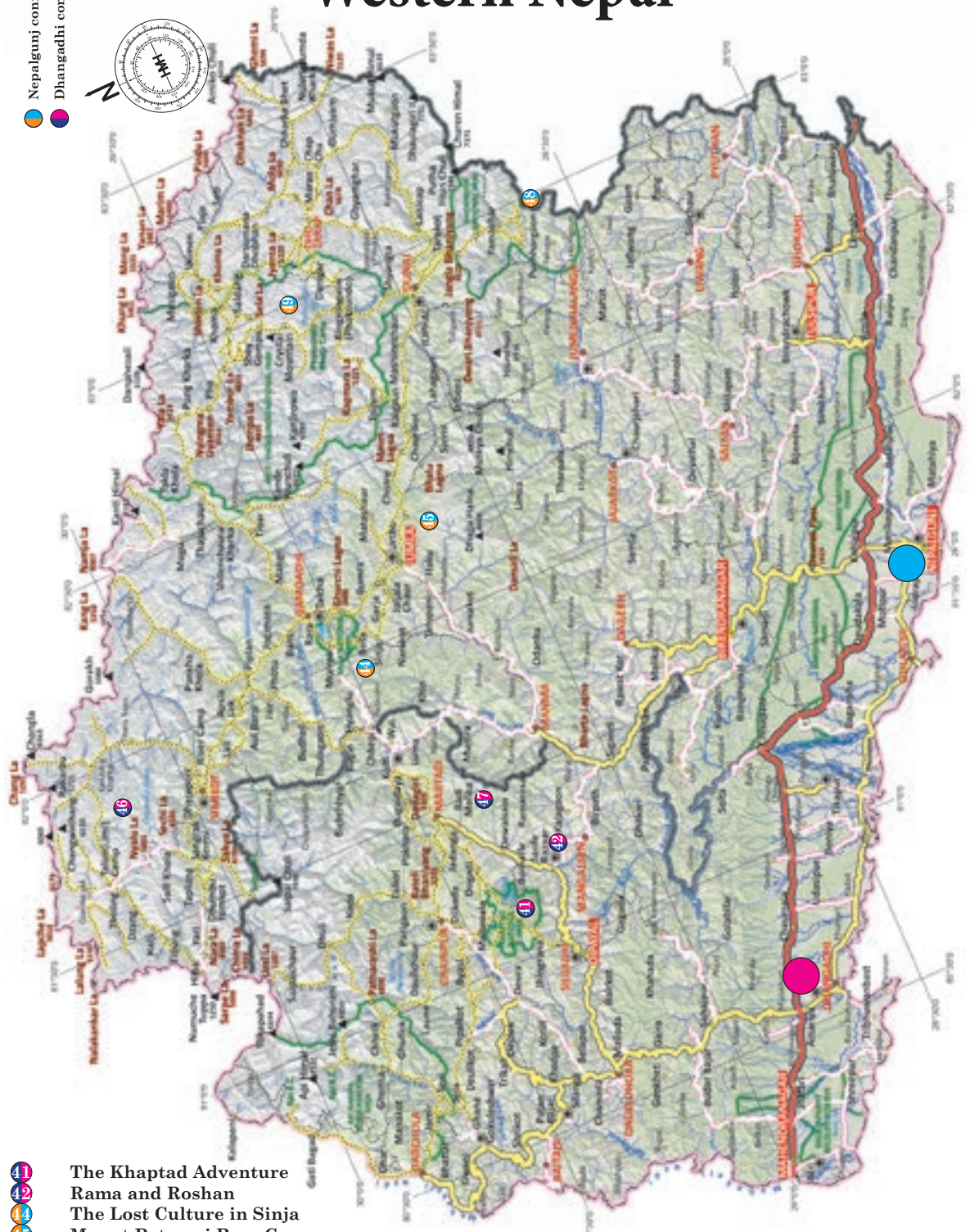
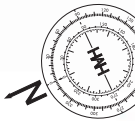
Special attractions: From Pikey Peak you have a great panorama of the Eastern and Central Himalaya, including several peaks above 8,000 m.

Connecting adventures: Southern Solu, Okhaldungha and Kotang districts have a maze of good hiking trails that are little used by visitors who focus on Everest. There are many options for adventurous hiking and exploration.

Special advice: Pikey Peak is sufficiently high to require slow ascent.

Nepalgunj connected
Dhangadhi connected

Western Nepal



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The Khaptad Adventure
 Rama and Roshan
 The Lost Culture in Sinja
 Mount Patarasi Base Camp
 Humla Nyin Culture
 Badi Malika Grasslands
 Jaljala high grasslands, the treasure of Rolpa
 Shey-Phoksundo Trek

5–10 DAYS TREKS AND ADVENTURES

#41 The Khaptad Adventure

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Guesthouse at the Khaptad National Park headquarters, tented camping if staying overnight far from the Park headquarters.
Provisions	: Silgadhi, otherwise limited.
Mode of trekking	: Khaptad National Park Guest House, and camping.
Formalities	: TIMS and Khaptad National Park fee.

Location: Doti District.

Getting there and back: By plane to Dhangadhi in Kailali District, continue by bus or jeep to Silgadhi in Doti District. Silgadhi is the gateway to Khaptad National Park.

Route: 5–6 days or more. From Silgadhi it is a three-hour trek to Baglek, and two hours to Jhingrana where you stay overnight. From Jhingrana it is a five-hour walk to Bichpani, and you may choose to take the additional three to four hours to Khaptad the next day.

There are various things to see and do in and around Khaptad:

- Three days are normally enough to get a proper overview of Khaptad National Park and its general features, but four days will give you more.
- Trekking various routes to the Khaptad

grasslands and plateaus. The National Park authorities will be ready to provide advice and guiding.

- One day visit to Khaptad Daha Lake.
- Enjoy watching birds and wildlife in forests, wetlands, and grasslands.

Special attractions: The prime feature is the high grassland plains surrounded by dense forests in the lower sections and pine forest in the higher areas. Wildlife and panoramas of grasslands, hills, and the northern Himalayas, as well as the Khaptad Ashram and local pilgrimage temples.

Connecting adventures: Visit the Rama Roshan wetlands (No. 42), Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve, and Badi Malika high grasslands (No. 47) in Bajura.



Khaptad during winter.

Difficulty	: Easy to moderate.
Lodging	: There are small hotels, teahouses, and homestays before reaching the plateaus. Homestays are available in Rama and Tinimini. Camping is a good option beyond Rama.
Provisions	: Dhanghadi, Sanfe Bazaar, otherwise limited.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, couples.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Accham District, Western Nepal.

Getting there and back: By plane or car to Dhangadhi from Kathmandu, followed by a two-day interesting road trip via Budar and Dadeldhura to Sanfe Bazaar, and onwards to Jughada. Return the same way.

Route: 6 days. By bus or jeep from Dhangadhi to Jughada (1,800 m). You can stop at several places to take in the scenery and cultural attractions. From Jughada the trek passes Mujabar villages, wading a river good for swimming, and spending the first night at Muja Bazaar. The next days take you along rice terraces, through pleasant villages, luxuriant grasslands, and wetlands (called Patans) abutted by a rock barrier to the north. A half-day slow trek taking in the sights ends at Tinimini, which can be a base for hikes in Ramaroshan with its

ivers, ponds and lakes. Descend from Tinimini to Muja Bazaar along riverbeds and dense forest for the last overnight stay. A two-hour trek on day 6 brings you to the roadhead.

Special attractions: Rama (a herders' summer settlement at 2,500 m) and Roshan are two unique plateaus, with names referring to Hindu legends. The 18 meadows, 12 lakes, and the wetland landscape forming most of the plateaus have black bears, foxes, jackals, other mammals, and numerous wetland and forest birds. Hunters collect cliffbee honey in the rocks north of the Patans.

Connecting adventures: Can be visited as part of a tour of Khaptad National Park, (No. 41), Suklaphanta National Park, (No. 13) and a visit to the Mohana ecological corridor.

Due to an error, #43 is now on page 115 as #50a



Ramaroshan lake, Achham.



Traditional Panche Baja played by Dalits.

© HMH

#44 The Lost Culture of Sinja

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate with strenuous sections.
Lodging	: Lodges, homestays and camping. Except for the visit to Rara Lake, the trek can benefit from more nights at homestays.
Provisions	: Nepalgunj, Jumla, otherwise limited.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, couples. Without a knowledgeable guide, it will be hard to find and interpret the archeological finds and ruins.
Formalities	: TIMS and National Park fee for Rara National Park, if visited.

Location: Jumla, Kalikot, and Dailekh Districts.

Getting there and back: By plane via Nepalgunj to Jumla, or a lengthy trip by car. Return from Jumla or Talchok (short treks), or Manma, Kalikot (medium trek) or Surkhet (long route).

Route: 5–6 days. Note that there are several alternative routes for visiting Sinja Valley, the quickest being in and out from Jumla.

A longer one can involve a visit to Rara Lake, and a really long trek, 9–10 days, will slowly move down the Sinja Valley until the Himal Nadi meets the Tila River, then heading south via Dailekh to Surkhet.

Count on spending 2–3 days in Sinja itself, exploring the wide valley.

Special attractions: Little-studied archeological remains of palaces, temples, and settlements from the early medieval culture of the Khas Malla kingdom that ruled much of central Himalaya from this area. The first inscriptions in Nepali language are found here. The ancient capital at Dullu controlled the Uttar Pata trade route to Tibet. The area has been entered on the UNESCO World Heritage waiting list. Ancient rites of Masto shamans are practised in the ruins.

Connecting adventures: Rara Lake National Park, Bardiya National Park, the Jumla–Khaptad trail (No. 41), and the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) into Bajura.

Special advice: Without knowledgeable guides, this trek can be a flop. Participants must be interested in history and ready to make stops at archeological sites. The area is nearly devoid of visitor facilities.

#45 Mount Patarasi Base Camp

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate to strenuous: relatively short day-walks can ease the trek.
Lodging	: Combination of teahouses and camping.
Provisions	: Bring trekking gear from Kathmandu, stock up on food in Jumla Khalanga.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, individual trekking might be possible, but not recommended for others than experienced people. Large groups are not a good idea, as facilities are limited.
Formalities	: TIMS might be required. You should check in with the police and register your trip.

Location: Jumla District, the highlands and ridges north of Jumla.

Getting there and back: A multi-day adventurous trip by car or bus from Kathmandu via Nepalgunj, Surkhet, Dailekh and Kalikot to Jumla. There are daily flights from Nepalgunj to Jumla. The trek begins after a short ride north of Jumla Khalanga and the airport.

Route: 5–6 days. Between the first and fourth days you walk from Jumla to Dillichaur (overnight), to Chura (overnight), continuing to Kalichaur, Devasthan (4,350 m), and back to a base camp at Kalichaur. The Patarasi Base Camp (4,325 m) can be reached by a full day's excursion. From Kalichaur, descend and trek to Jumla via Ghutichaur in two days.

Special attractions: Remote villages, highland northern Nepal cultures and landscapes, *kharka* grazing lands, and accessible mountain landscapes (below 5,000 m). There are fantastic views towards the Patrasi Himal and the Kanjiroba Himal.

Connecting adventures: Can be continued as a wider loop into the Thakurguyi Mountains to the south, adding five days to the trek.

Special advice: Possible confusion due to double naming of places in Western Nepal, both archaic and modern Nepali as well as indigenous languages being used. We recommend that you spend additional days rambling around in these mountains.

#46 Humla Nyin Culture

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate, short day hikes at elevations between 3,000 and 4,100 m.
Lodging	: Homestay in pleasant, well-made Nyinba houses.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Nepalgunj and Simikot.
Mode of trekking	: One of the few treks in Humla where individual trekking is fine, but check for any restrictions. Also for couples and small groups.
Formalities	: TIMS and Humla remote area fee.

Location: Humla District.

Getting there and back: By plane from Nepalgunj to Simikot. Return the same way.

Route: 7 days. The trek begins at the district capital, Simikot, to Torpa Village, then ascending to Raling for a homestay with Nyinba people. Spend the next full day in the Raling Valley. Descend from Raling to Bargaun the next day, and continue to the river and temples at Kharpunath. From Kharpunath there is a steep ascent to Simikot.

Special attractions: The Nyinba people of Tibetan stock live in a few villages in the Nyin Valley. They are known as a hard-working

people with decorative clothing and fine cultural traditions. Raling has a Buddhist gumpa and hermitages, with views of high trans-Himalayan mountains, and notable closeups of Mount Crystal Peak, Shelmogang (5,300 m).

Connecting adventures: The Nyin–Chungsha–Limi trek (No. 118). You can connect with the Great Himalayan Trail high route (No. 126) to Mugu or westward on the Kailash route (No. 100).

Special advice: Own sleeping bag is useful, ear-plugs likewise, as people get up very early. Adding one day in Simikot before the trek, for acclimatisation hikes, is recommended.

Difficulty	: Moderate, but only if the ascent is done slowly and dizzying narrow ridges are not a problem.
Lodging	: Hotels and lodges in the towns, teahouses in Jadanga, tent camping on the grasslands, and homestays in Lamagadh.
Provisions	: This is an extremely poor area with chronic seasonal food insufficiency. Provisions are very limited, mostly geared toward locals. Stock necessities in the towns you pass at the beginning or in Kathmandu.
Mode of trekking	: Suitable for small groups, families, individual and independent travel.
Formalities	: TIMS.

Location: Bajura District due west of the Karnali River.

Getting there and back: By plane or bus from Kathmandu to Dhangadhi, continue by road via Dadeldhura to Sanfe Bazaar in the Achham District and Jadanga roadhead near Martadi. Return from Silgadhi (roadhead) back to Dhangadhi. There is a shorter option by air to Kolti (Bajura) and one day's walk to Martadi from where you can ascend to the grasslands from the north. Go slow and put in an extra night, due to the fast ascent. You can return to Kolti or mix the two return options.

Route: 9–10 days. The ridge system is huge, undulating at about 3,700 to maximum 4,280 m, and bordered by steep escarpments and ridges. It is worth spending 3–4 days in the high grasslands on the main ridge to roam around. In less than three days it is theoretically possible to walk from Jadanga to Budhako Dar and the grasslands at 3,800 m, but this entails going too high, too fast. In order to avoid altitude sickness, it is better to spend one more day on the ascent than schedules suggest. The descent from the grasslands on day 6 is extremely steep along a narrow ridge to Dhawalpur Lake. Descend further to Lamagadh; after the morning on day 8, arrive in Mourya on Budhi Ganga River for

road transport to Silgadhi. The grasslands may be approached from the east as well: inquire about options when planning this trip.

Special attractions: The view is panoramic, taking in the mountains of all the western part of Nepal and the rolling hills to the south and east. The flora is lush, and there are grazing sheep, goats, yaks and crossbreeds and wildlife. There are creeks, rivers, waterfalls and a hot spring along the trail. Badi Malika is a temple situated on the high edge of a major ridge, listed as one of the more important temples in Nepal, with the main festivals in August.

Connecting adventures: Can be combined with the Great Himalayan Cultural Trail (No. 126), the Rara Lake (No. 76), and the Sinja Valley (No. 44) eastwards. Due west, across the Budhi Ganga River Valley, is Khaptad National Park, with impressive grasslands and wetlands.

Special advice: Watch for altitude sickness and be prepared to descend to avoid worsening symptoms. Food services and hygienic standards at teahouses tend to be low. If returning from Kolti airport to Nepalgunj, beware of erratic schedules and potential waiting time at Kolti. Ascents and descents are challenging for people with fear of heights.



Ascending Badi Malika.

© Madhav Sudan Dahal

#48 Jaljala high grasslands, the treasure of Rolpa Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate.
Lodging	: Guesthouses at Sulichaur, otherwise homestays. Pilgrim lodges (<i>dharmasalas</i>) in Jaljala.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Butwal and Gorahi before Sulichaur. Limited selection in village shops along the trail.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups with guide/porters, single travellers with interest in the history of the recent war.
Formalities	: TIMS.

Location: Rolpa District, in the central western part of Nepal.

Getting there and back: About 12 hours by bus or hired car from Kathmandu to Sulichaur in Rolpa. Return from Sulichaur to Kathmandu the same way. You can save six hours by flying to Bhairawa airport. To cut road hardships, note the midway attraction points of Chitwan National Park and Lumbini, Buddha's birthplace.

Route: 6 days. The trek takes you in a loop culminating with a stay on the Jaljala highlands and grasslands (3,600 m). From Sulichaur the trek begins by vehicle for four hours to Fulibang, passing the Sunchari waterfall, then another four hours' trek to Kotalbara. Ajambari Commune is reached on the second day out, after a low pass at 2,576 m. Stay in this commune overnight with an opportunity to meet communists and ex-combatants. Thawang, the original headquarters of the 10-year People's War, is reached the next day. After a steep ascent from Thawang you come to the Jaljala grasslands. Continue to the trek's

highest point, Dharampani, and descend through difficult terrain to the Majhibang roadhead for a half-half day rough drive back to Sulichaur.

Special attractions: Hill watersources and wetlands, pilgrim sites and splendid mountain views. Ajambari is considered the last vestige of the Maoist Peoples' war. The Dhakpa Hills near Thawang on the Rukum border are red panda habitat, and Ghamchin Hill offers views of Sisne, Otha and the Dhaulagiri Himal. On the last stretch you are in the core area of the Magar culture.

Connecting adventures: At Thawang, you can extend your stay to get acquainted with the surroundings, the Magar culture, and enjoy the mountain views. Visits to Chitwan National Park and Lumbini on the way back to Kathmandu.

Special advice: The trek goes through a very poor region, not attuned to tourism. This is not a culinary trek. It will be helpful to read up on Nepal's recent history and the maoist insurgency.



Magar traditional MAYUR dance.



Shey-Phoksundo lake and Ringmo village.

© HMH

#49 Shey-Phoksundo Trek

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate, some vertiginous trail passages.
Lodging	: This is currently the only trek in Dolpo that can be based entirely on teahouses or homestays.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Nepalgunj, limited in Dunai.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, families.
Formalities	: Shey-Phoksumdo National Park fee, TIMS.

Location: Western Dolpo District.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj, next morning by plane from Nepalgunj to either Juphal or Mashinechaur. Return the same way.

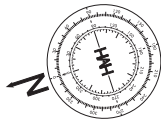
Route: 9 days or more. Land at either Mashinechaur or Juphal airfield in the morning and walk to Dunai the first day. The next day you cross the bridge over to Sulighat and turn north along the deep Suli Gad River Valley to Chhepka, continuing through a canyon landscape on a partially exposed, somewhat demanding trail to Rechi and an equally fascinating trail past a waterfall, and on to Ringmo village. Staying for a day or more in Ringmo enables you to make excursions for half a day or a whole day to the lake and along the lakeshore. Return downhill to Juphal or Mashinechaur following the same route, which is equally interesting as the ascent.

Special attractions: The Suligad wild gorge, Ringmo Village with its architecture, and the Ringmo, Tshowa and Shey Bön-po gompas. Natural features include the Phuksundo turquoise lake, spectacular trails, the Crystal Mountain, and geological points of interest. Upper Dolpo is the home for the semi-nomadic Dolpo-pa people.

Connecting adventures: Trekking and stays in Dolpo are strictly regulated. The Shey-Phoksundo Trek can be linked with other routes in Dolpo, but any deviations and extensions are not permitted. Read the other Dolpo trek suggestions (Nos. 103, 119) to define your ambitions clearly before you go. You can access Dunai from Jumla in the west, Beni-Dhorpatan in the east and Musikot in the south.

Special advice: Add days to explore the lake and side valleys more thoroughly. Note that Dolpo is the local name; the Nepali is Dolpa.

Pokhara connected
Kathmandu connected



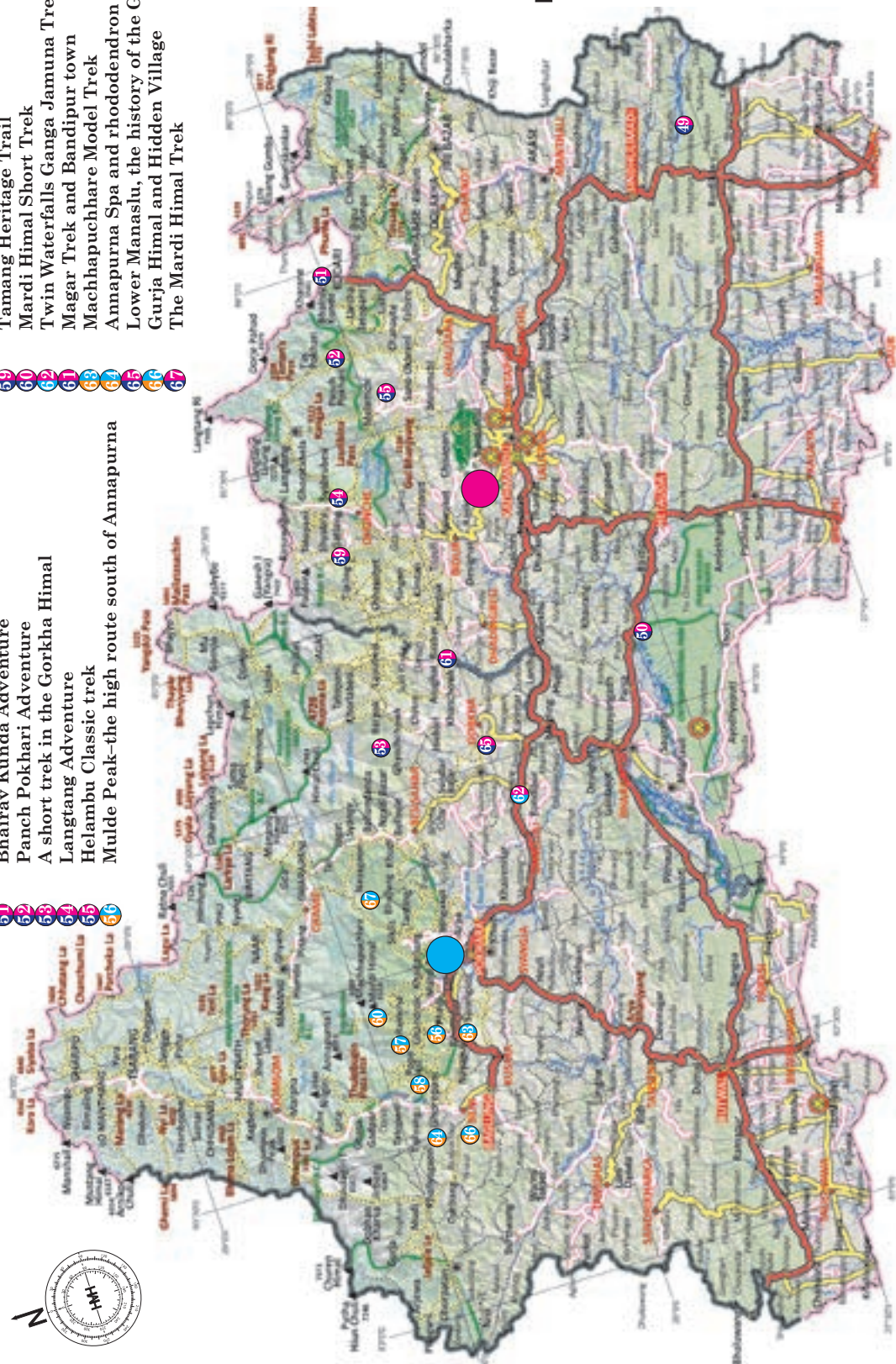
Mahabharat Rhododendron Trek
Chepang Cultural Heritage Trail
Bhairav Kunda Adventure
Panch Pokhari Adventure
A short trek in the Gorkha Himal
Langtang Adventure
Helambu Classic trek
Mulde Peak—the high route south of Annapurna

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Annapurna Khayer Lake Adventure
The Chorepani Loop with Poon Hill
Tamang Heritage Trail
Mardi Himal Short Trek
Twin Waterfalls Ganga Jamuna Trek
Magar Trek and Bandipur town
Machhapuchhare Model Trek
Annapurna Spa and rhododendron trek
Lower Manaslu, the history of the Gorkha
Gurja Himal and Hidden Village
The Mardi Himal Trek

Central Nepal



#50a Mahabharat Rhododendron Trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Camping, can be developed into a homestay trek.
Provisions	: Kathmandu.
Mode of trekking	: Small, focused groups. This is an unknown trekking area, so a guide is recommended.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Sindhuli District.

Getting there and back: By car five hours east from Kathmandu to Dumja. Return from Sipali by car to Kathmandu.

Route: 6 days. From Dumja to Khani Danda, then following the ridges to Phurse Danda, Jugepani, and the highlights at the 'rhododendron hill' Gode Chuli (2,900 m). Return to Jugepani, ascend to Bhumechuli (2,800 m), and descend to Sipali for the return to Kathmandu.

Special attractions: The high ridges of

the Mahabharat when the rhododendrons are in bloom. Views down below to the Terai plains, and to the Himalayas to the north.

Connecting adventures: This trek can be extended for more days on a longer route for in-depth nature study. Descend and exit to the Terai, possibly combined with rafting on the Sun Koshi River.

Special advice: Bring gear for nature observation, rhododendron identification handbook, binoculars, camera, etc.

#50 Chepeng Cultural Heritage Trail

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate.
Lodging	: Commerical lodges at the end point, otherwise homestays.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Naubise, and Bharatpur.
Mode of trekking	: Couples, small group with guide/porters, full package trip from Kathmandu.
Formalities	: TIMS.

Location: Dhading, Makwanpur and Chitwan Districts in the Mahabharat mountain belt, southern-central parts of Nepal.

Getting there and back: By bus or car to Hugdi on the Kathmandu–Pokhara road. Return by bus or car from Narayanghat, Bharatpur or by plane from Simara.

Route: 5 days. The trail goes from Hugdi, to Hattibang, Sirchauchuli, Jyanjala Chepeng, and Upardangadi village. From Upardangi you go by jeep to Chitwan National Park for elephant safari and other park activities. The trek takes you through the home area of the Chepengs, traditional hunters and honey-gatherers, who are among Nepal's most disadvantaged peoples.

This trek can be extended with more trekking and longer visits in Chitwan National Park.

Special attractions: Chepeng culture, the Mahabharat Hills, flora and fauna, the Shaktikor fortress.

Connecting adventures: Visits to Chitwan, other parts of Terai, and to the Orchid Trail (No. 18).

Special advice: This is not a touristic area. Do not trek alone in this area, route finding is difficult and few people understand English. Good local food is available at homestay lodges and teahouses. It is worthwhile reading about the Chepeng people before setting out on this trek.

#51 Bhairav Kunda Adventure

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous.
Lodging	: Lodges at the start and end of the trail, otherwise camping.
Provisions	: Kathmandu and Barhabise.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Gaurishankar Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Sindhupalchowk District. Bhairav Kunda is a high mountain lake on the Bhairav Kunda Lekh ridge, just west of the Tatopani border on the Arniko Highway to Tibet.

Getting there and back: By car from Kathmandu to Barhabise (about four hours). The return by car from Larcha to Kathmandu takes five to six hours.

Route: 8 days. Walk from Jalbire (1,000 m) to Chanaute and to a rest in Khani Gaon for acclimatisation and exploration. On the fourth day, trek via Forest Camp to reach Pati (3,750

m) and a three-hour hike to Bhairav Kunda Lake at 4,250 m. Descend from Bhairav Kunda to Sherpa Gaoun, overnight at Larcha.

Special attractions: Dramatic Himalayan wilderness landscape near the Tibetan border. The beautiful Bhairav Kunda Lake has religious significance. Excellent views toward the Rolwaling Himalaya, Jugal Himal and Tibetan mountains.

Connecting adventures: Panch Pokhari Lakes (No. 51) to the west, continuing on the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126).



Frozen Bhairav Kunda.



Pilgrimage tour by traditional healer shaman to Panchpokhari.

📷 *Punya*

#52 Panch Pokhari Adventure

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous due to difficult pathfinding, steep trails at high elevations, the area's relative remoteness and lack of facilities.
Lodging	: None after Chautara, only herders' shelters, so tent camping is advisable.
Provisions	: Dolalghat is probably the last good option. Beyond Dolalghat, village shops have a limited selection.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups with guide and porters.
Formalities	: TIMS, Langtang National Park Fee.

Location: Jugal Himal, northern Sindhupalchok District.

Getting there and back: By car to the roadhead at Sano Okhreni, past the district capital Chautara and Lamidanda. Return to Sano Okhreni, unless connecting to a traverse east or west.

Route: 6 days or more. Begin the trek from Sano Okhreni village, walking on a steep trail among bushes and bamboo to Bhanyang. The next day involves a steep trail, but there is also a longer, more moderate one, both ending at Hille Bhanyang. By the steeper path, you can reach Narsingpati in one day. Either way, you continue to Panch Pokhari where it is worth spending at least one day, to explore the area. A four-hour hike brings you to Narsingpati. Walking to Sano Okhreni via Hille takes two days.

Special attractions: Five alpine lakes situated within a short distance in a hollow below Dorje Lakhpa in the Jugal Himal. From Narsingpati there are panoramic, close-up views of the Jugal Himal. Local herders use the grazing land during spring and summer.

Connecting adventures: The visit to Panch Pokhari can be integrated into a more general Helambu visit. Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) passes Panch Pokhari, Dudh Pokhari (No. 84) one day's walk west, and another day further west takes you to Tilman's Col, the pass leading into the upper Langtang Valley. There are also connections eastward to the Great Himalayan Trail.

Special advice: Very dry hills, bring all the water you need for the ascent. High and cold, winter comes early and spring is late.



The Manaslu massif.

📷 HMH

#53 A short trek in the Gorkha Himal

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate
Lodging	: Camping trek, home stays in Ghyachchowk
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Gorkha Bazaar, limited in Ghyachchowk.
Mode of trekking	: Small group
Formalities	: TIMS, Manaslu Conservation Area Fee

Location: Gorkha District. A short loop in the southern Manaslu-Himalchuli area.

Getting there and back: Kathmandu to Gorkha Bazaar 4 hours by bus, by jeep towards Ghyachchowk in Daraudi Khola. Or go by 4WD vehicle from Kathmandu. Return the same way.

Route: 7 days. From Gyachchowk (1,680 m) hike along the upper Daraundi Khola valley for 3 days up to Rupina La (4,720 m). After taking in the views from Rupina La, turn back and down and continue west past Narte Pokhari lakes and over Simke Danda ridge to visit Dudh Pokhari (ca 4,700 m). Return to Ghyachchowk south along the high Simke Danda with fine views all around.

Special attractions: A short trek into the high wilderness of the southern Gorkha Himal,

and the pilgrimage lake Dudh Pokhari. Rupina La has close views of the peaks of Baudha Himal, Hiunchuli, Rani Himal and Manaslu. The descent on the high Simka Danda ridge offers panoramic views in all directions. Ghyachchowk was near the earthquake epicenter in 2015. It is rising from the ruins and welcomes guests.

Connecting adventures: With more days to spare, slow down for more exploration. Continuing across Rupina La takes you on a demanding, easterly course along Chhilung Khola linking up with Manaslu Circuit at Nyak Phedi. At the trek's end, explore the history of Gorkha (No. 65).

Special advice: To prevent altitude sickness, spend an extra day on the ascent. If the weather is bad, avoid ascending Rupina La.

Difficulty	: Moderate to strenuous. Langtang is very popular, but be aware that going too high too fast can lead to altitude sickness.
Lodging	: Homestays, teahouses, lodges.
Provisions	: Shops and lodges along the route used to be well-stocked. Due to earthquake damage, Syabrubesi and Kathmandu are now the best places to stock up.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, families with children, individual trekkers.
Formalities	: Langtang National Park permit, TIMS.

Location: Rasuwa District. Langtang National Park lies only 40 km air distance north of Kathmandu, close to the Tibetan border.

Getting there and back: Easy access with 4WD car or bus from Kathmandu (115 km) to trailheads at either Dhunche or Syabrubesi. Return the same way.

Route: 8 days. From Syabrubesi (1,460 m) follow the regular Langtang trek route into the valley via Sherpagaun, Lama Hotel, and Ghoretabela, but be aware of trail changes due to earthquake damages. Having crossed the 1½ km wide landslide area where Langtang Village used to be, you find newly built accommodation further up in sheltered parts of the valley. Continue up to Kyanjin Gumpa (3,850 m) from where you can take day-trips and excursions in the surrounding areas. Return to Syabrubesi on the same trail.

Special attractions: Fantastic people, forests, and mountain views. Around Kyanjin Gumpa the high Himalayas open up. Earthquake memorials remind us of the mighty powers of nature.

Connecting adventures: With help of locals you might be able to rent a tent and some other gear sufficient for an overnight trek further into the valleys to the east and higher up for scenery and sport. There are also high viewpoints like Yala and the Tsergo Ri Peak (4,984) that can be reached on a day-trip basis.

With mountaineering skills and with a group you can exit the Langtang Valley over the Ganja La (5,130 m) into Helambu. Ice- and snow-equipment is needed. At the end of the trek, you can pass Gosainkund Lake, entering Helambu to trek all the way back to Kathmandu. Walking westward from Syabrubesi, you join the Tamang Heritage trail (No. 59) toward Ganesh Himal, connecting further with the Ruby trail and the rest of the Ganesh–Manaslu trail network.

Special advice: The area is recovering from massive earthquake damage, but the spirit and efforts are formidable. If possible, spend some time assisting the local people with recovery activities after the earthquake. Crime has been reported near Syabrubesi. Watch for altitude sickness, it's easy to go too high, too fast on the Langtang trail.



Langtang during winter.



Milk is a major income source.

© HMH



Tarke Ghyang, Helambu.

© Punya

#55 Helambu Classic trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: This is a classic teahouse trek. Lodges and homestays are also available.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, local village shops and lodges.
Mode of trekking	: Independent trekking, individuals, families, small and large groups.
Formalities	: TIMS.

Location: Nuwakot and Sindhupalchowk districts, immediately north of Kathmandu.

Getting there and back: By bus or car to Sundarijal. Finish the trek at Melamchi Bazaar and return to Kathmandu by bus or car.

Route: 7 days. This is the classic, short and easy looping trek among several options in the Helambu region. Starting at Sundarijal on the northern side of Kathmandu, you practically walk out of town towards Chisopani for the first night. Continue north, with Langtang Lirung and the Gosainkund ridge in sight. After passing Path Bhanyang you cross the Gul Banyang pass (2,620 m) to the open landscape at Kutumang. Along the Tharepati Danda ridge there are

fantastic mountain views to Tharepati (3,490 m), where you descend on a steep trail to Melamchi Gyang and Tarke Gyang. Continue to Sermatang via Dubhochaur to Malamchi Bazaar.

Special attractions: Tharke Gyang is the largest village in Helambu, and a good place to explore Sherpa and Tamang culture and local gompas and temples.

Connecting adventures: Gosainkund Lake (No. 33), Langtang National Park, Dudh Pokhari Lake (No. 84).

Special advice: Helambu is recovering from damages during the 2015 earthquake. Trekking routes and sufficient facilities are being rebuilt.

56 Mulde Peak—the high route south of Annapurna Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate, yet ascending Bayali (which can be avoided) might be strenuous.
Lodging	: Teahouses, homestays, and lodges.
Provisions	: Village and lodge shops are well stocked in this area.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, families, and individuals. Independent trekking.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Parbat and Kaski Districts, on the south flank of Annapurna South.

Getting there and back: Only half an hour by bus or car from Pokhara to Phedi. Return to Pokhara by bus or car from Naya Pul on the Modi River.

Route: 8–10 days. Trek from the roadhead at Phedi via Dhampus and Pothana to Landruk, and across the Modi Khola River to Gandruk and Tadapani on the old classic route toward Jomsom. From Ghandruk continue west past Tadapani to Dobato and Mulde Peak (3,649 m) half an hour away.

From Mulde you can shorten the trek by going back the same way you came, or continue for a medium option turning southwest to Swanta, or continue the main trek ascending northwards directly towards Annapurna South. After a long ascent you come the highest point at Bayali (4,550 m), descending southwest on the Khopra Ridge for wonderful sunset views from Khopra.

There is a lower trail option if you want to skip Bayali. From Khopra descend via Swanta, Phalante to Ghorepani. Early in the morning you can take the easy walk to Poon Hill for a comparison with the Mulde sunrise. Continue via Ulleri and Bhiretanti to Naya Pul.

Connecting adventures: Other trails in the area bring you to Jomsom, Annapurna Base Camp (No. 85), the Myagdi Parbat Eco Trail (No. 83), or the Dhorpatan adventure (No. 80).

Special attractions: This trek includes the best of the trail network south of the Annapurna South. Mulde Peak and Khopra are higher and more adventurous than Poon Hill, and you get both on this trek. Stunning panoramic views of peaks and glaciers on Annapurna South and Dhaulagiri.

Special advice: An updated map is necessary since Mulde, Dobato and Khopra are recent additions in this trail network. additions names may differ, depending on the local language used.

#57 Annapurna Khayer Lake Adventure Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate.
Lodging	: Lodges and homestays. Camping on Bayali ridge above Khopra.
Provisions	: At Pokhara; also supplies at village shops and in lodges.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, families.
Formalities	: TIMS, Annapurna Conservation Area fee.

Location: Parbat District, on the southwestern flanks of Annapurna South, west of Pokhara.

Getting there and back: By plane or car from Kathmandu to Pokhara, by car to Naya Pul. Return the same way.

Route: 8 days. The route first follows the main trail on the Annapurna South trail network from Naya Pul to Tadapani, then ascending to Dobato and to Khopra Danda. Staying in Khopra, Khayer Lake is one day's walk away. At 4,200 m, the Khayer Lake is considerably higher than the commonly used trails. Return back to Naya Pul via Swanta and Ghorepani. The trek can easily be extended at various points.

Highlights: Views of the hills and the Annapurna South flanks, and the best views to Dhaulagiri. Pleasant alpine terrain around Lake Khayer and views towards a nearby glacier.

Connecting adventures: There is a campsite below Khayer and many viewpoints and features to explore in the area, so we recommend spending more time there and at Khopra Danda.

Special advice: Beware of altitude sickness. While the rest of the trail network is suitable for trail-running, ascending to Khayer is not recommended, due to the elevation.

#58 The Ghorepani Loop with Poon Hill

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Lodges and homestays. This is a famous teahouse trek.
Provisions	: At Pokhara; also supplies at village shops and in lodges.
Mode of trekking	: Groups, families. The area has capacity for large groups. Both organised and independent trekking can be recommended, depending on skills and comfort.
Formalities	: TIMS, Annapurna Conservation Area fee.

Location: Parbat and Kaski Districts.

Getting there and back: By plane or car from Kathmandu to Pokhara, by car to Naya Pul. Return the same way.

Route: 5 days. This iconic trek is part of the trail network west of Pokhara. The goal is the viewpoint Poon Hill (3,194 m) above Ghorepani Village. From Naya Pul you trek to Ulleri for an overnight stay before reaching Ghorepani on the second day. Get up early the next morning to catch the sunrise at Poon Hill. Walk through the forested area to Tadapani, and continue to

Ghandruk and Naya Pul for transport back to Pokhara on the fifth day.

Special attractions: The fabled sunrise view toward Annapurna South and Dhaulagiri. In springtime rhododendrons are in bloom in the Ghorepani area.

Connections: The trek can easily be extended in both the approach and return parts, to include loops, for instance, in the area south of Annapurna South and the Pokhara – Gurja Valley.

Special advice: None.



Sunrise at Poon Hill with view towards Dhaulagiri.



Churning milk for butter.

© *Punya*

#59 Tamang Heritage Trail

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate. Connecting trails and excursions can be strenuous.
Lodging	: Community lodges, homestays and lodges.
Provisions	: At Dhunche, Syabrubesi. Limited supplies at village shops and in lodges.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups with guides/porters.
Formalities	: TIMS, Langtang National Park fee.

Location: Rasuwa District. In the northern hills and mountains on the east flanks of the Ganesh Himal massif.

Getting there and back: By bus or 4WD car on the 120 km road from Kathmandu to Syabrubesi. The road is seasonally in very bad condition, so be prepared for a ten-hour drive. Return the same way.

Route: 6 days. The trek starts in Syabrubesi, continues to the large Tamang village of Gatlang and to onward to Tatopani via Thanbuchen. From Tatopani the trek continues to Brimdang village and the Nagthali Danda high grasslands at 3,200 m. Ascend the next morning to Taruche View Point (3,720 m), then descend to Thuman Village to stay overnight. When descending from Thuman you hit the trade route to Tibet and walk to Briddim, where you stay overnight. On day 6 it is a short trek back to Syabrubesi.

Special attractions: The trek is developed and managed by the Tamang Youth Club, enabling you to experience the Tamangs' tough life and cultural features close-up as you walk through their villages. They will understand your

curiosity and share aspects of their lives. When planning this trip, consider taking an extra day or more in the villages, or follow herders' trails high up to viewpoints and grazing areas. Close views of Ganesh Himal, Langtang Himal, and mountains in Kyerong, Tibet. From the Taruche View Point you have spectacular views into Tibet and the Ganesh and Langtang Himalaya. Rhododendron forests, hot springs.

Connecting adventures: Can be combined with a Langtang Valley trek (No. 54), a Gosainkund (No. 33) visit, and leaving the area via Helambu. The trail also connects with various climbing routes on the eastern spurs and peaks of Ganesh Himal. You can exit the area to Nuwakot/Trishuli Bazaar by trekking south from the Pangsang Bhanyang pass, and descend to Betrawati via Phikuri Danda.

Special advice: This is a sensitive border zone to Tibet. Do not trek alone and keep to the marked trails. The 2015 earthquakes devastated some villages in the area; however, the Great Himalayan Trail route is up and running again with some changes. The exact route might differ a little from what we describe.

#60 Mardi Himal Short Trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate. The trek is strenuous off-season and during snowfall.
Lodging	: Teahouses and simple lodges available. Homestays are available in villages.
Provisions	: Pokhara. Stocks are limited in village shops and in teahouses on the ridge.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, families. Suitable for individuals and independent trekkers. Larger groups will need to have tents.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Kaski District. Mardi peak is just in front of Machhapuchhare due north of Pokhara.

Getting there and back: By car or local bus from Pokhara to Khara. The trek ends at Naya Pul, near Lwang in Mardi river valley, then one hour by car back to Pokhara.

Route: 7 days. From Khara the trek ascends to the western ridge toward Mardi Himal and Machhapuchhare. Trekking on the ridge from Pothana you always look towards Machapuchhare and Annapurna Sanctuary. Via Forest Camp (2,500 m) and the Low Camp, reaching High Camp (3,620 m) on day 4. After a full day's exploration and a second night in High Camp, you descend steeply to the village of Siding (1,280 m), ending the trek in Naya Pul. There are several variations of this trip.

Connecting adventures: The trek can be expanded in three general ways: (1) The route described above can be extended from Siding into the trail system towards Ghandrung and Poon Hill (No. 58); (2) A slightly longer but very pleasant trail from the High Camp, through villages along the Mardi Khola River Valley, ending near Hyangja, closer to Pokhara; (3) A long and strenuous trek descends from the High Camp down to the Jungle Camp, ascending the eastern Mardi Ridge to Korchon. Dip down to Sethi Khola Valley at Mirsa or trek along the ridge to Riban and towards Hyangja.

Special advice: Good for families. The route also suits a trail run, but be careful not to ascend too fast.

#61 Twin Waterfalls Ganga Jamuna Trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy to moderate.
Lodging	: Teahouses in villages; camping at Ganga Jamuna.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Dhadingbesi.
Mode of trekking	: Families, small groups. Can be done independently.
Formalities	: None

Location: Dhading District, below Ganesh Himal.

Getting there and back: By bus or car from Kathmandu to Dhadingbesi. Return from Arughat Bazaar by bus or car.

Route: 6 days. After arriving Dhadingbesi you can hike directly to Jyamrung Danda for the first night. The route continues to Karki Gaoun and Ganga Jamuna (3,244 m). Stay and enjoy Ganga Jamuna for a day, before returning to the roadhead at Arughat via Budathum.

Special attractions: High grasslands,

villages, agricultural landscapes, Central Himalaya mountain panorama, Ganesh, and Manaslu. From the Hindu pilgrimage site Ganga Jamuna there are spectacular views toward the Langtang and Ganesh Himal. The area is rich in birds and other wildlife.

Connecting adventures: Links are possible to Ruby Valley, Rasuwa trails, and the Great Himalaya Trail (No. 126).

Special advice: Local language skills are necessary for a full experience, so ensure the company of someone who speaks Tamang in addition to Nepali.

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Good lodges and guesthouses in Bandipur town, homestays along the trail. In some trek alternatives camping on hilltops with a view is part of the adventure.
Provisions	: At Kathmandu and Dumre. Bandipur is well stocked, but village shops have only basic supplies.
Mode of trekking	: Independent travel, couples, small group with guide-porters, or full package trip from Kathmandu.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Tanahun District. A town located on a hill above the Kathmandu–Pokhara highway.

Getting there and back: By bus or car 100 km from Kathmandu to Dumre and Bandipur (about four hours). Return the same route or continue to Pokhara or Chitwan.

Route: 5 days or more. Based in Bandipur town, there are short and longer trek options in the Mahabharat Lekh, looping back to Bandipur. Trek alternatives, which can be combined, take you to sunrise viewpoints, Himalayan views, sights over the Terai and the Indian plains. Trails are winding and undulating with some steep ascents and descents, all serving as traditional village trails.

Special attractions: Bandipur is a former Newar trading town on the route between Tibet and India. It has a rich architecture with ruins

from the pre-unification Magar kingdom. Today, interactions with local people offer opportunities to experience the Magar culture. The town is well maintained and is geared toward tourism after the construction of the Kathmandu–Pokhara highway in the 1970s. It has good views toward the Himalayas and the hill landscapes, and a very relaxed atmosphere.

Connecting adventures: Adding a visit to Chitwan National Park in the Terai (3 hrs) or move on to Pokhara (2½ hrs).

Special advice: Beyond Bandipur town this is not a touristic area. Do not trek alone in this area, route finding is difficult and few people understand English. A native guide–translator who understands local languages and culture is essential for a complete experience.



Bandipur on the old trade route.

#63 Machhapuchhare Model Trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate. Although this is logistically an easy trek, it reaches elevations of nearly 4,000 m. As a trail-running option, it will be strenuous.
Lodging	: Tented camps, lodges and homestays. A good idea is to bring your own tent.
Provisions	: Pokhara, Mardi Pul. Village shops have limited supplies.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups and individual trekking.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Kaski District, due north of Pokhara.

Getting there and back: A taxi ride north of Pokhara brings you to the starting point at Mardi Pul close to Hyanga. The end point is also Mardi Pul, but you could vary with Astam or Dhampus.

Route: 6 days. Might sound boring, but this delightful loop trek is in fact a variant of the Mardi Himal trek (No. 67). From Mardi Pul, to Lhachok and Ribhan the first day, proceeding via Odane Hill to Chichemle Kharka (2,700 m). Then continue along the ridge to Korchon Kharka (3,699 m) on day 4. After descending from the ridge, you have a pleasant walk on day 5 and 6 in the Mardi Valley.

Special attractions: Lovely walk through Takru and Lwang villages with occasional tea gardens.

Connecting adventures: From Lwang, continue to Dhampus and connect with the Panchase trek around Phewa Lake. You can also continue on the trail system westwards near Annapurna South.

Special advice: A steep section down from Korchon. The Odane-Korchon ridge is quite high and exposed. As this is among the wettest spots in Nepal, there can be sudden thundershowers in early autumn and spring, as well as snowfall in winter.

#64 Annapurna Spa and rhododendron trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy, also suitable for children.
Lodging	: Lodges.
Provisions	: Village and lodge shops are well stocked in this area.
Mode of trekking	: Groups, family trekking, and individual, independent trekking.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Kaski and Parbat Districts. The trek brings you to the south flank of Annapurna South.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Pokhara. Travel Pokhara to Khale by bus or car, return via Ghorepani to Naya Pul and by bus or car to Pokhara.

Route: 5 days. From Khale the trek undulates along a near-perfect trail via Pothana, Landruk, Jhinu Dada, Chomrung, Tadapani to Ghorepani with Poon Hill, and return via Ulleri.

The route is partly on the Annapurna Base Camp trail.

Special attractions: The trail passes through pleasant Gurung and Magar villages. You can enjoy Nepal's best outdoor hot springs in Jhinu Dada. In the springtime, there are stunning rhododendron forests. From Poon Hill you have spectacular views of Annapurna South.

Connecting adventures: There are Ghandruk – Ghorepani trail options, Annapurna Circuit (No. 107), Annapurna Base Camp (No. 85), Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126), Myagdi Parbat Eco Trail (No. 83), Dhorpatan adventure (No. 80).

Special advice: None.



Manaslu from Shyala.

📷 *HMH*

#65 Lower Manaslu, the history of the Gorkha nation Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: A mix of homestays, hotels in Gorkha Bazaar, and camping.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Gorkha Bazaar, village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Individual, couples and small groups. Particularly attractive to those interested in history.
Formalities	: None, but check for a fee to Manaslu Conservation Area.

Location: Gorkha District, a loop through the southern part.

Getting there and back: Three hours by car or bus from Kathmandu to Kurintar and the Manakamana Cable Car. Return by bus from Gyampesal via Gorkha Bazaar back to Kathmandu or Pokhara.

Route: 9 days. To the Manakamana hilltop temple by cable car, starting the trek toward Gorkha Bazaar after a visit to the temples. Gorkha Bazaar is reached after two days of hill trekking, and a further three days can easily be spent in Gorkha Bazaar exploring the historical Gorkha Palace, the Gorkhanath Cave, Gorkha Museum, and the surrounding area.

Continue by driving on rural roads to Bhacheck and onwards by foot passing tea and herbal gardens to Sirandanda, Barpak and Laprak. Barpak village was the epicenter of the Gorkha

earthquake in April 2015. Continue from Laprak to Nambi Kharka and Tallo Thotnery. There is an excellent 180-degree mountain panorama from Darche Danda 3,220 m. The last trekking day takes you into Gyampesal where there is a country bus service to Gorkha Bazaar.

Special attractions: A highly varied trek among the historical roots of modern Nepal. Trekking through villages and a landscape dotted with historical and religious remains and memorials of the origins of modern Nepal and the Gorkha Kingdom. Good mountain views of Manaslu and Ganesh Himal. Hot springs. Rich ethnic diversity and close contact with local people through homestays and village lodges.

Connecting adventures: Chitwan National Park Visit. The Lower Manaslu Trek (No. 53) toward Besisahar.

Special advice: None.

Difficulty	: Moderate, however side trips such as the Arche alternative route, or to Churen Himal glacier are strenuous. Snow may be encountered on the Rugachaur Pass.
Lodging	: A mix of homestays, local lodges, and camping in the wilderness.
Provisions	: Pokhara and Baglung.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: TIMS.

Location: Myagdi District, directly south of western Dhaulagiri Himal.

Getting there and back: By bus or car from Pokhara to Baglung, returning from either Baglung or Beni.

Route: 8 days. The trek loops west towards Dhorpatan, turns north and enters Gurja Valley from the south. From Baglung the route goes in varied terrain via Okle, Tarakhola Gaoun, Phedi, Rum, and Bonga Dhoban. After Bonga Dhoban the trek crosses Gurjaghat Pass (3,350 m) and Rugachaur Pass (3,850 m) before arriving in Gurja Valley and Gurja Khani village (3,900 m). Explore the unique village and extraordinary landscape facing the Gurja Himal (7,193 m). The trek descends to Lulang, and after Sibang follows the Myagdi River gorge to Dharapani and Tatopani which has hot springs. On the last day a more northerly route brings you back to Beni.

Special attractions: Stunning views of the Dhaulagiri range. The Gurja Valley is also known as the 'Hidden Valley'. Two low but extremely scenic passes are crossed on the way to Gurja Khani. A dramatic canyon, Dhula, is encountered on the way back to Beni. The valley is sparsely populated by various ethnic groups. The Gurja Khani people are Chantals of Tibeto-Burman stock. There are several activities and excursion points in Ghurja Khani, and local people enjoy sharing explorations in the area.

Connecting adventures: More or less dramatic, longer or shorter alternatives, including more cultural involvement and side trips.

Special advice: Despite the short trek options and relatively low elevations, this area must be considered as remote with limited communications. Part of the return route goes through sparsely populated wilderness areas.



Gurja Himal on the way to Khegas.



Mardi Himal, western ridge

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#67 The Mardi Himal Trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate, but strenuous if you attempt the high trekking point on Mardi Himal. From the forest camp between the two ridges, the uphill trail to Korchon is very steep.
Lodging	: Homestays available in the lower villages. Seasonal lodges on the ridges. Camping gives more flexibility.
Provisions	: In Pokhara and village shops in the lower hills.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups. Individual trekking is possible, but not recommended.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Kaski District, a short distance north of Pokhara.

Getting there and back: There are several roadheads: By bus or car to Dhampus and return via Lhachok to Mardipul/Hyanga or to Burjung Khola.

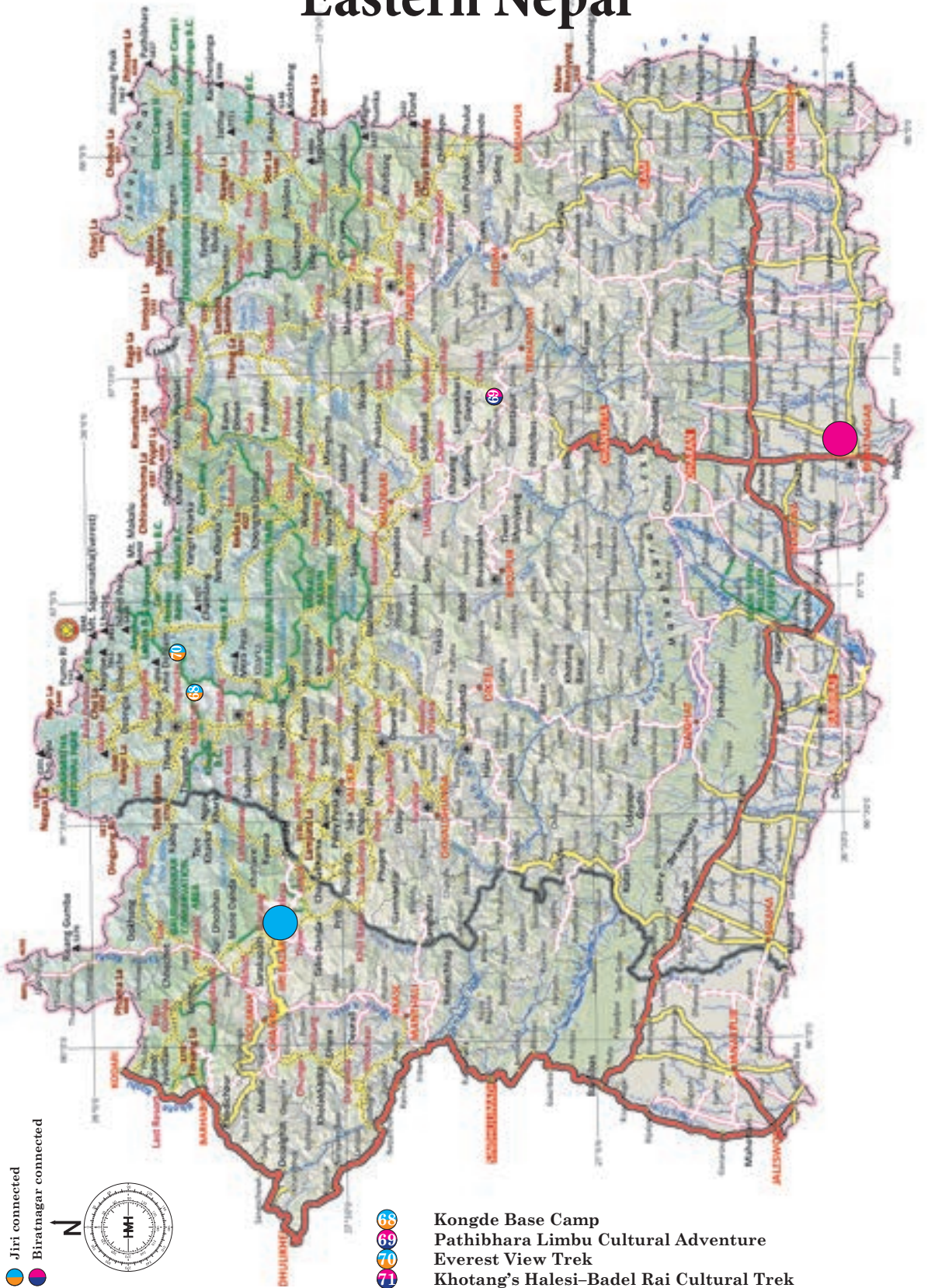
Route: 9 days or more. Start at Dhampus/Pothana and follow the Mardi Himal west ridge for two full days to the High Camp. We suggest spending one extra day to walk further north on the ridge for sightseeing. Then cross the valley's north end to get to the East Ridge at Korchon. This involves a deep dip into the valley that divides the two ridges. From the Korchon ridge you can either descend into the Seti Valley via Mirsa or other waypoints, or follow the spur south and descend into Pokhara Valley via Odane and Riban for Mardi Pul.

Special sights: This long and high loop up one ridge and down another close to Pokhara is a gem. These two main ridges leading up towards Machhapuchhare offer fantastic views toward the whole Annapurna panorama.

Connecting adventures: If you have the correct permits and appropriate equipment, you can attempt an ascent of the trekking peak Mardi Himal from Korchon. You can descend into the Seti Khola Valley and connect with the Siklis Eco Trek (No. 25) to Siklis via Shardi Khola and Ghalegaun.

Special advice: Weather can be harsh in the Annapurnas, with incredible thunder, hail, and rainfall. The short distances to higher elevations increase the risk of altitude sickness. There are several points for descending from the ridges to safe elevations.

Eastern Nepal



Kongde Base Camp
 Pathibhara Limbu Cultural Adventure
 Everest View Trek
 Khotang's Halesi-Badel Rai Cultural Trek

#68 Kongde Base Camp

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous, two long days in steep terrain and at high elevations.
Lodging	: Teahouses and lodges. There is one seasonal lodge in Kongde Base Camp.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Lukla, and Namche Bazaar.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Sagarmatha National Park fee, TIMS.

Location: Solukhumbu District

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Lukla or by bus to Jiri. Return the same way.

Route: 7 days. Trekking days are counted from Lukla. Arriving in Lukla, trek to Namche Bazaar via an overnight stay in Phakding. To ensure acclimatisation, stay one day more in Namche Bazaar, good for sightseeing. The third day, trek to Thame (3,800 m), continue the next long day to Kongde Base Camp (5,050 m). Descend back

to Phakding and Lukla.

Special attractions: Impressive close-up views of the Khumbu Mountains. Lush forest walks, hospitable Khumbu Sherpa people.

Connecting adventures: Kongde Base Camp can be done as part of other Khumbu options.

Special advice: Risk of trekking too fast to high elevations; don't hesitate, descend to Thame if you experience altitude sickness symptoms on the ascent to Kongde.

#69 Pathibhara Limbu Cultural Adventure

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate.
Lodging	: Overnight facilities in Basantapur, Suketar, Phedi, and Taplejung.
Provisions	: Tea-stalls and simple teahouses catering to pilgrims.
Mode of trekking	: Single, families, groups.
Formalities	: No formalities, but be prepared to sacrifice some banknotes at the summit.

Location: Dhankuta, Terhatum and Taplejung Districts, far eastern Nepal.

Getting there and back: By car directly from Kathmandu to Dharan or by plane to Biratnagar, then by car to Dharan and onwards to Basantpur. Return by plane from Suketar to Biratnagar or Kathmandu.

Routes: 7 days. Start from Basantapur for a full day's trek to Chauki, onwards to Gupha Pokhari (2,940 m), Gurja Gaun, descending to Dovan on the Tamur River (730 m). Proceed to Suketar on day four. From Suketar toward Phedi for an overnight stop before ascending to Pathibhara (3,790 m) on day six and returning to Devi the same day. Next day descend to Suketar.

Special attractions: This trek takes you across the green, central areas of the far eastern

valleys and hills of Nepal with several cultural sites of importance to the Limbu and other Kirati people. On the Pathibhara Devi hill near Taplejung is the Kirati and Hindu temple dedicated to the goddess Pathibhara, with splendid views of Kanchenjunga.

Connecting adventures: We recommend expanding this trek to include the cultural opportunities on the Olanchung Gola trek, or add a return along the relatively low Milke Danda trek southwards (No. 98), or at the beginning or end of the Kanchenjunga treks (Nos. 111, 112).

Special advice: Having a guide who has knowledge of Kirati traditions will be a great advantage. Bring plenty of water for the trail to the Pathibhara top, and also some food. Women should cover their heads when entering the temple. Men will do well with a topi.

Difficulty	: Moderate. We recommend adding more time for acclimatisation. This extends your mobility and makes the trek easier and, probably, more enjoyable.
Lodging	: Good lodges all the way.
Provisions	: All trekkers' supplies available in Lukla and Namche Bazaar.
Mode of trekking	: Groups, families with children, independent trekkers. This trek is possible also during the winter season, just be sure to check the weather forecast and plan for more days.
Formalities	: Sagarmatha National Park fee, TIMS.

Location: Solukhumbu District, Khumbu region.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Lukla, return the same way. You can skip the flight, and trek from/back to Jiri or Paphlu.

Route: 6 days. If short of time and ambitions, the Everest View Trek enables you to see Everest in a safe and leisurely way, and experience some of the highlights of the Khumbu Sherpa lifestyle. From Lukla, a slow trek on a good trail brings you to Namche Bazaar with one overnight stay for rest and acclimatisation. Enjoy Namche Bazaar, and set out to Khumjung for views of

Everest and the other Khumbu Valley peaks. Return to Lukla via Pakding.

Special attractions: Spectacular views toward Mt. Everest and the lower Khumbu mountains from Namche Bazaar.

Connecting adventures: See details in Everest Base Camp Trek (No. 96).

Special advice: This fast itinerary leaves little time for stopping in the valleys and villages. During high season or in bad weather the departures from Lukla get crowded, so calculate buffer days in the overall planning, so as not to miss your international flight from Kathmandu.



Work at this age can be hard.

© HMH



Buddhist spiritual landmark.

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The popular cave, Halesi.

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Buddhist rituals in Halesi.

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#71 Khotang's Halesi–Badel Rai Cultural Trek

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy, maximum 2,200 m.
Lodging	: Camping, homestays possible.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, staples available in village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, specially interested groups.
Formalities	: None.

Location: Khotang District.

Getting there and back: By jeep or bus from Kathmandu to Halesi in Khotang. Ending the trek at Lamidanda, by plane back to Kathmandu.

Route: 10 days. Arriving in Halesi in southern Khotang to stay overnight. Begin the next day with a visit to the pilgrimage temple at Halesi Cave, before a short day's trek to Bijule. It takes a full day to trek to Rawa Khola for an overnight stay. Continue the next day to Rakha and half a day to Badel. We recommend spending three days in Badel, getting to know the Kirati



(Rai) culture, socialising and experiencing the village lifestyle, and shamanistic rituals and performances. Continue on the day 8 to Aeshelu Kharka via Bakachol, then returning to Rawa Khola and Lamidanda.

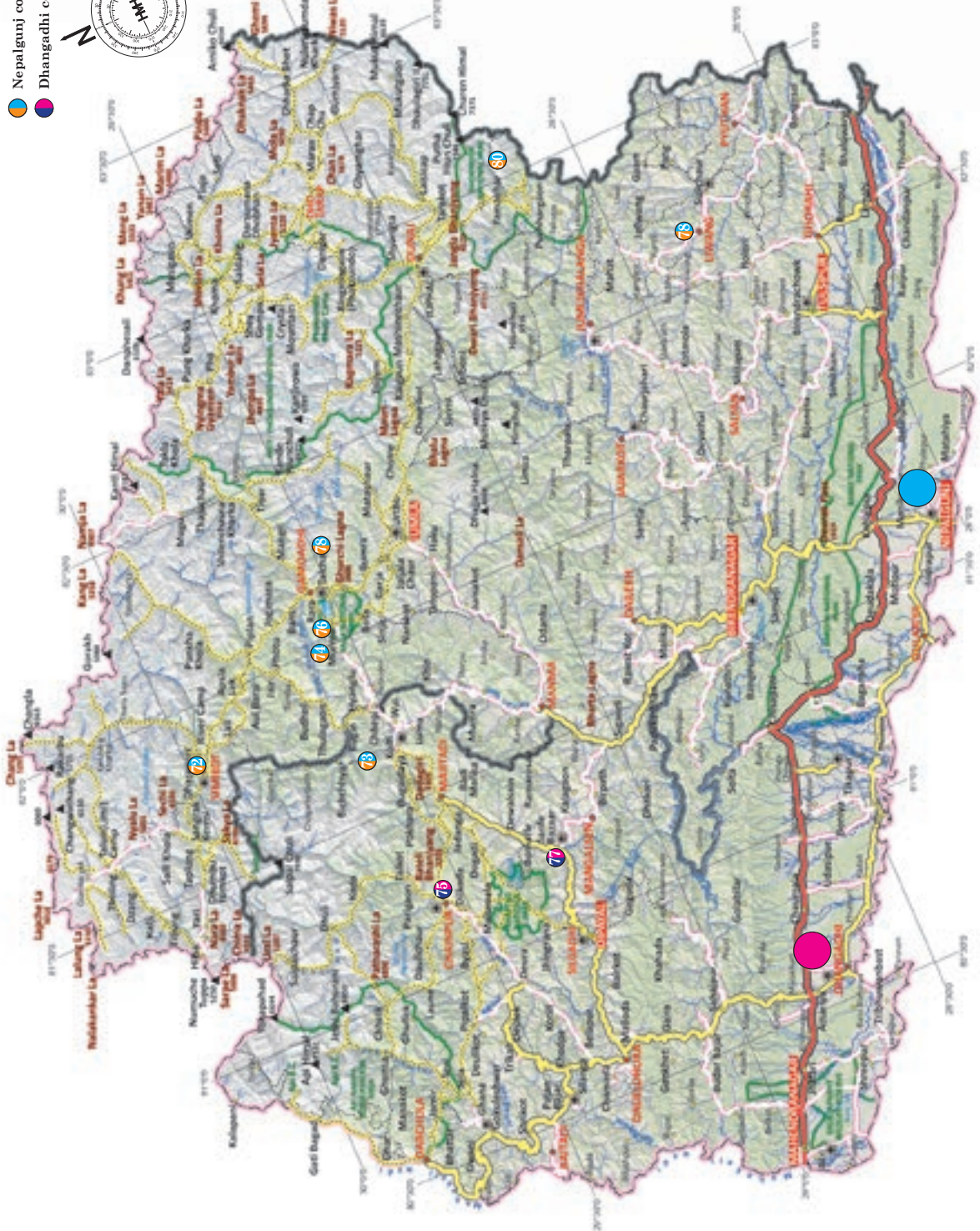
Special attractions: Halesi Cave, a Hindu cave temple as well as an early dwelling, probably in use 6,000 years ago.






Connecting adventures: Great Himalayan Cultural Trail (No.126), both east and west.



Special advice: Advance reading about the Kirati people and shamanism will enhance your trek experience.

Western Nepal

-  Nepalgunj connected
-  Dhangadhi connected



-  Saipal Northern Base Camp
-  Saipal Ranikharka
-  Humla to Mugu High Route
-  Api Himal South Base Camp
-  Rara Lake

-  Khaptad-Ramaroshan Trek
-  Rara-Khaptad Trek
-  The Guerrilla Trek
-  The Dhorpatan trek

11–14 DAYS TREKS AND ADVENTURES

#72 Saipal Northern Base Camp

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous, but can be made easier by adding one day for acclimatisation.
Lodging	: Camping. Teahouses and lodges are emerging on the Kailash Trail from Yalbang to Simikot.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Nepalgunj, and Simikot. Limited stocks at the Dharapori lodge shop, nothing in other villages.
Mode of trekking	: Small, groups.
Formalities	: TIMS, Remote Area fee.

Location: Humla District. A loop from the Humla Karnali Valley toward Saipal and Api Himal.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj, continuing next morning by plane to Simikot. Return the same way by plane. Instead of flying, you can spend ten days on foot to the nearest road and drive back to Kathmandu.

Route: 10–12 days. The route follows the Kailash trail (part of the Great Himalayan Trail) from Simikot to Dharapori, ascending to the Chhoila Pass to a beautiful lake at 3,800 m and onwards to the splendid Palang Le campsite before crossing the Thothory Pass at 4,500 m. On the fourth day you reach the Kharang Khola Valley, and via the Kairang summer settlement at 3,800 m, trekking on herders' trails to Saipal Base Camp (4,400 m). Spend the sixth day exploring the upper Kharang Khola and the Base Camp area, continuing the next day through the valley back to Labuk Depsa to the unique and remote Chala village. From Chala cross Syakup Lagna Pass (4,214 m) and descend into the Karnali Valley at Yalbang village. Proceed downriver to

Kermi and take a dip in the hot spring (2,860 m) before the long, steep ascent to Simikot.

It is worth including an acclimatisation day at Chhoila and visiting the Dhumbe Lekh at 4,500 m, overlooking the Karnali Valley. Staying one day in Chala would enable you to explore a fascinating high-elevation settlement. Total trek would then be 14 days.

Special attractions: A remote area following mostly herders' trails on the way to the Base Camp, returning on a traders' route. Very few travellers have been to Saipal Base Camp, or in this area at all. There are fantastic opportunities for photographing mountains and settlements.

Connecting adventures: Trek to Ranikharka to the east of Saipal and exit south. Great Himalayan Trek (No. 126) and the Limi Valley trek (No. 118). From Simikot, there are short trek options into Nyin Valley with the Raling Gomba.

Special advice: Rocky trails, dusty on the Kailash trail, steep up-and-down trails.



Difficulty	: Moderate to strenuous in short sections.
Lodging	: Camping all the way; however, teahouses at Yalbang and lodges at Kermi and Dharapori.
Provisions	: Kathmandu and Nepalgunj. This is a poor area with limited supplies along the trekking route.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Humla trekking permit, TIMS.

Location: Bajura and Humla District.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj, overnight and an early morning flight to Simikot, district capital of Humla. Return the same way.

Route: 11 days. The trek begins at Simikot town, descending to the Karnali River at Kharpunath, following the deep Humla Karnali gorge to Ripgadh. The route ascends east up the hill to Khada, crossing the Khadikhani Lagna Pass into Kawadi Kholu Valley, following this upstream to Ranikharka, the broad, U-shaped valley blocked by Saipal's east face and Saipal Base Camp East. A sixth day is recommended to spend exploring the Ranikharka grazing lands and Nunkharka glacier area. Trekking north over Sakya Lagna (4,709 m), Chala Phedi is reached after a long day, followed by another long day to Yalbang in the northern Humla Karnali River

Valley. Returning eastwards to Simikot via Kermi, Dharapori and Majgaun.

Special attractions: The Humla Karnali gorge to the south and impressive habitations on the edge along the river. The Ranikharka and Nunkharka areas with the dramatic backdrop of Saipal nearby offer Nepal's most beautiful camping sites. Crossing the Sakya Lagna and unique Chala village.

Connecting adventures: Staying more days in Ranikharka for exploring further. This can be compensated by cutting the return to Simikot by two days, turning east after Sakya Lagna and trekking via Chhoi La before descending to Dharapori before Simikot.

Special advice: This is a remote area with high elevation sections outside the Humla Karnali valley.



Chala village.

#74 Humla to Mugu High Route

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous. Trail finding in an isolated area adds to the challenge of this route.
Lodging	: Camping. Lodges only in Simikot, Simikot and Gamgadhi.
Provisions	: Nepalgunj, and simple provisions available in Simikot and Gamgadhi.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, prepared for roughing it.
Formalities	: Humla remote area fee, TIMS.

Location: Humla and Mugu Districts.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu via Nepalgunj to Simikot, trek to Gamgadhi and Talcha airstrip.

Route: 15 days. The trek starts from Simikot, descending to Kharpunath on the Chhuwa Khola, proceeding upriver to Takla village. Continue up the little-visited and uninhabited Lurupya Valley.

Ascend Okhale Lekh ridge and cross a 4,800 m pass, walking through a mountain area, descending along the Ogalya Khola River to the remote village of Nepka in the Loti Karnali valley. Follow the Loti Valley north toward the

Tibet border, cross the high *kharkas* and lake areas of the Humla Patan mountain ridge to the upper Mugu Khola Valley and the village of Mugugaoun. From there descend to Gamgadhi.

Connecting adventures: This basic route from Simikot to Gamgadhi/Talcha can be extended with five days to reach Jumla. The trail partly follows the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126).

Special advice: A guide familiar with local trails is essential. There are no services or infrastructure available between the start and end points. This is the most poverty-stricken area in Nepal, with limited food and services available.

#75 Api Himal South Base Camp

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate with some strenuous sections.
Lodging	: Camping trek, no proper lodges.
Provisions	: Very limited outside the towns, stock up before setting out on the trail.
Mode of trekking	: Tourism is not developed here, so a camping trek is the only option. Group trekking, preferably small groups. Independent trekking is not permitted.
Formalities	: Remote area permit, Api Nampa Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Baitadi and Bahjyang Districts.

Getting there and back: By plane or car to Dhangadhi, by car to Gokuleswor in Baitadi. Return the same way.

Route: 14 days or more. Drive to the Gokuleswor roadhead and beyond as far as a 4WD can go. Trek for four days along Nau Gad and Chamaliya Nadi Rivers and join the Great Himalayan Trail to Makarighat. From Lithi continue further north along the deep valley of Chamali Nadi in the vicinity of the Api and Nampa peaks at Dhawaliodar, and reach Api South Base Camp on day eight. Spend some time to roam around the high lakes before returning along the same route with different campsites.

Gukoleswor is reached on day twelve.

Special attractions: This area is as remote and untouched as you can get in Nepal, yet within manageable elevations of maximum 4,200 m. The Api Nampa Conservation area offers a fascinating cross-section of the Himalayas with deep inhabited valleys, untouched forested highlands, and the sanctuary of Api and Nampa mountains.

Connecting adventures: Great Himalayan Trail east and west (No. 126).

Special advice: This area is poor and remote with limited provisions. If possible, stay a few extra nights in the Base Camp area.

#76 Rara Lake

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate. Winter months are cold and snowy.
Lodging	: Camping; teahouses and lodges along some stretches.
Provisions	: At Kathmandu, Nepalgunj and Jumla.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups. Individual travellers are discouraged and the Rara Lake National Park staff might not allow it. Check beforehand.
Formalities	: TIMS and Rara National Park Fee.

Location: Mugu District and Jumla District.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj, another flight to Jumla Khalanga airport. By jeep or bus to Jumla is a major undertaking. Return the same way.

Route: 10 days or more. From Jumla Khalanga Bazaar (2,370 m) the trek follows the classic route to Rara via Danphe Lagna pass (3,130 m), Chautha, Dhotu and Lago Rara, arriving at Rara Lake on day five. After a day of rest and exploration at the lake, continue to Ghorasingha (3,190 m) and cross over to the Sinja Valley. From Sinja the route goes via Jaljala pass (3,600 m) and back into Jumla. We recommend adding some days to explore the lake and the lake rim

including, Chuchemara Peak (4,039 m), the Ruma Khand and Malika Khand peaks.

Special attractions: Rara Lake National Park at 2,999 m, quiet and pristine landscapes, with coniferous forest and mountain backdrop, Sinja Valley is beautiful.

Connections: Continue via Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) through Mugu towards Humla and the far western districts. Proceed south through the Sinja Valley and emerge at Surkhet or via Kalikot to Khaptad.

Special advice: Rara is in a remote area: do not expect any visitor or trekking services outside Jumla.

#77 Khaptad–Ramaroshan Trek

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: Combination of camping and homestays.
Provisions	: Kathmandu and Dhangadhi.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Khaptad National Park fee, TIMS.

Location: Bajhang, Bajura, Doti, and Achham Districts.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu or on a long drive to Dhangadhi and Silgadhi. End the trek at Sanfe Bazaar in Achham, and take the bus to Nepalgunj and Kathmandu.

Route: 13 days. Begin the trek from Silgadhi to Kalikasthan and Dauda, entering the Khaptad National Park on the third day. Spend two full days inside the national park and move on to Ramaroshan, also worth exploring for two days. On day 8 leave the Ramaroshan area for a slow trek via Chauka, Patal, Santada to Jayagadh and Sanfe Bazaar.

Special attractions: Khaptad National Park grasslands and wetlands, panorama views of far western Nepal's northern mountains. Ramaroshan is a special area of wetlands, cliffs, villages of various ethnicities, and vegetation and grazing areas with herders and their animals.

Connecting adventures: As part of a longer adventure in the lower far western Nepal, it makes sense to visit also Rara Lake (Nos. 14, 76) and Sinja. Before or after the trek you can visit Suklaphanta National Park near Dhangadhi or Bardiya National Park near Nepalgunj.

Special advice: A local guide will be an advantage on this trek.

Difficulty	: Moderate.
Lodging	: Tented camps combined with homestays, teahouses and lodges.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Nepalgunj, and Martadi.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: TIMS, Rara National Park fee, Khaptad National Park fee.

Location: Mugu, Bajura, Bhajang, and Doti Districts.

Getting there and back: By plane or bus from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj, flight next morning to Talcha in Mugu District. End trek at Tamali in Doti for bus transport to Dhangadhi, and flying or driving back to Kathmandu.

Route: 13 days. Hike from Talcha to Rara Lake (2,999 m), spending the next day at the lake and at Murmatop to view the Kanjiroba Himal. Continue the next day via Majghat to Serkot, Jugala, and Majchaur, reaching the Karnali River at Jugala on day 4. The next day you get to Kolti, the airstrip of Bajura, ascending from Kolti to Pandusen and Parekh Lekh (2,700 m), undulating to Martadi, the district capital of Bajura. Then comes a varied and undulating walk to Dhurlasen and, on day 9, you reach a hilly region in Bajura District that marks the beginning of Khaptad. Stay overnight at Laske Chaur inside the Khaptad National Park, spending one day for trekking within the national

park and another day for rest and excursions, seeing temples, grasslands and wildlife. On day 12, the route goes through the forested edge of the national park and via Lekhda, Meltadi, ending by the riverside in Simalpani. Half a day more takes you to the trek's end-point at Tamali, where you take the bus to Dhangadhi.

Special attractions: Rara Lake, mountain views of Kanjiroba, the Karnali Valley and the scenery around Khaptad and the grasslands and forests within the national park. The trek goes through numerous villages and places with different ethnic groups.

Connecting adventures: Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve or Bardiya National Park before or after the trek.

Special advice: The trek is highly varied and interesting, traversing a whole section of far western Nepal rarely visited. However, this is a poverty-ridden area with limited supplies outside the main bazaars.



Rara Lake.

#79 The Guerrilla Trek

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate to strenuous. For the most part on good trails in undulating
Lodging	: terrain.
Provisions	: Simple lodges and food, limited services available at Beni, Baglung, Thawang, and at the end of the trek in Suliochaur.
Mode of trekking	: Teahouses, homestays and lodges.
Formalities	: Permit to Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve, TIMS.

Location: Myagdi, Rukum, and Rolpa Districts.

Getting there and back: By bus or car from Pokhara to Beni. Return from Suliochaur, Rolpa, by bus or car (nine to ten hours) to Kathmandu.

Route: 14 days. The trek follows some of the main trails of the Maoist guerrillas in their previous heartland west of Pokhara, south of Dhaulagiri, and through the Dhorpatan forests and meadows.

Trekking begins in Beni, passes Baglung and proceeds on undulating trails westwards from village to village. Already on day 2, the landscape becomes more dramatic. On day 4, you reach Dhorpatan, with good chances of seeing wildlife, especially birds. Thawang in Rukum, the cradle of the guerilla movement, is reached on day 8. The next day's goal is Jaljala Hill (3,900 m), with views of the mountains of far western Nepal. The trek ends at Suliochaur in Rolpa, with a roadhead and several communist commune cafes and lodges run by former guerillas. The trek can also be done in the opposite direction.

Special attractions: This area is the homeland of the Magar people. There are superb views of Dhaulagiri from the ridgeline trails and hilltops.

Connecting adventures: After the trek you can visit either Bardia National Park or Chitwan National Park. The trek can also be moderated for particular routes and points of interest, as well as being connected with areas to the north. The trail has been successfully tested for trail-running; however, only limited supplies are available en route.

Special advice: Travellers rarely visit this area, so lodging and restaurants may not hold high quality. The area is also very poor in general infrastructure.



Taka, a Magar village.

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Indigenous Magar in traditional attire.

© HMH



Bluesheep (Goral) in Dhorpatan, the only hunting reserve in Nepal.

© HMH

#80 The Dhorpatan trek

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate, trails are good.
Lodging	: Depends on the chosen route. A network of simple lodges has been set up specifically for Dhorpatan visitors. Camping, some teahouses and homestays, but the latter are primitive. In practice, a combination will work very well.
Provisions	: Shops in Pokhara and Baglung.
Mode of trekking	: Independent, groups, families.
Formalities	: Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve permits, TIMS.

Location: Myagdi District, due south of the Dhaulagiri Massif.

Getting there and back: By bus or jeep from Pokhara to Beni or to Burtibang. Continue on foot either slowly from Beni or on a more direct route from Burtibang.

You make a circle coming back to the Baglung area, and return by bus or jeep to Pokhara.



Route: 10–14 days. There are many trail options in this area: A) Follow the Lower Great Himalaya Trail and slow it around Dhorpatan. This route involves tent camping, proceed to Juphal and fly out or return towards Baglung. B) Burtibang–Bhobang–Dhorpatan and stay, or make a loop west to Jaljale ridge via Gurjaghat, on to Darbang where there is a road to Pokhara.

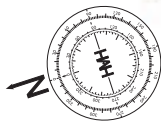
Special attractions: The Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve is an under-appreciated, rarely visited area with an unfortunate name, ('hunting') two or three days trekking west of the Kali Gandaki River. The reserve has high and wide flowery meadows straddling 4,000 m, with much wildlife, especially birds and blue sheep. There is great mountain scenery and friendly people.

Connecting adventures: You can follow the Guerilla Trail (No. 79) further west or follow the lower Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) towards Dunai in Dolpo. Biking is a novelty here, but possible. The area is featured as a place for long-distance running.

Special advice: This is a fairly undeveloped area, with limited infrastructure and services.

Central Nepal

 Pokhara connected
 Kathmandu connected

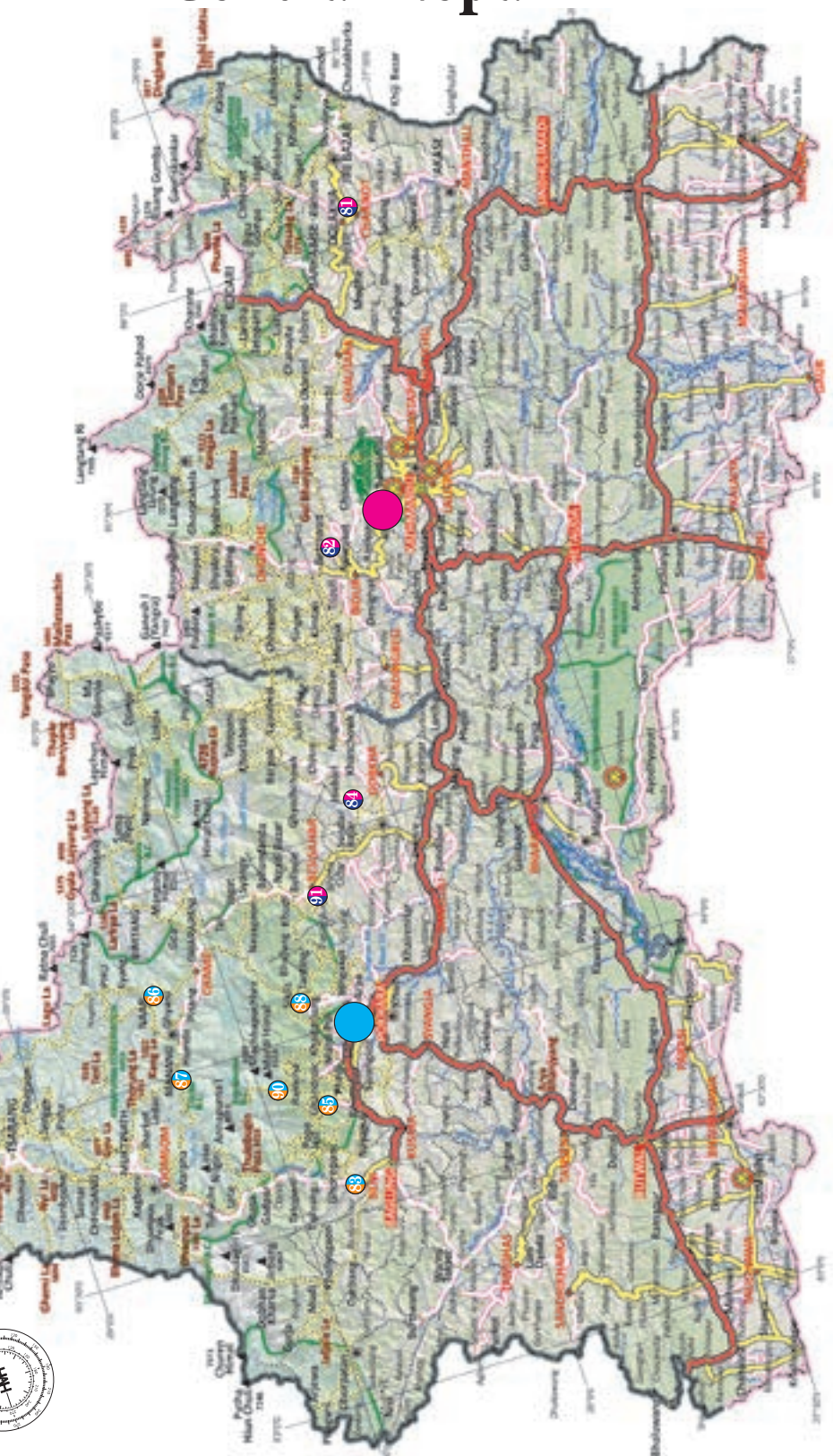


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Rolwaling Adventure
 Jugal Rambale
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Annapurna Circuit-Tilicho Trek
 The Salt Pass to Manang
 Upper Mustang Loop
 The Mardi Himal Trek
 Lamjung Traverse and Gurung Heritage trek



Difficulty	: Moderate, despite the possibility of reaching high elevations. For something more strenuous, you can hire equipment and a guide in Beding or Na and go bouldering, ice climbing or reaching the higher elevation passes and trekking peaks on the southern rim.
Lodging	: We recommend lodges or homestays only.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Charikot, and lodges in the valley. Most families in Rolwaling live from expeditions and mountaineering, so lodges are fairly well stocked with goods and staples. Good food can be bought in homes and lodges in both Beding and Na.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, couples, individuals.
Formalities	: Gaurishankar Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Dolakha District. The Rolwaling Valley runs west–east at the foot of the legendary twin peaks of Gaurishankar (Tseringma) and the Menlung mountains.

Getting there and back: By bus or rented jeep from Kathmandu via Charikot to Singati, Jagat or Chetchet in the upper Tama Khosi Valley, depending on road conditions. Return the same way.

Route: 10 days or more. From the start in the Tama Koshi Valley the trail follows the Rolwaling Khola via Simigaun for two days to Beding. Once in Beding, you settle into a lodge or homestay, and switch between Beding and the summer settlement of Na (4,200 m), a half-day trek further up the valley. From Beding and Na you can explore the valley's riches, meeting people and rambling around in this wonderful alpine valley, hiking in the forests and mountain slopes approaching 6,000 m. From the ridge Ri Pimo there is a 360-degree panorama of the upper valley.

Connecting adventures: This stay in Rolwaling is complete as it is. It is also possible to exit the valley by the eastern Tashi Lapcha across one of two high passes on the southern Rim into Ramechhap, and by following the eastern rim of the Tama Koshi Valley via Tashinam to Sailunge. However, the Tashi Lapcha is more safely crossed in the opposite direction.

Special attractions: Rolwaling is a '*beyul*', in the Tibetan tradition a sacred valley of peace

and spirituality, where one should behave with decorum and respect. No slaughter of animals is allowed. The direct translation of Rolwaling is 'Plow Furrow Valley', and so it looks, deep and steep on both sides. The valley is considered the birthplace of Deep Ecology in the tradition of the Norwegian philosopher (and mountaineer) Arne Naess, after years of research focused on Beding and Na. There is an abundance of rhododendrons early in the season.

Flowering plants abound during spring and summer. If you are very lucky, you just might sight snow leopards, leopards and clouded leopards; even rank amateurs should see blue sheep, hear barking deer and musk deers. Local people can take you to their *kharkas* and show you the yaks and yak hybrids, how they care for them, and how agriculture is practiced at 4,000 m above sea level. Above the valley floor, you can explore the glacial outburst-threatened Tsho Rolpa lake, some smaller glacial lakes such as the holy Omai Tso, glaciers, magnificent mountains, and many waterfalls, some of them frozen for half the year. There are some hermitages, and Beding gompa is not to be missed.

Special advice: Acclimatisation is an issue when you start the trek, so follow a slow course up to Beding. Two days is a minimum. Do not proceed from Beding to Na without a further acclimatisation day in Beding. Beding has electricity from a microhydro plant – bring along something to read.

Difficulty	: Moderate, despite high elevations in the beginning. The Tilman's Col and Ganja La descents are strenuous. The route through Helambu towards Kathmandu is considered easy ridge trekking.
Lodging	: Camping until you reach Melamchigaun. The Helambu part has a good selection of lodges and teahouses.
Provisions	: Kathmandu and Barhabise. There is no access to provisions apart from herders' supplies up until Helambu with village shops. The short distance from Kathmandu ensures that most village stores are fairly well stocked with goods and staples.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Gaurishankar Conservation Area fee, Langtang National Park fee, TIMS.

Location: Sindhupalchowk and Nuwakot Districts in central Nepal, between the Arniko Highway and Kathmandu.

Getting there and back: By bus or rented jeep from Kathmandu via Barhabise (four hours) to 15 km short of Tatopani on the Tibet border. Trekking westwards back into Sundarimal, Kathmandu. Breaking off earlier into the Melamchi Valley and returning by car to Kathmandu is possible, shortening the trek.

Route: 10 days or more. The trek combines the Bharabkund, Panch Pokhari and Helambu trekking routes, and is a wonderful mix of high trekking and ridge walking, descending through Helambu to Kathmandu. The trek can be done both ways, however, we find it more attractive to come walking back into Kathmandu.

The trek starts from Jalbire (1,000 m) due north of Barhabise. After a few days you reach the Bhairabkund Lake and Jugal Himal mountain meadows and grazing lands. The trail traverses the southern flanks of Jugal Himal onwards to Panch Pokhari at the end of the Panch Pokhari Lekh. From Panch Pokhari a high route takes you close to the Tilman's Col (pass) and a mountaineering style descent into the upper Langtang Valley. From Panch Pokhari you can either descend into the Indrawati basin directly,

or continue at the same elevation further west, skirting the upper Yangri Khola and the glaciated approach to Ganja La, before turning south on the Yangri Danda and Melamchigaun. Once in the Helambu area you have a choice of faster or longer return routes to Kathmandu.

Connecting adventures: Two passes lead into Langtang Valley, both requiring ice- and snow-equipment. An easier trek into Langtang is one day further along the Gosainkund Lekh to Tharepati, over Laurebina La past the Gosainkund Lake (No. 33), descending to Dhunche or Syabrubesi. The Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) is followed for most of the stretch up to Helambu.

Special attractions: The sight and proximity of the Jugal Himal, views towards the twin peaks of Gaurishankar and other Rolwaling and Khumbu mountains, the Middle Hills vista to the south. There are alpine lakes below the Jugal Himal; herders and livestock in high *kharka* grazing season.

Special advice: Acclimatisation is an issue at the start of the trek. It is necessary to go slowly as you ascend to Bhairabkund. This trek has the advantage of offering relatively good opportunities to break off the trek if necessary and descend, close to road transportation.

#83 Myagdi-Parbat Eco-tourism trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate, the highest point being Khopra, otherwise much up and down.
Lodging	: Camping, several fine campsites available if you look for them.
Provisions	: Pokhara, Beni, otherwise village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups or family. Not for larger groups, because this should be a quiet and low impact trek.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Parbat and Myagdi Districts west of Pokhara.

Getting there and back: By car from Pokhara to Beni, returning the same way. Many variations of the route are possible.

Route: 11 days. Starting from Beni in the Kali Gandaki Valley, in the following very interesting three days you pass Ghumaune Lake, continues to Banshkharka, Nagi-Mahara Danda, and to Pyari Baharani Lake. From Pyari Baharani Lake, the trek ascends via Gharmadi and Swanta to Khopra (3,880 m), one of the highest points on the trekking area south of Annapurna South. After Khopra, the trek loops eastwards along Narchyan ridge, via the famous Tatopani hotsprings to Ghaleswhor, ending again at Beni.

Special attractions: We recommend this trek because it is clean and green, with careful interaction and very special campsites. Close views of the Dhaulagiri and Annapurna Himalayas, great sunrise and sunset at campsites, small lakes, creeks, waterfalls, hot springs and wilderness. This region is peopled by the Magar ethnic group.

Connecting adventures: Trek to Gurja Hidden Valley, Dhorpatan, Jomsom, more places north and east towards Pokhara.



Natural hot water spring in Tatopani.

Special advice: This trek suits people interested in nature, calm hiking and contact with local people. Take plenty of time to look around and photograph. Bring binoculars.



Harvesting time.

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Dhaulagiri seen from Myagdi.

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Giant Manaslu.

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#84 Dudh Pokhari–Baudha Himal

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate to strenuous. The trails, mostly made for local herders and pilgrims, are challenging and exposed in places. Many ups and downs with some high pass crossings. Not a winter trek.
Lodging	: Camping.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Pokhara and Besisahar.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: TIMS, Manaslu Conservation Area fee.

Location: Lamjung and Gorkha Districts. Located high on the southwestern slope of Baudha Himal in the Manaslu – Himalchuli massif.

Getting there and back: By bus or car from Pokhara or Kathmandu to Baluntar. End trek at Gorkha Bazaar, and by car or bus back to Pokhara or Kathmandu.

Route: 14 days. The trek starts at either Phaesangu or Besisahar in the Lamjung District, following Simledanda the ridge toward Baudha Himal, then curving southeast, skirting the mountains toward Gorkha Bazaar.

The trek commences near Besisahar and approaches the ridgelines via the terraced agricultural landscape of Gurung and Tamang villages on the route to Baluntar, Lilik Kot, Harmi Bhanyang, Siran Chok, Bhasi Kharka, Pasi Kharka, arriving Dudh Pokhari on day 6. Spend a day of rest and exploration at the alpine

lake of Dudh Pokhari (4,700) before setting out for Narte Pokhari and crossing the Rupinala Bhanyang (4,500 m) on day 9. The route continues south from Rupila Phedi to Sumrung Khola, Rose Kharka, Homche, Homche-Tala and Gairi Gaoun before ending in Gorkha.

Special attractions: Dudh Pokhari is a very attractive lake of local pilgrimage, rarely visited by outsiders. Close views of Manaslu, Himal Chuli, Peak 29.

Connecting adventures: From Gorkha Bazaar you can continue to Manakamana, exit via the cable car or continue via the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) eastwards through the Ganesh Himal Area and Dhading.

Special advice: This route is rarely used by outsiders; the trail is neither well marked nor in good condition. Guides with local knowledge are recommended. Take time to visit Gorkha Bazaar. Check for post-earthquake updates.

Difficulty	: Strenuous due to high elevations, ups and downs, snow and cold spells. Because of the dangerous traverse that is exposed to avalanches from Hiunchuli, the trail can be closed during spring and summer seasons.
Lodging	: A great advantage of this high-altitude trek is that you can stay in teahouses or lodges.
Provisions	: Trekking gear is available in Pokhara.
Mode of trekking	: Groups as well as independently organised trekking. However, due to the altitude and dangers along the trail and snow, single travel is discouraged.
Formalities	: TIMS and Annapurna Conservation Area fee.

Location: Kaski District northwest of Pokhara, in the Annapurna Conservation Area.

Getting there and back: By jeep or bus from Pokhara to several possible trailheads, Naya Pul being the standard one, with Phedi/Dhampus as a good alternative.

Route: 12 days. This is a classic trek, next to the Everest Base Camp trail in terms of popularity. You hike up the Modi Valley, and down again the same way. Starting in Naya Pul you trek for three days to Ghandruk, Chomrong, both being main Gurung villages, toward the Modi canyon. On day 4 you begin to gain serious altitude ascending to Machhapuchhare Base Camp, Annapurna Base Camp is reached the next day. A short day in terms of distance, but there is both an elevation gain and snow, so going can be slow. A speedy return from ABC goes via overnights at Bamboo, Jhinuwa Danda, and either via Ghandruk or Landruk to reach either Naya Pul or Lumle.

Special attractions: Annapurna Base Sanctuary is considered the world's most impressive

mountain cirque. You are surrounded by very impressive mountain peaks, including Annapurna II, above 8,091 m. The hike up the Modi Khola gorge is fantastic. Most trekking itineraries do not allow for spending a full day at ABC, but this is something to consider unless it is too crowded.

Connecting adventures: This trek can be varied at the departure and end points, taking advantage of an extremely good trail network below the Annapurna South. Some avid trekkers go to ABC at the end of the Annapurna Circuit (No. 107).

Special advice: Note that the day-walks are set to a standard in order to avoid altitude sickness and to take in the surrounding landscape. For easing the transition to higher elevations it might be wise to add a couple of days in the beginning. One option is walking an extra loop to Ghorepani and Poon Hill prior to heading up the valley. The trail can be overcrowded, sometimes causing an unhealthy race to secure accommodation. If you are short on time, but really want to see and enjoy as much as possible, spend time on the uphill trek, and go down more quickly.



Annapurna Base Camp

Difficulty	: Easy to strenuous, depending on what you choose to do. Slow and easy valley walk is the basic mode, but many moderate to strenuous walks and climbs can be undertaken on excursions lasting one or more days.
Lodging	: Very good lodges in Manang.
Provisions	: Good shops in Manang.
Mode of trekking	: Groups and individual trekking.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee.

Location: Manang District. The Manang Valley lies behind the Annapurna range.

Getting there and back: From west, on foot from Jomsom; from east, by footpath, car or plane from Besisahar.

Route: 10–14 days in Manang and surroundings. Trekkers on the traditional Annapurna Circuit route usually took a rest day in Manang. You can experience the side valleys, climb the local peaks or take side trips to Nar Phu, Meso Kanto La and Yak Karkha. Distances of maximum three hours on foot separate the lodges and restaurants in Manang Valley, highly conducive to short walks, excursions, and playing naturalist. Manang is also good for mountain biking.

Special attractions: Manang used to be a major trading village. If your timing is good

you may experience one of the local festivals. A two-day excursion to Tilicho Lake (4,100 m) brings you to beautiful surroundings and is good for acclimatisation. Pisang and Braga villages on the way to Manang have fascinating architecture and gompas.

Connecting adventures: Explore Manang as part of the Annapurna Circuit trek (No. 107). You can take side trips to Nar Phu with an alternative exit via Tilicho Lake, and also do the Manaslu Circuit (No. 106) or follow the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126). After crossing Thorung La to Muktinath, you can continue into Upper Mustang, but only if you have the right permits.

Special advice: Flights into Manang are erratic. Due to the cold, most of the residents move south during the winter season.



Tilicho Himal, Manang.



Tilicho Lake.

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#87 Annapurna Circuit–Tilicho Trek

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous. The crossing of Tilicho and Mesokanto is in rough terrain, partly without visible trails that are often snow covered and exposed to cold, freakish weather.
Lodging	: Although the Annapurna Circuit is otherwise known for good lodges, teahouses at short intervals and good food, none of this applies to the stretch between Khangsar and Thimi, so prepare to camp for three nights.
Provisions	: At Manang and Jomsom.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, never alone and always with a guide.
Formalities	: TIMS, remote area permit, Annapurna Conservation Area fee.

Location: Lamjung, Manang and Mustang Districts.

Getting there and back: By bus from Kathmandu or Pokhara via Dumre to Besisahar. Ending the trek at Jomsom, by plane, car or footpath to Pokhara.

Route: 14 days. Follow the new Annapurna Circuit trail from Besisahar to Manang. This takes six days including acclimatisation rests. From Manang village, deviate from the normal Annapurna Circuit route and trek to Khangsar village across Jharsing Khola. The next day you reach Tilicho Lake (4,919 m), continuing along the glaciated banks of the lake, crossing the Mesokanto La pass (5,315 m) at the end of a tough day in rough terrain. From a camping site below the pass on the Mustang side, the trek continues the next day with a formidable descent

to Thimi village, ending in Jomsom (2,741 m). This route goes at slightly lower elevations than the Thorong La route via Muktinath, but the conditions are much rougher.

Special attractions: The Tilicho Lake is frozen for most of the year and the surrounding glaciated mountain landscape with high Himalayan peaks are spectacular. Mesokanto La offers fantastic views of Mustang and the surrounding peaks.

Connecting adventures: From Jomsom you can choose to continue trekking to Pokhara, enjoy excursions around Jomsom, or visit (with the proper permit) Upper Mustang (Nos. 89, 110).

Special advice: This is a little-frequented route, and finding the right way can be difficult. Make sure your guide actually knows this route.

#88 The Salt Pass to Manang

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous; on one day the trekking borders on mountaineering.
Lodging	: Guesthouses in the villages at both ends, lodges in Manang, otherwise camping.
Provisions	: Pokhara, Siklis and in Manang. Nothing is available during the trek.
Mode of trekking	: Small parties with knowledgeable guide.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Kaski and Manang Districts.

Getting there and back: By plane or car from Kathmandu to Pokhara, by car to Siklis. End of the trek can either be Chame (shortest version), Besisahar (east) or over Thorong La or Tilicho La into the Kali Gandaki Valley, returning by car or plane to Pokhara.

Route: 9 days or more from Siklis to Chame. Siklis can be reached in one day. If you arrive Siklis early in the day, a village tour is perfect, or an afternoon trip up the hill above Siklis. On day 2 you trek to Tasa, ascending to Korikharka (3,000 m). The fourth day you leave the treeline, reaching the grazing lands and Thulo Tal, ascending to Falne and Thorju with marvelous views of the central Annapurna–Lamjung massifs. At nearly 5,000 m, an acclimatisation day provides an opportunity to visit the Dudh Pokhari (No. 90). Day 8 includes a

strenuous and long trek over the glaciated Namun La Pass 5,249 m to Danfe Kharka on the Manang side of the Annapurna–Lamjung chain. The next day involves a steep descent to Timsang Besi and Chame.

Connecting adventures: Staying in Manang. Crossing the Thorong La to Muktinath and Jomsom.

Special advice: Weather-exposed area with risks of hail, rain and snow. Light snow and ice equipment for crossing the pass, crampons, rope and ice-axe should be carried. In case crossing Namun La is impossible, plan B involves roaming around the Dudh Pokhari area, ascending to Sundar Peak overlooking the Marsyangdi Valley, the Manaslu and Himalchuli massifs. You can descend to either Yangyakot for Pokhara or via Ghanpokhara for Besisahar.



Chame, Manang.

#89 Upper Mustang Loop

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate.
Lodging	: A mix of camping and lodges.
Provisions	: Pokhara, Jomsom, and Lo Manthang. Trade with Tibet has facilitated a considerable supply of goods also to Upper Mustang.
Mode of trekking	: Small, focused groups.
Formalities	: Upper Mustang permit, TIMS, Annapura Conservation Area fee.

Location: Upper Mustang District (restricted area).

Getting there and back: By plane, car or on foot from Pokhara to Jomsom. Return the same way.

Route: 10 days or more. Starting from Jomsom, you reach Kagbeni at the edge of Upper Mustang the same day. Hike along a route through several villages and settlements, arriving Lo Manthang (3,760 m) on day 5. Spend a day or two in Lo Manthang, hike to Gekhar, Gami and Samar before returning to Kagbeni and Jomsom.

Special attractions: Colourful desert landscapes, gorges, ravines. The trek offers

unique opportunities to observe Tibetan (Lo-pa people) culture and lifestyle, ancient gompas and hermitages and rituals. There are contrasting buckwheat fields and villages, and the walled Lo Manthang, the capital of the former Kingdom of Mustang.

Connecting adventures: Links with the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) into Dolpo and to Manang across the Thorung La.

Special advice: This is high and dry desert country, but extremely colorful and photogenic. Do not forget your camera – and lens protection against the sandy winds. You can shorten this trek considerably by choosing to drive on the rough road to Kagbeni.



Mustang

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Garphu, Mustang

© Dag Norling

Difficulty	: Moderate. Strenuous, if you attempt the high trekking point on Mardi Himal. From the forest camp between the two ridges, it is very steep up to Korchon.
Lodging	: Homestays available in the lower villages. Seasonal lodges on the ridges. Camping gives more flexibility.
Provisions	: In Pokhara and village shops in the lower hills.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups. Individual trekking is possible, but not recommended.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Kaski District, a short distance north of Pokhara.

Getting there and back: By bus or car to Dhampus and return via Lhachok to Mardipul/Hyanga or to Burjung Khola roadheads.

Route: 9 days or more. Start at Dhampus/Potana and follow the Mardi Himal west ridge for two full days to the High Camp. We suggest you spend one extra day to walk further north on the ridge for sightseeing.

Then cross the valley's north end to get to the East Ridge at Korchon. This involves a deep dip into the valley that divides the two ridges. From the Korchon ridge you can either descend down into Seti Valley via Mirsa or other points, or follow the spur south and descend into Pokhara Valley via Odane and Riban for Mardi Pul.

Special sights: This long and high loop up one ridge and down another close to Pokhara is a gem. These two main ridges leading up towards Machhapuchhare offer fantastic views of the whole Annapurna panorama.

Connecting adventures: If you have the correct permits and appropriate equipment, you can attempt to ascend the trekking peak Mardi Himal from Korchon. Descend into the Seti Khola Valley and connect with the Siklis Eco Trek (No. 25) to Siklis via Shardi Khola and Ghalegaun.

Special advice: The weather can be harsh in the Annapurna area, with incredible thunder, hail and rainfall. Short distances to higher elevations increase the risk of altitude sickness. There are several points for descending from the ridges to safe elevations.



West South Approach to Mardi Himal.

📷 HMMH



High Camp on the Mardi Himal trek. 📷 Olav Myrholt

Difficulty	: Strenuous, long days at the beginning of the trek, long and high ascents.
Lodging	: This is designed as a camping trek, although several villages at lower elevations along the route have homestays and teahouses for simple accommodation.
Provisions	: Pokhara and in bazaars along the Marsyangdi River.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: TIMS, Annapura Conservation Area fee.

Location: Kaski, Lamjung and Gorkha Districts.

Getting there and back: By plane, car from Kathmandu to Pokhara, continuing by jeep north to a campsite on the banks of Modi Khola. Ending the trek at Gorkha Bazaar, by bus to Kathmandu or Pokhara.

Route: 10 days or more. From the Modi Khola camp the trek ascends on ridges to Tangting Kharka (2,100 m), Bhaise Kharka (3,400 m) and reaches the Lamjung Himal Base Camp (3,940 m) on the third day. After resting one day with panorama view excursion, the route descends to Kopchepani, Baglungpani to Tarkughat in the Lamjung lowlands and to Daraudi Khola (820 m) into the Gorkha District. On the last day you arrive to Gorkha Bazaar. A slower trek along the same route, focusing more on villages and meeting people will be similar to a ‘Gurung Cultural Trek’.



Wood store for the rest of the year.

📷 HMMH



Gurung woman in traditional attire.

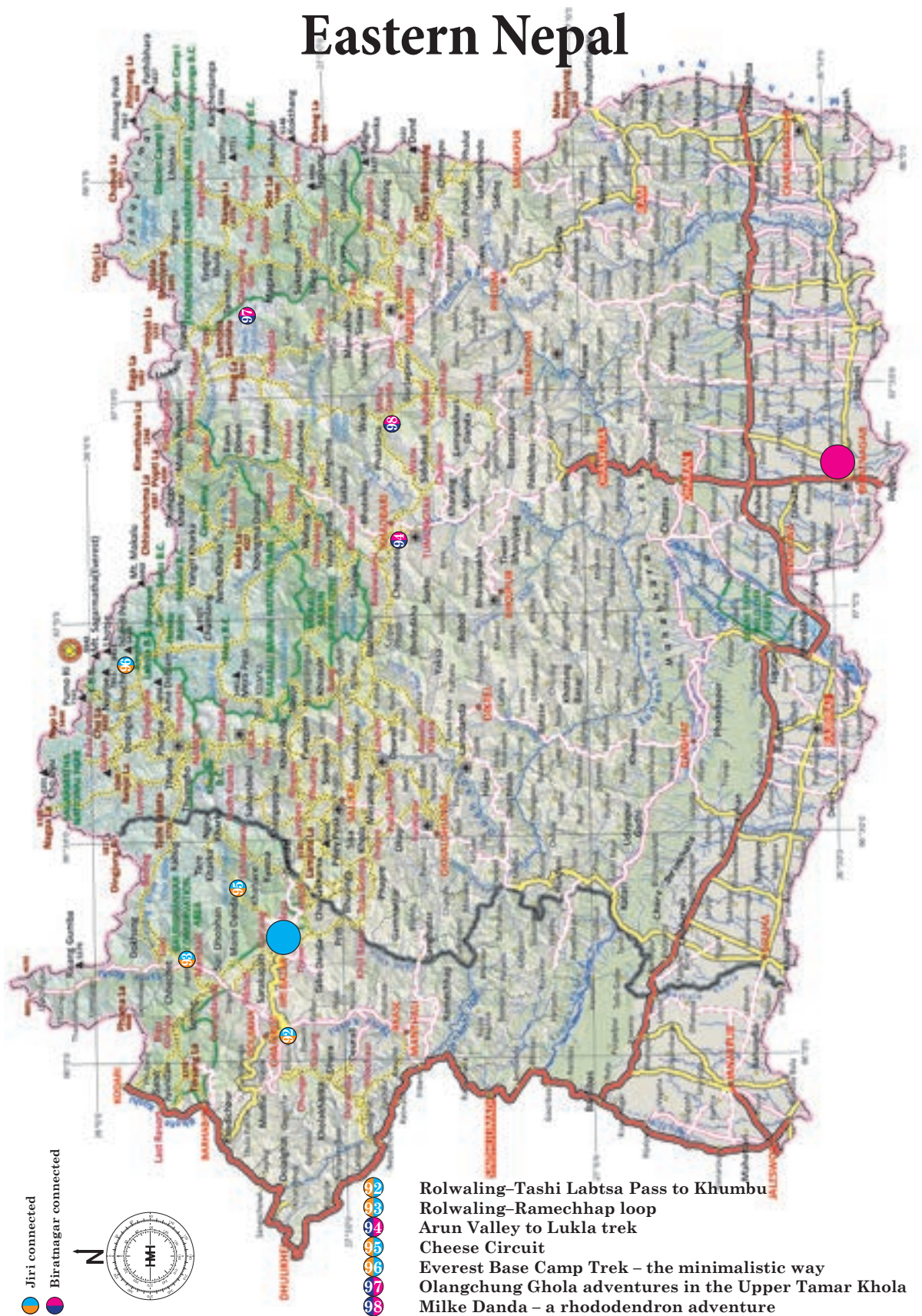
📷 Punya

Special attractions: Superb views to Machhapuchhare, Annapurna II, IV, the Manaslu–Himalchuli and Baudha massifs, and very near views of the Lamjung Himal. A trek close to nature, far from villages during the first four days, then through the cultural landscapes of eastern Gurung villages.

Connecting adventures: Spending more time to explore the highlands south of Lamjung Himal, ending the trek in Besisahar. Alternatively, spending two or more days on the entire trek. You can extend the adventure by hiking from Pokhara through the Dhading district to the Trishuli Valley in Nuwakot, a short bus ride from Kathmandu. This takes fourteen days.

Special advice: The rapid ascent suggested to Lamjung Base Camp might induce altitude sickness symptoms. Quick descents are easy, but spending one day extra on the ascent is preferable.

Eastern Nepal





Tso Rolpa Lake.

📷 Øyvind Amundsgård



Na Gompa

📷 HMM

#92 Rolwaling–Tashi Labtsa Pass to Khumbu

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous. The glacier crossings and Tashi Labtsa are mountaineering style. Ice- and snow- equipment is necessary.
Lodging	: A mix of lodges and camping. Lodges are available up to Na, and seasonally at Tso Rolpa Lake. Camping is necessary over Tashi Labtsa, while lodges are found again from Thame all the way to Lukla.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Charikot: simple provisions and essentials up to Na. Khumbu is well stocked.
Mode of trekking	: Small and medium sized groups.
Formalities	: Gaurishankar Conservation Area fee, Sagarmatha National Park fee, TIMS.

Location: Dolakha and Solukhumbu Districts.

Getting there and back: By bus or rented jeep from Kathmandu via Charikot to Singati or Jagat/Chetchet. Ending the trek in Lukla, by plane back to Kathmandu, or on foot back to Jiri for road transport back.

Route: 10 days or more. This trek can be done walking from east to west or from west to east. However, acclimatisation is best done going from the west towards the east. From the roadheads at Singati, Jagat or Chetchet you can access the trail to Tashinam and Simigaun. Consult Rolwaling Adventure (No.81) for details at this end. The trail undulates up to Beding (3,800 m) in the Rolwaling Valley, ascending to the summer settlement Na (4,200 m). An acclimatisation break with day-trips exploring Na and the passes and side valleys is recommended for added safety and experience. Continue along the moraines of Tso Rolpa Lake and the Trakarding Glacier, and ascend (ropes advisable) the cliffs

and glacier falls. An exposed camp is reached at the Tashi Labtsa pass. Descend, with caution, into Khumbu to Thyangbo, Thame, Namche Bazaar, and Lukla.

Connecting adventures: The glacier and mountain landscapes in Upper Rolwaling and at Tashi Labtsa can be explored within a few extra days. Scaling the trekking peak Yalung Ri can be done as a one-day trip. The logical extension from west to east is to cross Renjo La to Gokyo and to Gorakshep for a view of Everest from Kala Pattar before descending to Namche Bazaar. An easier ramble involves following the Khumbu valleys rather than crossing the passes. This route is a spectacular section of the Great Himalayan Trail high route (No. 126).

Special advice: A strenuous and high trek, but with options for return on both sides of the Tashi Labtsa approaches if the elevation or the weather becomes a problem.

#93 Rolwaling–Ramechhap loop

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous, high elevation, snow- and ice-bound pass.
Lodging	: Camping, but both Rolwaling and lower part of the Numbur loop toward Jiri have homestays and lodges.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Charikot, otherwise lodge shops in Rolwaling.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Gaurishankar Conservation Area fee, TIMS, trekking peak fee for Yalung Ri.

Location: Dolakha and Ramechhap Districts.

Getting there and back: By bus or car from Kathmandu to Charikot. By local bus or jeep to Jagat or Chetchet. Return by car from Jiri.

Route: 14 days or more. The first part of the loop is described in the Rolwaling trek (No. 92), the end part crossing territory described in the Cheese Circuit (No. 95).

The route ascends the Rolwaling Valley from the Tama Koshi River Valley, reaching Na in five days, including stops for acclimatisation. If more acclimatisation days are needed, Na is a perfect place. The route deviates from the main trail, ascending for two days on the southern slope to the Yalung Ri pass (5,310 m), including an

attempt on the Yalung Ri peak (5,630 m). On the Ramechhap side of the Yalung Ri, the herders' trails take trekkers along the descending *kharkas* of Mad Chhekung, Tuden, and Laprak Danda to the Chordung peak before a final descent to Jiri.

Special attractions: Crossing a seldom used, high altitude pass. Superb views of the Khumbu and Numbur mountains, and the hills to the south.

Connecting adventures: Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) toward Lukla or west toward Barhabise. Also hiking to Pikey Peak (No. 40) for a Khumbu mountain panorama.

Special advice: You should be familiar with snow camping and have some altitude experience.



Gaurishankar.

#94 Arun Valley to Lukla trek

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Moderate to strenuous.
Lodging	: Camping.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Tumlingtar, otherwise in village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Makalu – Barun Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Bhojpur, Sankhuwasabha and Solokhumbu Districts.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Biratnagar, or by plane or car (very long drive) from Kathmandu to Lukla in Khumbu. Returning by plane to Kathmandu.

Route: 10 days or more. This is a very scenic and culturally interesting route that takes you from the Arun River Valley westward below the main Makalu, Barun and Khumbu mountains.

From Tumlingtar you trek for three days via Kartike Ghat, Ghote Bazaar to Salpa Phedi below the Salpa La pass (3,349 m). After crossing the Salpa La on day 4, the trek continues via Guranse, Share to Share-Bung and Najingdingma. From Najingdingma the route goes through Pangum and Puiyan, reaching Lukla on day 10.



The trails are filled with steps.

© HMMH



Ascent to Lumba Suma.

© HMMH

Special attractions: A definitely non-touristic, highly attractive trek at elevations varying between 390 and 3,000 m. Visit the Salpa Pokhari Lake at 3,414 m. Side excursions to other viewpoints are possible. There are great views of Kanchenjunga, Makalu, Barun, Everest and Gaurishankar. Explore the deep and forested Arun valley with a rich flora and fauna, and Sherpa, Rai and Limbu local cultures.

Connecting adventures: Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) to Pikey Peak (No. 40), hiking to Lukla and Jiri.

Special advice: This trek is well suited for people interested in nature and remoteness. Great photo opportunities. Bring binoculars.



Yak cheese is made from yak milk.

© Punya

#95 Cheese Circuit

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous due to four days at high elevations and some difficult uphill sections.
Lodging	: Camping.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Charikot, and village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Gaurishankar Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Ramechhap District.

Getting there and back: By car to Shivalaya on the Kathmandu to Jiri road. If conditions are wet, stop at Jiri. Return by car from Thosé further west on the Jiri road.

Route: 14 days or more on a non-touristic, quiet and undulating loop. After staying overnight in Shivalaya, you start with an easy short trek to Kahare, ascend 1,000 m the next day in the Likhu Khola Valley to Pani Pakha, continue on the third day on a short but steep trek to Mane Danda, and on the fourth day ascend Pani Pokhari (4,515 m). On day 5 you follow the trail to Thare, ascend to Gyazo La pass (4,880 m) on day 6, and descend on day 7 to the herders' settlement at Ngeju at the foot of the Numbur Icefall. From Ngeju continue on day 8 to Lhachhewar and Kyama, and on day 9 enjoy a short trek in undulating terrain to Gumdel. The final stretch goes from Gumdel via Serding to Lapchane before the trek ends at Thosé.

Special attractions: Short trekking days make it possible to meet the Sherpas and see cheese in the making at factories and yak *kharkas*. The route takes you through Sherpa settlements and cultivated lands, through a deep river canyon, and to high grazing lands and alpine lakes below the Rolwaling Himal. There are excellent close views of Numbur Chuli, the Rolwaling Himal, and the western Khumbu mountains. Visit the Thodung Gompa.

Connecting adventures: Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126). Crossing the Ramdung Pass brings you into the Rolwaling Valley (No. 81). Hiking the Pikey Peak trail (No. 40) can be an extension of the Cheese Circuit.

Special advice: The trek provides access to high mountains within a short distance from Kathmandu, offering excellent photo opportunities. Advance reading about the Sherpas and high mountain agriculture is recommended. Lots of cheese to be had along the route!

Difficulty	: Strenuous. Adding more time for acclimatisation will make the trek easier and more enjoyable.
Lodging	: Good lodges all the way.
Provisions	: All trekkers' supplies available in Lukla and Namche Bazaar, and in lodge shops.
Mode of trekking	: Group, families with youngsters (not small children). Independent trekkers should team up due to the danger of altitude sickness.
Formalities	: Sagarmatha National Park fee, TIMS.

Location: Solukhumbu District.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Lukla, returning the same way. An alternative is by car to Jiri/Shivalaya or Paphlu and on foot to Lukla. This adds several enjoyable days to the trek.

Route: 11 days. This trek follows the basic, fastest, no-nonsense, most hiked route through the Khumbu region, home of the Khumbu Sherpas.

From Lukla you hike to Namche Bazaar, stopping one night on the way for acclimatisation. Once in Namche, spend another one or two days for acclimatisation and side trips. Ascending via Tengboche, Dingboche and Lobuche to Gorakshep, the starting point for a long one-day trip to Kala Pattar (5,545 m) for excellent views of Everest Base Camp and Mt. Everest. Despite the heading, note that the trek does not actually go to Everest Base Camp itself – in fact,

the views from there are not as good as from Kala Pattar. From Gorakshep you return the same route, but a lot faster, rolling downhill via Dingboche, Namche Bazaar and to Lukla.

Connecting adventures: Side valley visits, such as Gokyo Glacier Lake and villages. You are close to several trekking peaks or can follow the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) westward to Rolwaling (No. 81) or east to the Barun and Makalu region. Southern Solu treks and Okhaldhunga treks are accessible, and you can hike back to Jiri instead of flying.

Special advice: This fast itinerary leaves little time for seeing attractions in the valleys and villages. Altitude sickness is a real danger, even if two acclimatisation days are scheduled. During high season or bad weather departures from Lukla get crowded. Therefore, if you have booked an international flight from Kathmandu, be sure to calculate buffer days when leaving Lukla by plane.



Ama Dablan, one of the most beautiful mountains in Nepal.

97 Olangchung Ghola adventures in the Upper Tamar Khola Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: The straightforward trek into Olangchung Gola is moderate, while the two additional options are strenuous.
Lodging	: Camping, teahouses, and lodging facilities along the main access routes to Kanchenjunga Base Camp, but only homestays in the Olangchung Gola Valley. Camping only for the two extra options.
Provisions	: Taplejung, limited choice of provisions at Olangchung Gola.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups preferred.
Formalities	: TIMS, Kanchenjunga Conservation Area fee, possibly remote area fee.

Location: Taplejung District, Olangchung Gola Valley and the upper the Tamur River.

Getting there and back: By plane to Suketar/Taplejung, or by jeep or bus to Taplejung town.

Route: 10–12 days. Starting and ending points are Taplejung and Suketar. You will return on the same trail to Taplejung/Suketar, unless cutting west toward Lumbasumba on the Great Himalayan High Trail from Olangchung Gola.

From Taplejung or Suketar follow the main trail toward Kanchenjunga Base Camp toward Ghunsa. From Taplethok the trail turns north into the Upper Tamar River Valley, turning west along the Tamar River into the Olangchung Gola Valley at Ramte. Use Olangchung Gola as a base camp for day-trips and excursions. Visit the surrounding valleys and yak grazing ridges. You can approach the Tiptok La pass (5,095 m) next to Tibet, and visit the upper Yangma Khola basin and the Nupchu Pokhari lakes.

There are two other options:

(1) Making a loop from Taplejung via Thanku, Topkegola, and Lasa across the Lumbasumba La pass (5,155 m) into Olangchung Gola for a stay there. Exiting via Taplethok toward Taplejung. Due to the high elevations and the remoteness of Lumbasumba La this option adds one week.

(2) After having visited Olangchung Gola, hike out of the Tamar River Valley over Nango La (4,820 m) to Ghunsa, the main settlement of the Kanchenjunga area. From Ghunsa you can either explore the Kanchenjunga upper tracts or descend to Taplejung along the main Kanchenjunga trail. This detour adds minimum four days to the original trek.

Special attractions: Olangchung Gola is a remote, unique and delightful village. The border pass into Tibet is used for trading.

Connecting adventures: This trek can be done as a side adventure to the main Kanchenjunga Loop (No. 112) further northeast. The Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) traverses the valley.

Special advice: This is a remote area with limited access and few provisions.



Gola village.

Difficulty	: Moderate. Maximum elevation is 3,900 m. Northern extensions will be
Lodging	: strunuous. Camping. There is limited, but improving tourism infrastructure, so enquire about lodging opportunities prior to booking a full camping trip.
Provisions	: Available in Dharan and in village shops, but limited on the ridge.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, families.
Formalities	: TIMS.

Location: Terhathum, Taplejung and Sankuwasabha Districts.

Getting there and back: By car to Basantapur (Terhathum District) via Dharan. To avoid driving from Kathmandu, you can go by plane to Biratnagar and continue by car. Return by plane from Tumlingtar. Alternatively, Taplejung and Tumlingtar can be used as starting points for approaches to Milke Danda.

Route: 9–12 days. The comfortable trekking section lies between 2,200 and 3,900 m. Starting from the south ensures good views of the snow covered Himalayas: from Basantapur to Gupha Pokhari, reaching Milke Danda ridge on day three. Continue to Jaljale and Chainpur, ending in Tumlingtar on day nine.

Special attractions: The highlight is the Tinjure Milke Jaljale ridge that stretches practically all the way from Dhankuta to Sumba Himal near the Tibetan border. Surrounding the ridge are ethnically diverse populations,

dominated by Rai, Sherpa and Limbus. You can see remnants of settlements after the historic Gorkha consolidation of Nepal. The more recent settlers have introduced modernisation, tourism and trade. A visit to Tinjure Milke Jaljale Danda focuses on the northern walkable section. In this area you find superb rhododendron forests, small lakes, Nepal's highest waterfall, interesting birdlife, flora and fauna particular for eastern Himalaya.

Connecting adventures: You can continue north on the Milke–Jaljale ridge to Jaljale Himal and joining the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126). Other easily accessible options are the Arun Valley Trek (No. 94), the Kanchenjunga Loop (No. 112), and Ilam tea gardens (No. 38).

Special advice: There are several options for trekking the Milke Danda, including start and end points. There is little water on the ridgetop, so ensure you have a supply. Yak caravans share your trail, step aside for them.



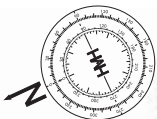
Rhododenron, the national flower of Nepal. © HMH



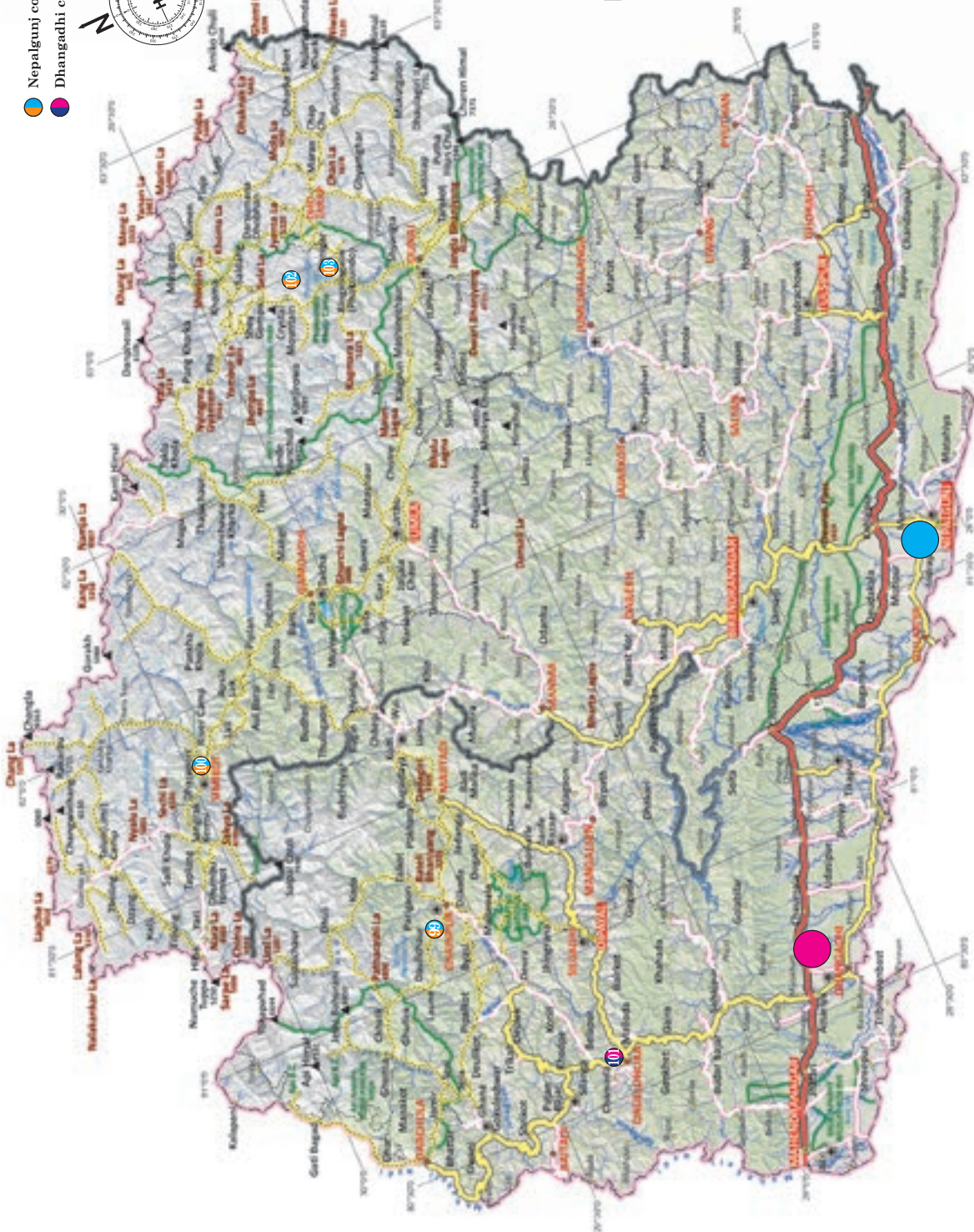
Water mill.

© HMH

- Nepalgunj connected
- Dhangadhi connected



Western Nepal



Api Nampa and Saipal Mountains
The Humla-Kailash trail
Api Himal Western Basecamp



Phoksundo-Kagmara Trek
Lower Dolpo Circuit

2-3 WEEKS TREKS AND ADVENTURES

#99 Api Nampa and Saipal Mountains

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous.
Lodging	: Camping. However, lodges once reaching the Karnali River Valley.
Provisions	: Very limited if anything between Chainpur and Yari. Trade with Tibet ensures basic supplies in Humla.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: TIMS and entry permit for Api Nampa Conservation Area, Humla remote area trekking permit.

Location: Darchula, Bhajang, Bajura and Humla Districts.

Getting there and back: By plane from Nepalgunj to Chainpur in Bhajang. It is also possible to go by plane to Dhangadhi, then by bus or jeep to Chainpur.

Route: 18 days. Exploring the deep Seti River Gorge between the Api Nampa and Saipal massifs, making a seldom used traverse into Humla from the west. From south to north you walk from Chainpur to Talkot (day 3), then from the Valley Camp to Saipal Base Camp on day 8, continuing to Urai La and Yari on the Humla Karnali River, to Muchu and Yalbang on day 15, to Kermi and ending in Simikot.

Special attractions: Fantastic views to Api, Nampa and Saipal, and into the Indian Himalaya and Tibet.

Connecting adventures: The western end of the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) and Humla – Kailash trail (No. 100), the Limi Valley. Short excursions are possible near Simikot, continuing on the Great Himalayan Trail towards Rara Lake and the Jumla trek.

Special advice: Very remote, poverty-stricken areas, strenuous long-distance trek. However, the elevation does not exceed 4,550 m. This is a part of Nepal rarely seen by trekkers. Add a couple of more days and explore more of the Seti Valley.



View from eastern Saipal.

Difficulty	: Strenuous. The trails are good, except the descent from the Nara La. Altitude is a factor.
Lodging	: Lodges, teahouses, but not all the way. Lodges combined with camping give good flexibility.
Provisions	: Simikot, Tumkot and Hilsa (and Taklakot in Tibet).
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Humla trekking permit, TIMS. You need a Chinese visa and a special permit to enter Tibet. An agency must organise this in advance, specifying which border crossings will be used.

Location: Humla District.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj. Continue the next morning by plane from Nepalgunj to Simikot in Humla. Return the same way. You can also return from Kailash by car via Zhangmu, re-entering Nepal at Kodari/Tatopani, or by car to Lhasa and by plane to Kathmandu.

Route: 16 days or more. The trail to the Tibetan border at Hilsa and the holy mountain of Kailash constitutes the western end section of the Great Himalayan Trail. From Simikot you walk to Dharapori, Kermi, Muchu, the Yangar–Nara La pass (4,560 m), and to Hilsa village on the Tibetan border. The route to the border should take five to six days for the unacclimatised.

Provided you have the right logistical arrangements and paperwork done, you can continue from the Tibetan border post Sher, a short walk from Hilsa, proceeding by bus or car to Taklakot/Purang to Kailash.

Returning the same way into Nepal, having visited Manasarovar Rakastal and the Kailash, the entire trip back to Simikot normally lasts sixteen days. You may, however, want to add a few days for *pujas* and ceremonies, and for doing the *kora* (religious circumambulation) around the Mt. Kailash.

Special attractions: This is a major trade and pilgrimage route, busy with caravans and people during the main season. However, this is a very remote part of Nepal. The route follows the beautiful Humla Karnali River Valley to the Tibetan border, then the road to the Kailash pilgrimage *kora*. South of the trail are the main Himalayas and the Saipal Massif.

Connecting adventures: The Kailash *kora* and visiting central Tibet. From Hilsa you can continue east through the Limi Valley (No. 118) and return to Simikot. There are wilderness trekking opportunities south to Seti Valley and Darchula via Yari, and to Chainpur or Martadi via Muchhu and Chala in the Saipal area for the hardy. When back in Nepalgunj, you should take the opportunity to visit Bardiya National Park.

Special advice: A small group is advisable. High elevation problems are common as the terrain offers options of fast ascents. No doctors here, perhaps a visiting one in Simikot. Go slow. If days are too short in terms of walking hours, spend time exploring side trails outside camp. The pilgrimage is also offered as a helicopter tour between Simikot and Hilsa with road transport connection to Kailash, but is not a good idea. Many people succumb to altitude sickness on the pilgrimage tour to Kailash due to ignorance of the effects of the high elevation.



On the Tibet caravan road.

Difficulty	: Moderate to strenuous. Maximum elevation is just below 5,000 m.
Lodging	: Darchula have hotels and lodges, camping for the rest of the trek.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Dhangadhi, Dadeldhura, Baitadi and Darchula. Limited supplies available in village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Groups.
Formalities	: Api Nampa Conservation Area permit, TIMS.

Location: Darchula District, straddling the Indian border.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Baitadi/Dadeldhura or to Dhangadhi. Continue a full day by bus or car to Dharchula.

Route: 15 days. Hiking north along the Mahakali River from Darchula, beyond Tinkar Village on day 8 to Nepal's northwestern corner where Tibet, India and Nepal meet.

Then you backtrack one day, cross a high pass (4,900 m), reaching the Api Western Base Camp at 4,450 m on day 10. From the Base Camp you can take day excursions along the slopes and the lake. Return down to Boddhi on the Makahali River, arriving Darchula on day 15.

Special attractions: The Api Himal is the highest mountain in far western Nepal. This area offers unspoilt mountain landscapes, views of the Api and Nampa twin peaks, forests, rivers, mountain peoples, cultural diversity and wildlife, especially birds.

Connecting adventures: The Great Himalayan Trail's western section (No. 126). The Suklaphanta National park is near Dhangadhi.

Special advice: This is a very remote part of Nepal, and heavily influenced by its proximity to India. By flying into far western Nepal, you save two days of road travel. The Mahakali River splits Darchula in a Nepali and an Indian part. There are few foreign visitors, and only Indian and Nepali citizens may legally cross the border to India in Darchula.



Snowleopard.

📷 Kamal Thapa/WWF Nepal



Api Himal.

📷 HMMH



Dolpo, a heaven for photo tours.

© HMH

#102 Phoksundo–Kagmara Trek

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Mostly moderate, however, the ascent of Kagmara La is strenuous. Adding one day in the Pungmo Valley will ease the ascent.
Lodging	: After entering the Pungmo Valley, camping only.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Nepalgunj, limited in Dunai.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Shey-Phoksumdo National Park fee, TIMS.

Location: Western Dolpo District.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj, next morning by plane from Nepalgunj to either Juphal or Mashinechaur. Return to Jumla and fly out, or back to Juphal or Mashinechaur.

Route: 15 days. Follow the route to Ringmo and Phoksumdo Lake via Dunai. Descend from Ringmo via Sanduwa into the Pungmo River Valley. The trek through this valley must be done slowly to acclimatise for the Kagmara La pass at 5,115 m on day 3 from Ringmo.

The trail connects with the Great Himalayan Trail at Kaigaun, and from there continues for

three to five days west to Jumla, via Chaurikot, Naphukona and Gothichaur.

Special attractions: The Suligad wild gorge, the Ringmo village with the Ringmo and Tshowa Bön-pa gompas, the Phuksundo Lake and mountain views.

Connecting adventures: You can access Dunai from Jumla in the west, Beni–Dhorpatan in the east and Musikot in the south.

Special advice: Trekking and stays in Dolpo are strictly regulated, and while this trek can link up with other tempting routes in Dolpo, deviations from the route stated in the trekking permit are generally not allowed. Meticulous advance planning is necessary.

Difficulty	: Strenuous, due to high altitude, with high passes well over 5,000 m and rocky trails.
Lodging	: This is a camping trek. There are a few homestays and teahouses at the start and end points, and a few lodges in Tarap Valley.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Nepalgunj, limited in Dunai.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Shey–Phoksumdo National Park fee, TIMS.

Location: Dolpo District.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj, next morning by plane from Nepalgunj to either Juphal or Mashinechaur. Returning from Juphal or Mashinechaur.

Route: 16 days or more. The Lower Dolpo Circuit can be done either clockwise or anti-clockwise.

From Juphal or Mashinechaur, trek via Dunai, proceeding to Tarakot on the Thulo Bheri River further east. Continue north via Khanigaun through the dramatic Tarap Khola Valley. Dho Tarap is reached on the trek's fifth or sixth day. Slow trekking, with sidetrips through the Tarap Valley, is the recipe for crossing the upcoming Numa La (5,190 m) safely on day 10 and enjoying the attractions of the Tarap area.

At the Numa La the mountain panoramas are stunning, and the vistas continue at the next pass, Baga La. The trail turns south on the Numa La and then west to Phoksumdo Lake, connecting

with the Ringmo–Dunai trail, and the return to Juphal or Mashinechaur.

Special attractions: The Tarap gorge, wide and remote Tarap Valley undulating above 4,000 m, Numa La pass, Tarap Valley gompas and monasteries, Ringmo village and gompas, the Phuksundo Lake, Suligad wild gorge and mountain views.

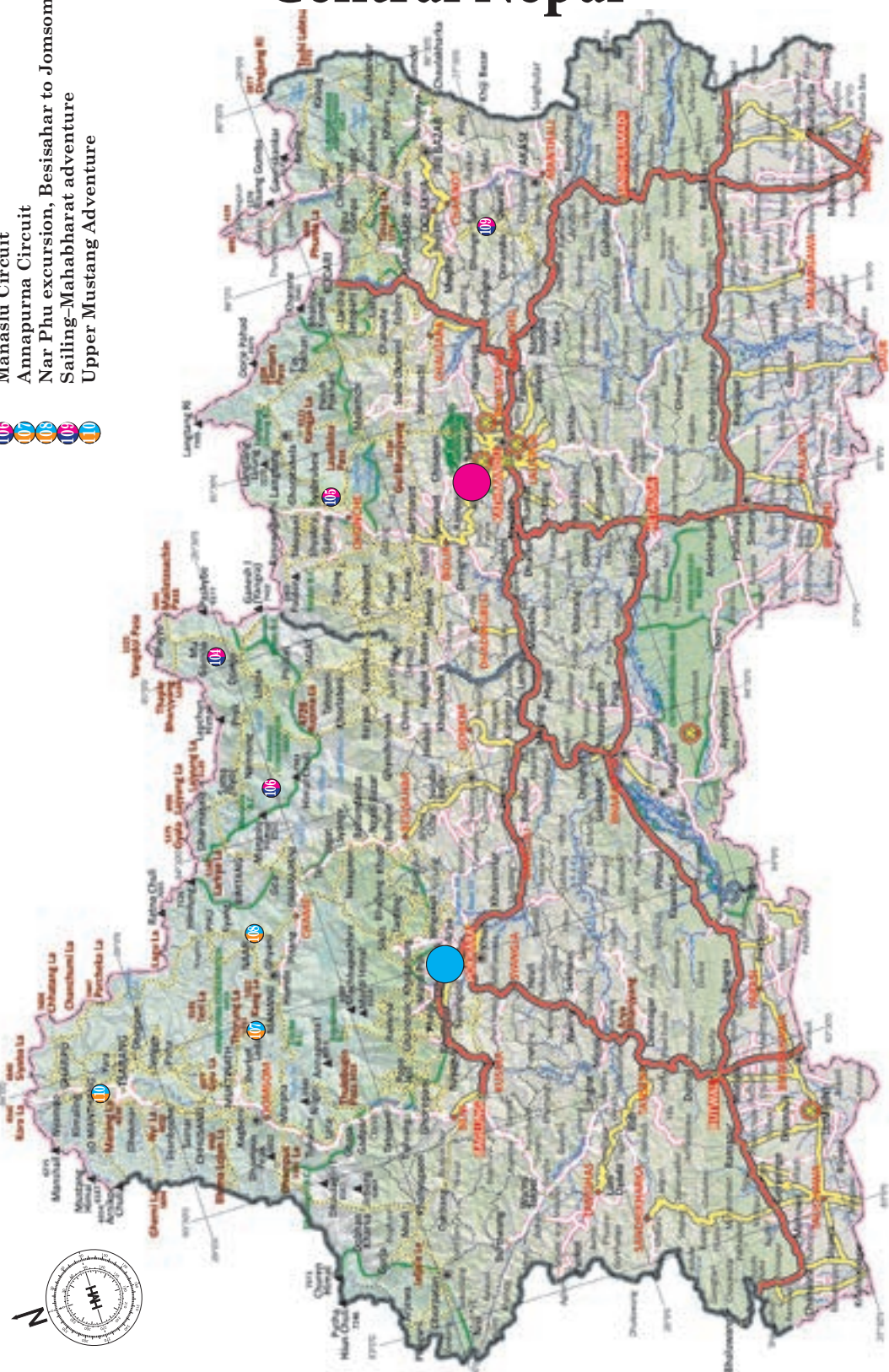
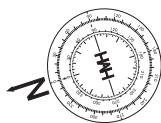
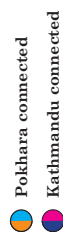
Connecting adventures: The loop can be extended eight to nine days by adding the Kagmara La trek after leaving Ringmo. See special advice below.

Special advice: If necessary, add one extra day or more in the Tok Kyo area to ensure adequate acclimatisation before crossing the Numa La. Trekking and stays in Dolpo are strictly regulated, and while this trek can link up with other tempting routes in Dolpo, your route will be defined in the trekking permit, and deviations are generally not allowed. Check the other Dolpo trek suggestions and decide before you go.



Central Nepal

Tsum Valley
Ganesh Himal
Manaslu Circuit
Annapurna Circuit
Nar Phu excursion, Besisahar to Jomsom
Sailing-Mahabharat adventure
Upper Mustang Adventure



Difficulty	: Moderate, unless you opt for the higher side valleys. Getting to Ganesh Himal Base Camp is strenuous.
Lodging	: Village teahouses, local guesthouses, homestays and camping.
Provisions	: Kathmandu and Arughat Bazaar. Limited supplies available in village and lodge shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Manaslu Conservation Area fee, remote area permit, TIMS.

Location: Northern Gorkha District, the 'Hidden Valley' behind Ganesh Himal, bordering Tibet.

Getting there and back: By jeep from Kathmandu to Arughat.

Route: 16 days. The trek starts at Tripureswor, going to Khahare, Fulkarka and Manbu villages to the Budhi Gandaki Valley. On day 4 the route leaves Lokpa, under the flanks of Shringi Himal, deviating eastwards from the main Manaslu Circuit route and enters the Tsum Valley, basically following the valley floor. Stay overnight at Chhekam, Nile, Mu-Gomba, and Chhekya and Bhayo in the inner part of Tsum, returning via Kalung, Rachen Gumba, and Lungdang to Ripchet. The return from the Tsum Valley is basically down the Budhi Gandaki

River Valley after Ripchet, arriving at Arughat and road connections to Kathmandu.

Special attractions: The fantastic 'Hidden Valley' of Tsum with the Rothen, Gonghgye, Mu and Mu Dhephydonma gompas, and the Milarepa Piren Cave. The high mountains in close proximity, Ganesh Himal Base Camp. The overnight stays facilitate getting to know different settlements, sights and people each day and evening.

Connecting adventures: It is definitely worthwhile to add two days for a side trip to the Ganesh Himal Base Camp (No. 105). You can also visit the Nubri Valley with its cultural and economic similarity with Tsum. The Tsum Valley trek can be combined with the Manaslu Circuit (No. 106).

Special advice: None.



Chorten, a landmark.

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Tsum Valley.

© HMH

Difficulty	: Moderate. The excursion to Dobra Danda is rated as strenuous.
Lodging	: Camping. However, recovery after the 2015 earthquake will gradually open more homestays, teahouses and small lodges.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, to some extent Syabrubesi.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: TIMS.

Location: Rasuwa, Dhading and Gorkha Districts.

Getting there and back: By car from Kathmandu to Syabrubesi. End the trek at Tripura Sundari on the Buri Gandaki, and by car back to Kathmandu.

Route: 15 days. The trek starts at Syabrubesi, ascending from the deep valley of Trishuli Khola via Gatlang, Somdang and crossing the Pansang La pass (3,842 m) on the third day. The trail descends to the large village of Tipling, a crossroads for all trekking in the Ganesh area. Several other villages in the same area are also perched on ridge tops. Leaving Tipling you pass Shertung, via Hindung, ascending to Thoulo Dhunga and with splendid views of the Ganesh Himal, reaches Nojet Kharka (3,691 m) that serves as a base camp for two nights. A day hike up to Dobra Danda at 4,341 m offers wonderful views of peaks, glaciers and lakes of the Ganesh massif. Returning to Hindung, the clear trail continues to Kapur Gaon via the charming villages of Lapchyat Gaon and Lapa Gaon, heading west to the large village of Khading. From Khading the trail ascends to Magne Goth where rubies were

once mined, and to Lapu Danda. From Lapu Danda it is all lowlands past Ganga Juna to the end of the trail at Tripura Sundari.

The Ganesh trek can be cut to seven days by descending from Shertung to Dhading Besi in two days.

Special attractions: Dramatic views of Langtang, Ganesh and Manaslu Himal massifs. You walk through Tamang, Magar and Gurung villages. Enjoy the pleasant hot springs on the way to Kapur Gaon and the twin waterfalls Ganga Jamuna.

Connecting adventures: There are several alternative routes in this area, and many interesting options for both longer and shorter treks: Tamang Heritage Trail (No. 59), Tsum Valley Trek (No. 104), Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126). Tipling can be used as a 'base camp' for many interesting shorter loops and excursions.

Special advice: This is an underrated trekking area. It was also heavily damaged by the earthquake. The splendours of this trek should soon attract visitors again.



An adventurous trek to Sanjen Valley.

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Communal husking.

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Mt. Manaslu.

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#106 Manaslu Circuit

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous, partly steep and rough trails. Crossing Larkya La is not difficult, but at 5,215 m you must go slowly.
Lodging	: Camping, combined with teahouses and lodges. Simple lodges are available up to Samagaun.
Provisions	: Kathmandu. After recovery from the 2015 earthquake damages, some provisions should be available in lodges and village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee, Manaslu Conservation Area fee, TIMS, remote area fee for Upper Gorkha.

Location: Gorkha and Lamjung Districts.

Getting there and back: The trek starts from Arughat in the Buri Gandaki Valley in Gorkha, and ends at Besisahar in the Lamjung District. By bus from Pokhara or Kathmandu to Besisahar or Arughat. There are several options where to start the trek, and as roads encroach on the access route, the trailheads and approach routes to upper Gorkha may change.

Route: 18 days. The trek takes you up the Buri Gandaki Valley in a gradual ascent from very low altitude, subtropical to temperate conditions during the first four days. The valley becomes increasingly wild, with a trail that undulates along the river cliffs and waterfalls. On day 7 the trail enters Lho in the Nubri region with typical Trans-Himalayan landscapes and culture. The mountain scenery opens up here, and at Samagaun, where an acclimatisation day is necessary, the view is incredible. The valley further widens at Samdo, the last village before the pass. On day 11, you cross the Larkya La pass (5,215 m), beginning the descent toward the Marshyangdi Valley. Bimthang is the first village

on this side, connecting with the Annapurna Circuit trail on day 14. After two more days along the Marshyangdi you arrive at Besisahar.

Special attractions: People living in upper Buri Gandaki are of Tibetan descent, and their speech, dress, and customs are almost exclusively Tibetan. Several *mani* walls with good Buddha figures, the Honsancho Gompa between Lho and Sama. From Lho there is a spectacular view of Manaslu. Stunning mountain scenery, interesting villages and a mix of mountain peoples.

Connecting adventures: You can continue on the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) toward Manang and Mustang from Dharapani. You can add one week deviating from the circuit route into the Tsum Valley (No. 104).

Special advice: The 2015 Gorkha earthquake affected this area heavily. Reconstruction is ongoing, but is far from complete. Bears are numerous in the Manaslu Conservation Area, so venturing solo into forest areas in the upper Buri Gandaki Valley during certain seasons is not advisable.

Difficulty	: Strenuous. This is a long trek, including the high Thorung La crossing.
Lodging	: Teahouses, homestays and lodges. Also called the 'apple-pie' trek.
Provisions	: Pokhara, Besisahar, Manang and Jomsom.
Mode of trekking	: Individual and independently organised trekking, families, small and bigger groups. Individuals should join a group when crossing the Thorung La.
Formalities	: TIMS, Annapurna Conservation Area fee.

Location: Kaski, Manang, Mustang and Myagdi Districts.

Getting there and back: Depending on the length of the route chosen, these are the currently most used start and end points: By bus or jeep from Kathmandu to Besisahar, and continue by local jeep to Ngadi. Ending the trek at Naya Pul, by bus or car to Pokhara.

Route: 17 days. The Annapurna Circuit, or 'Around Annapurna', has changed over the years. Today it is not so much a circuit as a qualified semicircle. It will not take many years before you can drive the whole circuit. At the time of writing, only parts of the Manang Valley and the stretch over the Thorung La to Muktinath are still roadless.

The current Annapurna Circuit follows a new route that avoids the road. From the bus stop above Besisahar at Ngadi (930 m), the trek passes Jagat, Dharapani, Chame (2,670 m), Lower Pisang, Ngawal (3,660 m), arriving Manang or Ghunsang (3,960 m), where you halt for a day's acclimatisation. From Manang Village or Ghunsang you trek to Yak Kharka and Thorung Phedi, where you stay overnight for an early start the next morning to cross the Thorung La (5,416 m) and descend to the Muktinath area (3,700 m) on day 9. From Muktinath you

proceed to Kagbeni (or Lupra), through Jomsom to Marpha, Tukhche, and Tatopani, where a rest at the hot springs will be a blessing after the dusty Kali Gandaki gorge. From Tatopani the trek once again avoids the road, ascending to Ghorepani with Poon Hill, descending to Tadapani and Ghandruk, finally arriving Naya Pul for road transport to Pokhara.

Special attractions: The wide Manang Valley with spectacular views of several high Annapurna peaks. The high Thorung La pass, Muktinath pilgrimage temple, mountain views of Dhaulagiri, Tuckuche, Nilgiri Himal, Jharkot and Kagbeni villages with Mustangi architecture, Marpha and Tuckuche Thakali villages, Tatopani hot springs, Poon Hill panorama views, and pleasant hill trekking toward Pokhara.

Connecting adventures: Take the original Annapurna Circuit that begins at Begnas Bazaar on the eastern side of the Pokhara Valley and walk to Besisahar/Ngadi. Toward the end, hike via Ghandrung, Dhampus and Astana and walk into Pokhara at Kahare. This adds slightly less than one more pleasant week to your trek.

Special advice: The Thorung La is very exposed, subject to sudden bad weather, and can become dangerous at short notice. Always go in a group.



Thorung La is a rest point on the Annapurna Circuit.



Mani wall, Naar.

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#108 Nar Phu excursion, Besisahar to Jomsom

Central Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous, elevations up to 5,320 m.
Lodging	: Camping, combined with teahouses and lodges. Lodges available in the Manang Valley, but accommodation is scarce in Nar-Phu.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Besisahar, Manang lodges and village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee, TIMS, remote area fee.

Location: Manang and Mustang Districts.

Getting there and back: By bus or jeep to Chame or Besisahar. The trek ends in Jomsom, Mustang District, then by plane or car, or on foot trail to Pokhara.

Route: 18 days. This is an excursion loop on the normal Manang–Thorung La trek (No. 86). If you start in Besisahar you divert from the normal route in Koto on day 4 and ascend toward Nar-Phu via Meta, Khayang, and to Phu Gaun (4,050 m) on day 7. After a day's visit and acclimatisation, you reach Nar Gaun (4,150 m) two days later. After exploring the Nar area for three days return to the Manang Valley via the

Kang La (5,320 m). By now you should be well acclimatised and can proceed over the Thorung La (5,416) into Mustang, reaching Jomsom via Muktinath on day 18.

Special attractions: Stunning villages and mountain scenery along a route that takes you north of the Manang Valley. This is a very special place.

Connecting adventures: You can continue on the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) toward Dolpo, as well as hike up to Upper Mustang (Nos. 89, 110).

Special advice: This loop into Nar-Phu is strenuous and remote. Great photo opportunities.

Difficulty	: Moderate due to the length in hilly terrain. However, several days involve easy walking on village trails.
Lodging	: This is a camping-only trek due to the lack of infrastructure. Other accommodation might be available at Namobuddha. This currently extremely little appreciated trek could be developed into one with teahouses.
Provisions	: In Kathmandu, Dhulikhel, Mude and some village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups, and on this long trek we recommend to have a shared thematic focus.
Formalities	: None, according to current regulations. However, TIMS is likely to become required.

Location: Sindhupalchok, Kavrepalanchok, and Lalitpur Districts. This trek is unique in being located solely in the Middle Hills and the Mahabharat mountain range east of Kathmandu. It is also known as the ‘Indigenous Peoples’ Trail’.

Getting there and back: By car or local bus from Kathmandu to Mude on the way to Jiri. Then trekking south to Deurali, ending at Godawari in the Kathmandu Valley.

Route: 16 days. The trek begins from the road at Mude, goes through Deurali to Thulo Sailung (3,246 m), continuing to Doramba, Gurase Bhanyang, Kafle Damara and Chaubas Hill (2,100 m). The trail heads westwards past Chaubas Hill, Bolong, Pahari Gaun, Chapakhori to Kot Thimal. From Kot Thimal the trek continues via Namobuddha, Kusha Devi and to Pulchowk Hill (2,790 m) with great views of the Kathmandu Valley. On the final day you trek from Lato Bhanyang to Godawari.

Special attractions: This is a long scenic trek at fairly low elevation, following ridges and traditional trails between villages through pleasant forests and agricultural landscape. The trek offers comprehensive views and exposure to the people and their way of life; Tamangs, Thamis, Newars, Sherpas and Majhis. Aspects of Hinduism, Buddhism and shamanism will be encountered en route, often mixed, and you should set aside time to get acquainted with these practises.

Connecting adventures: At Kot Thimal you can connect with short treks out of Kathmandu.

Special advice: The trek has many ascents and descents, none of them formidable.



Namobuddha.

Difficulty	: Moderate.
Lodging	: A mix of camping and lodges.
Provisions	: Pokhara, Jomsom and Lo Manthang. Trade with Tibet in Upper Mustang has allowed a considerable supply of goods in this area.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Upper Mustang restricted area permit, TIMS, Annapura Conservation Area fee.

Location: Upper Mustang District.

Getting there and back: By plane and car or on foot from Pokhara to Jomsom. Return the same way.

Route: 20 days or more. Setting out from Jomsom, you reach Kagbeni (2,858 m) at the border to Upper Mustang the same day. Hike along a route that takes you on the west side of the river north to Lo Manthang, returning along the east bank. The trek passes several villages and settlements in Upper Mustang, arriving Lo Manthang (3,760 m) on day 6. Spend around four days in Lo Manthang, making excursions and overnight stays, in the surroundings. Then, full of impressions, hike to Dhakmar, Ghiling (3,806 m) and Chobuksang, before turning towards Kagbeni again and arriving at Jomsom half a day later. An interesting option at the end of the stay in Upper Mustang is to follow the high route on the east bank – check if permits are required – and arrive in Muktinath. From Muktinath stay on the high route and take in the

Bön-po village of Lupra on the way to Jomsom.

Special attractions: Colourful desert landscapes, gorges, ravines in a portion of the Tibetan Plateau inside Nepal. You can observe the special Tibetan (Lo-pa) culture and lifestyle, richly decorated gompas, hermitages and rituals. There are contrasting buckwheat fields and villages, and ancient walled Lo Manthang, capital of the former Kingdom of Mustang.

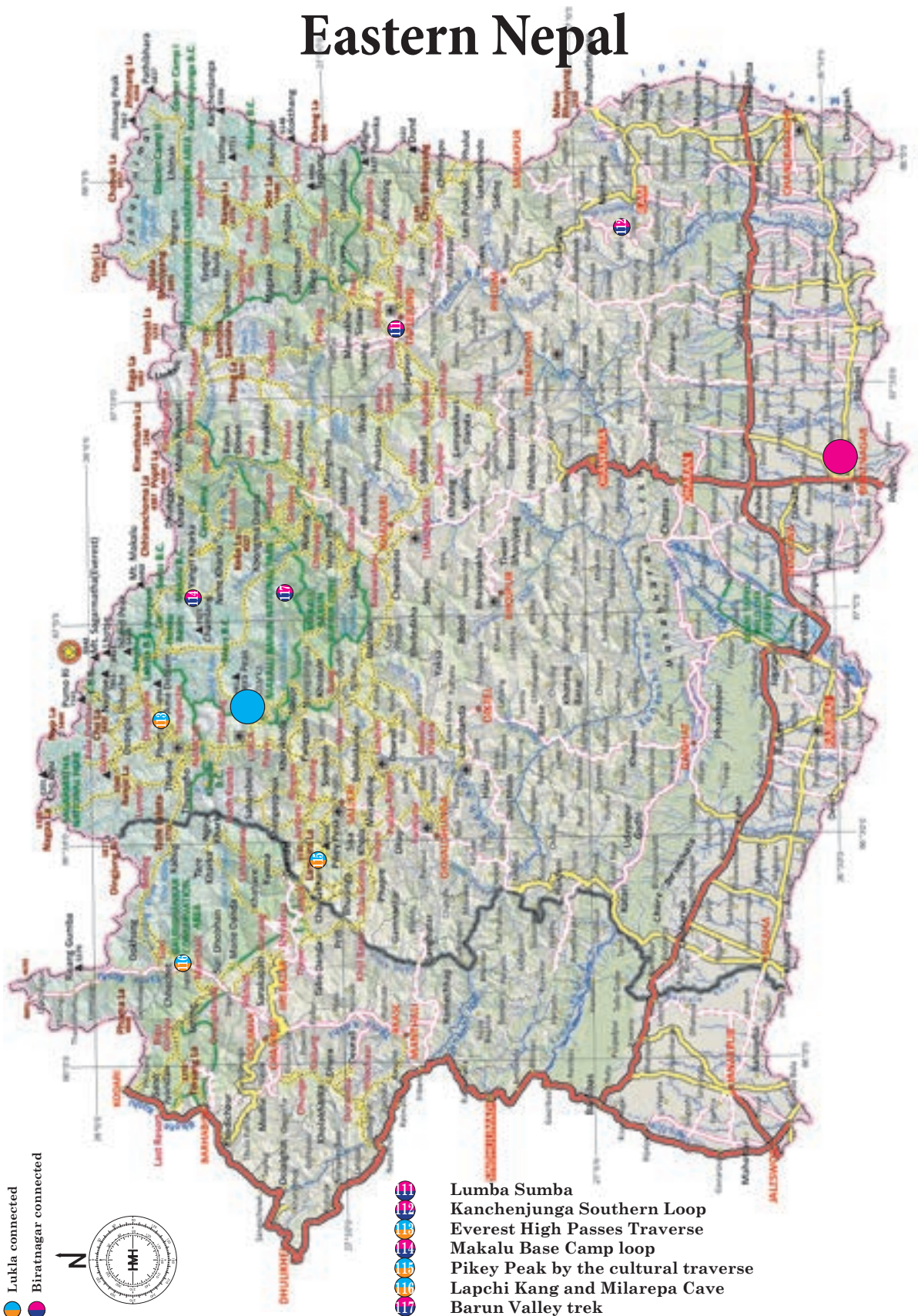
Connecting adventures: Trekking in and out of Pokhara to Jomsom. Linking with the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) into Dolpo and Manang over Thorung La (No. 86) is a distinct possibility.

Special advice: This is high and dry desert country, but extremely colorful and photogenic. Do not forget your camera and lens protection! You can shorten the trek considerably by opting to drive on the rough road south. Plan carefully in advance; deviations from your scheduled route are generally not allowed.



Horseback riding is a popular way of travelling.

Eastern Nepal



Difficulty	: Strenuous.
Lodging	: Camping.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Tumlingtar shops, very limited in village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups. A knowledgeable guide is essential for parts of this route.
Formalities	: TIMS and National Park fees for Kanchenjunga and the Makalu Barun National Parks.

Location: Taplejung and Sankuwasabha Districts, traversing from Kanchenjunga to the Makalu Barun National Parks.

Getting there and back: By plane to Suketar/Taplejung, and by car to the roadhead at Fungling. A long alternative is by bus or car from Kathmandu via Bhadrapur. Return to Kathmandu from Tumlingtar by plane or car.

Route: 16 days. This is a semi-circle trek that first follows the Kanchenjunga trail, then moving up north to Olangchung Gola, camping on the way in Mitlung, Chiruwa, Lele, Elap Danda and Seleph Kharka. The next three days are in complete wilderness to Tanchetar and the Lumba Sumba Pass Camp. On day 9 you cross the Lumba Sumba Pass (5,200 m), descending to Chaurikharka at 4,594 m.

The following days continue through valleys

and ridges, passing northern high villages and turning into the Arun Valley at Chaurikharka towards the south. The next days the trail descends along the Arun Valley, reaching the Num village, the roadhead in the Sankuwasabha District on day 16.

Special attractions: An unusual traverse trek, crossing Luma Sumba. Splendid mountain views, diverse mountain peoples, high alpine wilderness with waterfall and snow leopard country.

Connecting adventures: The Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) westwards. Looping in the Kanchenjunga Base Camp (Nos. 112, 124) before Olangchung Gola.

Special advice: A demanding trail at high elevations. Snow gear is necessary for high passes and Lumba Sumba.



Weaving.

© HMH



Olangchung Gola village.

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Difficulty	: Strenuous; exposed trails, cold, possible snowfall at higher altitudes.
Lodging	: With growing tourism, the number of lodges and teahouses is increasing. At higher elevations camping is still the only viable option. The basic southern trekking route has teahouses and lodges during high seasons, but check if this is valid for the Reze and Yalung Valley.
Provisions	: Trekking gear and clothing in Kathmandu, food in Biratnagar, Ilam and Taplejung. There are limited choices during the trek.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: TIMS, Kanchenjunga Conservation Area fee.

Location: Taplejung District.

Getting there and back: There are three options. (1) By plane from either Biratnagar or Kathmandu to Suketar/Taplejung. (2) By plane or car via Jhapa (Bhadrapur airport) and by jeep or bus via Ilam and Phidim to Taplejung. (3) By plane or car to Biratnagar, then continuing by bus or jeep via Dharan and Dhankuta to Basantapur, then four days on foot to Taplejung.

Route: 15 days or more. This route is the southern loop east from Taplejung with almost an immediate view of the southern and eastern flanks of Kanchenjunga. Following the Phawakhola the trail turns north through big valleys, past Yamphudin and crossing the Lamite Bhanyang (3,235 m). As you enter the subalpine zone with conifers and chillier temperatures, the Yalung Glacier Valley opens up. You ascend the valley up to Reze (4,580 m) on day 8. Spend a day or two in Ramche and explore the snout of the Yalung Glacier, the South Base Camp and the stupendous mountain views. Continue

trekking to Sallerle and arrive at Ghunsa via Mirgin La (4,480 m) on day 12. From Ghunsa trek down the impressive Ghunsa River Valley on the Kanchenjunga North route, arriving back at Suketar/Taplejung.

Special attractions: The spectacular mountain scenery of the Kanchenjunga massif, the lush nature of the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area's lower reaches with rivers, waterfalls, undisturbed forests and animal life, and the mix of highland peoples and cultures in Eastern Nepal. The southern loop passes through fantastic terraced landscapes.

Connecting adventures: Combining with a visit to the Kanchenjunga North Base camp adds one week to the trek. An easier and interesting excursion is trekking to Olangchung Gola (No. 97).

Special advice: This area is known for adverse weather conditions, including unseasonable rainshowers and snowfalls.



Difficulty	: Strenuous.
Lodging	: Camping, with the possibility of staying in lodges up to Gokyo and from Lobuche back to Lukla. However, trekking companies might insist you use their camping facilities all the way.
Provisions	: Namche Bazaar is well stocked, as are some of the lower village and lodge stores. The food served in lodges, teahouses, and restaurants is excellent.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups with some mountain experience.
Formalities	: TIMS, Sagarmatha National Park fee.

Location: Solu Khumbu district, Khumbu region, also called the Everest region.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Lukla or several days on foot from Jiri to Lukla.

Route: 20 days. This itinerary is a minimalistic one. Beginning in Lukla, the trek to Namche Bazaar should be done in two days to ensure good acclimatisation. The trek can be undertaken either from the Gokyo side (west to east) or from the Everest side (east to west). From Namche Bazaar the trail goes via Phortse and Pangboche to Ama Dablam Base Camp, also spending one day for acclimatisation. Proceed to Dingboche and Chhukhung and scale the Chhukung Ri. Trek to Lobuche and Kongma La pass (5,528 m), onwards to Gorak Shep and Kala Pattar, the Everest view ridge. A visit to Everest Base Camp can be included. Continue to Dzongla and Tangnag via Cho La pass (5,330 m). After Tangnag, the trek continues to Gokyo and Gokyo Ri, crossing the Renjo La pass (5,360 m) and descending to Lungden. From Lungden, trek via Thame and Namche Bazaar, ending at Lukla.



Chola Pass.

© HMH



View from Kala Pattar towards Everest and Nuptse. © HMH

Special attractions: Magnificent Himalayan landscapes, glaciers, and views in Sagarmatha National Park, including several of the world's highest peaks.

Connecting adventures: This traverse can be combined with scaling trekking peaks, such as Island Peak. The Gokyo area lends itself for a rest and acclimatisation stay if necessary and if you have the opportunity. The Everest area can also be visited more thoroughly. The traverse can be continued on the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) at both ends via Tashi Labtsa into Rolwaling (No. 81) in the west and into the Barun Valley (No. 117) to the east.

Special advice: This trek involves considerable time at high elevations, with harsh conditions like wind, cold and snow.



Makalu Base Camp.

© HMH

#114 Makalu Base Camp loop

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous.
Lodging	: Camping.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Tumlingtar, and in village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Makalu Barun Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Bhojpur and Sankuwasabha Districts, east of Everest.

16 days. The Makalu trek has normally been confined to the same way out as in. This version offers an alternative route.

Getting there and back: By plane or car (long drive) from Kathmandu to Tumlingtar in the Bhojpur District. Returning by plane or car to Kathmandu.

Route: 16 days. Starting from Tumlingtar, the trek follows the Arun River into the Makalu Barun National Park. Entering the Barun Valley over Kongma La pass (5,528 m) for spectacular views of Makalu, Baruntse and Chamlang. Ascend slowly in the Barun Valley to allow for acclimatisation before the Kongma La pass. Proceed slowly due to scenery and the high elevation past Nehe Kharka, Merak and Shershong to Makalu Base Camp (4,870 m)

where you stay two nights for explorations. The return trek goes via Yangri Kharka, diverting via Barun Doban to Gola, reaching the road at Num.

Special attractions: From low elevation to high mountain landscapes, not often visited and through sparsely populated areas. The higher part is remote wilderness. High diversity of flora and fauna, undisturbed wilderness, 400 species of birds recorded here; bears, snow leopard and clouded leopard, red panda.

Connecting adventures: The Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) east and west. Expand this trek from the Base Camp by visiting the Sherpani Col pass.

Special advice: This trek is particularly attractive for those interested in nature and remoteness. Great photo opportunities. Bring binoculars.

Difficulty	: This is a moderate to difficult trek.
Lodging	: There are lodges and homestays along this route, but rudimentary in places. For the section to Dudh Kunda, camping is necessary.
Provisions	: Available in Jiri, Junbesi, and in Taksindu.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups. Independent and individual trekking is possible.
Formalities	: TIMS.

Location: Solu Kumbhu District. Pikey is located in Solu, due south of Lamjura La pass on the Jiri to Lukla section of the Everest Base Camp trail.

Getting there and back: By bus or car from Kathmandu to Jiri. Return can be done the same way by looping back to Jiri from Ringmu/Junbesi. This description includes a return to Kathmandu by plane from Phaplu.

Route: 15 days. Essentially, Pikey is a high ridgetop bulge surrounded by forested valleys and Sherpa villages. You can choose among several alternative routes. This description focuses on the longer route that takes in much of the region's cultural and natural riches. From Jiri to Shivalaya, Bandar, Namkheli, Naur, Basecamp and excursion to Pikey Peak, Junbesi,

Thupten Chholing Monastery, Saharsbeni, Dudh Kunda (4,561 m), Taksindu, Ringmu to Phaplu.

Special attractions: From Pikey Peak there are panoramic views of the eastern and central Himalayas, including several 8,000 m peaks. You meet local Sherpas and other peoples, see monasteries and the lake pilgrimage site Dudh Kunda below Karyolong peak.

Connecting adventures: Continue from Taksindu to Lukla and the Everest trail system. Embark on the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) eastwards from Kharte. Southern Solu, Okhaldungha and Kotang districts have a maze of good hiking trails that ought to be used much more.

Special advice: None.



Summit of Pikey Peak.

Difficulty	: Very steep terrain that requires slow going. The itinerary must be carefully adjusted for good acclimatisation.
Lodging	: Camping only.
Provisions	: Available in Charikot, Jagat, and Lamabagar only.
Mode of trekking	: Small group trek, individual trekking not permitted.
Formalities	: Remote Area Permit, Gauri Shankar Conservation Area fee, TIMS. Special permission from the local army border unit is needed to scale the Lapche peak.

Location: Northern Dolakha District, Gaurishankar National Park, on the Tibetan border.

Getting there and back: By bus or car from Kathmandu via Charikot to Jagat or Chetchet. Road conditions further on are uncertain due to earthquake damage.

Route: 17 days. A very remote and unusual trek to a little-known area on the northeast slopes of the Chobo and Aba Bamare Himal, and Lapchi Kharka. This compact high elevation trek covers a fairly short geographical distance that is rich in things to experience. Hike along the Tama Koshi River from the roadhead (currently Chetchet) to Lamabagar. Continue the next two days along Jum-Lapchi River to Lapchi village on the Tibet border. Spend three days on day excursions and visits around Lapchi. Continue to Aba Bamara base camp, descending on the high ridge and through forests, reaching Lamabagar on day 17.



Lapchi Monastery.

© HMH

Special attractions: A cave where the Tibetan saint and poet Milarepa stayed in the 12th century. The Lapchi Monastery is significant, although little visited today. Yaks graze under the rock spires of Chobo Bamare and Kukur Raj Himal. The area has significant wildlife and vegetation. From the high slopes and ridges you can look into Tibet and view the Rolwaling Himal.

Connecting adventures: A Rolwaling side trip from Chetchet or Gongar to Bigu Gompa through northern Dolakha and finishing at Barhabise.

Special advice: The Tibet–Nepal border is not well demarcated, so be careful not to cross into Tibet by accident. This is a slow trek where you take in the spirit of the landscape, the wildlife and history.



Deep river gorge.

© HMH



Lakhey Dance.

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#117 Barun Valley trek

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous.
Lodging	: Camping.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Tumlingtar, and in village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Makalu Barun Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Sankuwasabha district. The Barun Valley is an extension of the Arun Valley east of Everest.

Getting there and back: By plane or car (long drive) from Kathmandu to Tumlingtar in the Bhojpur District. Returning by plane or car to Kathmandu.

Route: 19 days. The route's lower and middle parts offer options between different camps and villages, and for taking side diversions in the Barun Valley and in the Makalu Base Camp area. The itinerary described here is the traditional one.

Trekking from Tumlingtar (457 m) through Khandbari, Chichila to Num Camp you ascend from the subtropics to a temperate and subalpine environment which continues the next days as you pass Tashigaoun and arrive the Kongma La pass (5,528 m). The elevation change demands acclimatisation stops and time to soak up the alpine scenery. At Yangla Kharka you approach the Makalu massif, and via Yak Kharka you



arrive at Makalu Lower Camp where you stay to take day excursions, including up to Makalu Base Camp (4,870 m). From the Low Camp you backtrack to Tumlingtar at a faster pace.

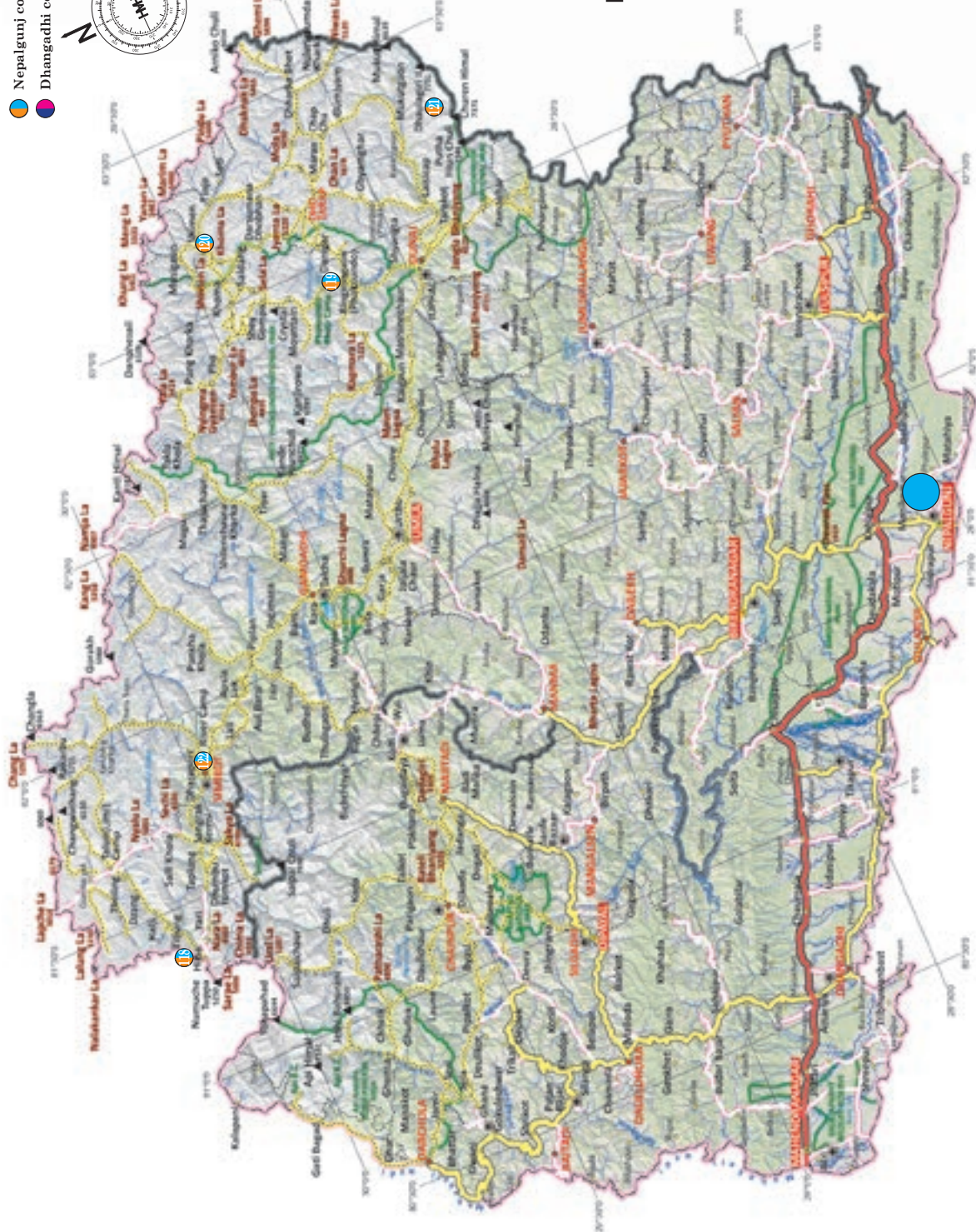
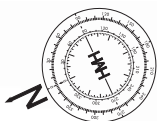
Special attractions: This trek goes from low elevations to the high mountains, not often visited and through sparsely populated areas. The higher part is remote wilderness. Follow the Arun River into Makalu Barun National Park. From the Kongma La pass there are spectacular views of Makalu, Baruntse and Chamlang. Very diverse flora and fauna, 400 species of birds have been recorded; bears, snow leopard and clouded leopard, red panda may also be sighted.

Connecting adventures: Great Himalayan Trail east and west (No. 126). You can also visit the Sherpani Col pass.

Special advice: This trek is particularly attractive to those interested in nature and remoteness. Great photo opportunities. Bring binoculars.

Western Nepal

-  Nepalgunj connected
-  Dhangadhi connected



The Limi Valley trek
Upper Dolpo Circuit
Dolpo to Mustang high passes trek



Around Dhaulagiri
Chang La Valley in Humla

TREKS AND ADVENTURES FOR MORE THAN 3 WEEKS

#118 The Limi Valley trek

Western Nepal

Difficulty	: Strenuous, so you should be in very good shape. Trails are good with a few exceptions: The first part out from Hilsa (scree), some landslides, the pass before Til, and the Nyalu La (snow).
Lodging	: Camping. Homestays possible at Til, Halji and Dzang, but not well advertised.
Provisions	: Simple village shops in Hilsa, Til and Halji.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: Humla Remote Area permit, TIMS and Limi restricted area permit.

Location: Humla District.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj. Continue the next morning by plane from Nepalgunj to Simikot in Humla. Return the same way.

Route: 22–24 days. Until Hilsa you follow the Humla–Kailash trail (No. 102): From Simikot to Dharapori, Kermi, Muchu, the Yangar-Nara La pass (4,560 m) and Hilsa on the Nepal–Tibet border. From Hilsa, turn east into the Limi Valley and walk 2 days to Til, half a day to Halji and half a day to Dzang. Then trek through the Talung Valley, across Nyalu La (4,950 m), down to Kermi on the Great Himalayan Trail and back to Simikot. If the Nyalu La pass is closed, continue to Hilsa; if it is open, return to Simikot.

Special attractions: Each of the three settlements in the Limi Valley, Til, Halji and Dzang has its own monastery. The place is more Tibetan than modern Tibet itself. The high valley is beautiful, enclosed by 6,000 m mountain ridges. A stretch of the rolling Tibetan plateau stretches within Limi, north of Tangchhe.

Connecting adventures: A longer stay in the Limi Valley is highly recommended for sheer pleasure. There is a remote route further east that connects to the Nyin valley, ultimately reaching Simikot. Expedition gear required for this.

Special advice: Extremely remote. Beware that trekking seasons are short and high passes can be closed due to snow. No significant re-supply possible. Electricity at Simikot, Hilsa, Til and Halji.



Dzang village.

© Dag Norling



Til village.

© Dag Norling

Difficulty	: Strenuous due to high elevations, high passes, prolonged stay in a remote, windy and cold area.
Lodging	: Camping. However, teashops, homestays and lodges are available between Dunai and Ringmo and in Tarap Valley.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Nepalgunj, limited supplies in Dunai and Tibrikot, and very little in Upper Dolpo.
Mode of trekking	: Small, focused groups.
Formalities	: Shey-Phoksumdo National Park fee, TIMS, Dolpo remote area fee.

Location: Dolpo District.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj, by plane onwards to Jhupal or Mashinechaur. Return the same way.

Route: 23 days. The first four days follows the same route as the Phuksomdo trek to Ringmo (No. 85). From Ringmo the trek continues on the high west bank of Phoksumdo Lake and proceeds up the Phoksumdo River Valley and over the Kang La (5,350 m). At the pass on day 8 you enter Upper Dolpo proper, with the deep valley to Shey and the high elevation deserts to the north. Shey Gompa is excellent for rest days and side excursions. From Shey the trek continues through sparsely populated areas to the northeast over the Saldang La pass (4,785 m); after entering the Nang-Khong Valley, the route turns south, passes Namdo and slowly ascends the upper valley to the Jyanta La pass (5,220 m) and enters Tok Kyu in the Tarap Valley. From here the trek joins the clockwise final portion of

the Lower Dolpo trek (No. 104) back to Juphal via Khanigaun, Tarakot and Dunai.

Special attractions: Ringmo, Phoksumdo Lake, and Shey Gompa. Northern, high altitude desert landscapes of Upper Dolpo, mountain panoramas and close views of snow peaks of the Kanjiroba Himal and other massifs rimming the valleys and on the Tibetan border.

Connecting adventures: This trek can be extended to include the Bhijeer area and Panzang Valley, shortened to cross the Numa La pass (5,190 m) back to Phoksumdo. There are several alternatives. Study Special Advice below.

Special advice: Trekking and stays in Dolpo are strictly regulated, and while this trek can link up with other tempting routes in Dolpo, your route will be defined in the Trekking Permit, and deviations or alterations are generally not permitted. Therefore, see the other Dolpo trek suggestions to define your ambitions clearly before you go.



Difficulty	: This is probably the most strenuous trek we present, due mostly to the length, remoteness and continuous high altitudes, with several high passes that may be covered with snow.
Lodging	: Camping, except for lodges and some homestays at the start and end points.
Provisions	: Kathmandu and Nepalgunj. You cannot depend on provisions being available until the descent into the Kali Gandaki Valley at Kagbeni.
Mode of trekking	: Small, focused groups.
Formalities	: Upper Dolpo and Upper Mustang permits. Shey-Phoksumdo National Park and Annapurna Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Dolpo District, traversing into Mustang.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj, next morning by plane to Juphal in Dolpo. End the trek at Jomsom, by plane or bus to Pokhara, or continue trekking to Pokhara.

Route: 26 days. The first leg from Juphal via Phoksumdo Lake to Shey follows the short Phoksumdo trek (No. 49) and the first half of the Upper Dolpo trek (No. 120). Eight to nine days later, the route continues north from Shey Gumpa (4,375 m) via the Sela La pass (4,170 m) and the Saldang La pass (4,785 m). Then northeast over the Khoma La pass (4,565 m) and another pass, from where the route turns south via Tinje, Kharka and the Mola La pass (5,030) to Chharka Bhot. The route crosses a remote area nearly devoid of population across high grazing lands, semi desert Trans-Himalayan landscapes and vistas to peaks on the Tibet border to the north, and the Dhaulagiri group to the south. Turning west, the trek crosses Niwas La (5,155 m) and then the Jungben La, the highest on the trek at 5,570 m. During the last few days the route passes through a rarely visited canyon landscape on the approach to the Bhima Lojun La (4,460 m) into Mustang, then descends to Kagbeni and Jomsom on the final day.

Special attractions: The Upper Dolpo landscapes are superb. Few visitors see the desert canyons in western Mustang.

Connecting adventures: The trek can be continued from Kagbeni over Muktinath and the Thorung La through Manang, ending

at Besisahar, then by bus to Kathmandu or Pokhara. The route constitutes a major section of the Great Himalayan Trail high route (No. 126).

Special advice: The trek is partly in unpopulated wilderness areas, and needs participatory planning and expeditions-style leadership.



Untrodden Mustang Trek.

Difficulty	: A strenuous high-altitude trek, with passes and camps above 5,000 m. Snow and ice for about six days demand specialist equipment and experience; communications equipment necessary because of the remote areas.
Lodging	: Camping.
Provisions	: Pokhara, Beni on approach, back in the Kali Gandaki area provisions available in Jomsom and in lower village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small teams.
Formalities	: Annapurna Conservation Area fee, TIMS.

Location: Kaski, Myagdi, Mustang and Dolpo Districts.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Pokhara, by car to Naya Pul. Return the same way. If returning to Jomsom, by plane or car to Pokhara.

Route: 21 days. The trek offers a long and interesting approach, a long stretch on snow and ice, and a long return hike. You will not have one boring minute.

This itinerary goes clockwise, but it can also be done the opposite way if the team is well acclimatised to the elevations above Jomsom. The trek starts at Beni in the Kali Gandaki Gorge, getting to the Italian Base Camp within the Dhaulagiri massif with views of Churen Himal, Gurja, Ghustung, Tsarabang, Jirbang and Manapati. Acclimatisation stops at increasing elevations slow the trek to the Dhaulagiri Depot and the Dhaulagiri Base Camp (4,650 m). The trek continues to the Hidden Valley Camp (4,900 m) and crosses the French Pass (5,360

m) with probably the most fabulous mountain scenery in Nepal. Continuing to Yak Kharka and the Dhampus pass (5,210 m) the route merges with the Kali Gandaki trek in the Jomsom area. To complete the trek you can continue on foot through the Kali Gandaki Gorge via Poon Hill and end the trek at Naya Pul.

Special attractions: Following the Myagdi River in a mighty valley curving along the west flank of Dhaulagiri 1. Several days are spent in a spectacular snow- and ice-landscape, culminating with Dhaulagiri Base Camp and crossing the French Pass (5,360 m). Fantastic scenery at Dhampus Pass as you re-enter the Kali Gandaki Valley.

Connecting adventures: Great Himalayan Trail east and west (No. 126).

Special advice: Considerable high elevation experience and fitness needed for this trail, and ability to deal with ice and snow. Equipment and experience as for mountaineering. Experienced high elevation trekking crew and leadership.



Dhaulagiri Circuit Trek.

© HMMH



Dhaulagiri Massif.

© HMMH

Difficulty	: Strenuous due to rudimentary trails at high elevation and exposed to wind. For two weeks the trek is in total wilderness without permanent habitation.
Lodging	: Camping.
Provisions	: Kathmandu, Nepalgunj, and Simikot. The only places to replenish during the trek are at temporary trading stalls at Larche or Tangchhe (Taling).
Mode of trekking	: Small, focused groups.
Formalities	: Humla remote area permit, TIMS.

Location: Eastern Humla District.

Getting there and back: By plane from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj. Continue the next morning by plane from Nepalgunj to Simikot in Humla. Return the same way.

Route: 21 days or more. After one day for acclimatisation and organising in Simikot (2,970 m), the trek passes Nyin villages and continues northeast via Limatang and Bargaun to Gyagru in the Dozam Valley. You have now entered the uninhabited alpine valley of the Chuwa and Dojam River. From the alpine vegetation in the gorge past Syamboyak you enter a widening rocky valley at Dhyualing (3,460 m). At Gurukpa the track divides, and the northeastern vally goes up to Chang La border pass (5,293) to Tibet.

Due to the high elevation and rocky terrain it will take two days to trek up to the pass. Back in Gurukpa continue in a northwestern looping direction along the Nying Khola River past Tashi Lung, skirting Rakarbu's west slope into the desolate terrain between the Chandi Himal (6,142 m) and Changwatang Peak (6,130 m). Continue over Taisolu La pass (5,474 m), entering Tibetan landscapes with high-elevation rolling hills and desert at high elevations. Trek in this near 5,000 m high landscape for three days via Newatang Phug, Phyajang Thana, then turn south at Larcha La pass (5,018 m) below the Tibet border mountain of Lapche Tuppa (5,762 m). From here you pass Risarba and the Tangchhe Valley, coming to the tail end of the Limi Valley. Valley. Continue up the Talung Valley, over Nyalu La pass (5,001 m), then descend into lower reaches and the alpine forests of the Humla Karnali valley. Three days later you arrive in Simikot.

Special attractions: Easily the most remote place anywhere in Nepal. From deep, forested valleys up past glaciated valleys and peaks, the Tibetan plateau landscape within Nepal, crossing high passes and descending among high cliffs and gorges back to the Karnali River Valley. Limi people coming over Chang La graze their yak and sheep herds in the Nying Valley.

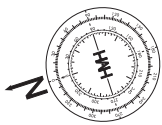
Connecting adventures: A four to five days shorter version is possible: Trekking a side valley westwards from the Nying Khola Valley half a day's hike from the Gurukpa camp, crossing Nying La (5,448 m), descending into the rocky Nyalu Khola valley to Talung Valley, to meet the original route at Talung Lake. If this trek is not enough, consider breaking off westwards at Tangchhe to follow the Limi Valley route (No. 118) in reverse, adding ten days.

Special advice: Mountaineering skills are not essential, but snow may be encountered. Hardship should be expected in the form of cold, wind, rough terrain, and rocky moraines.

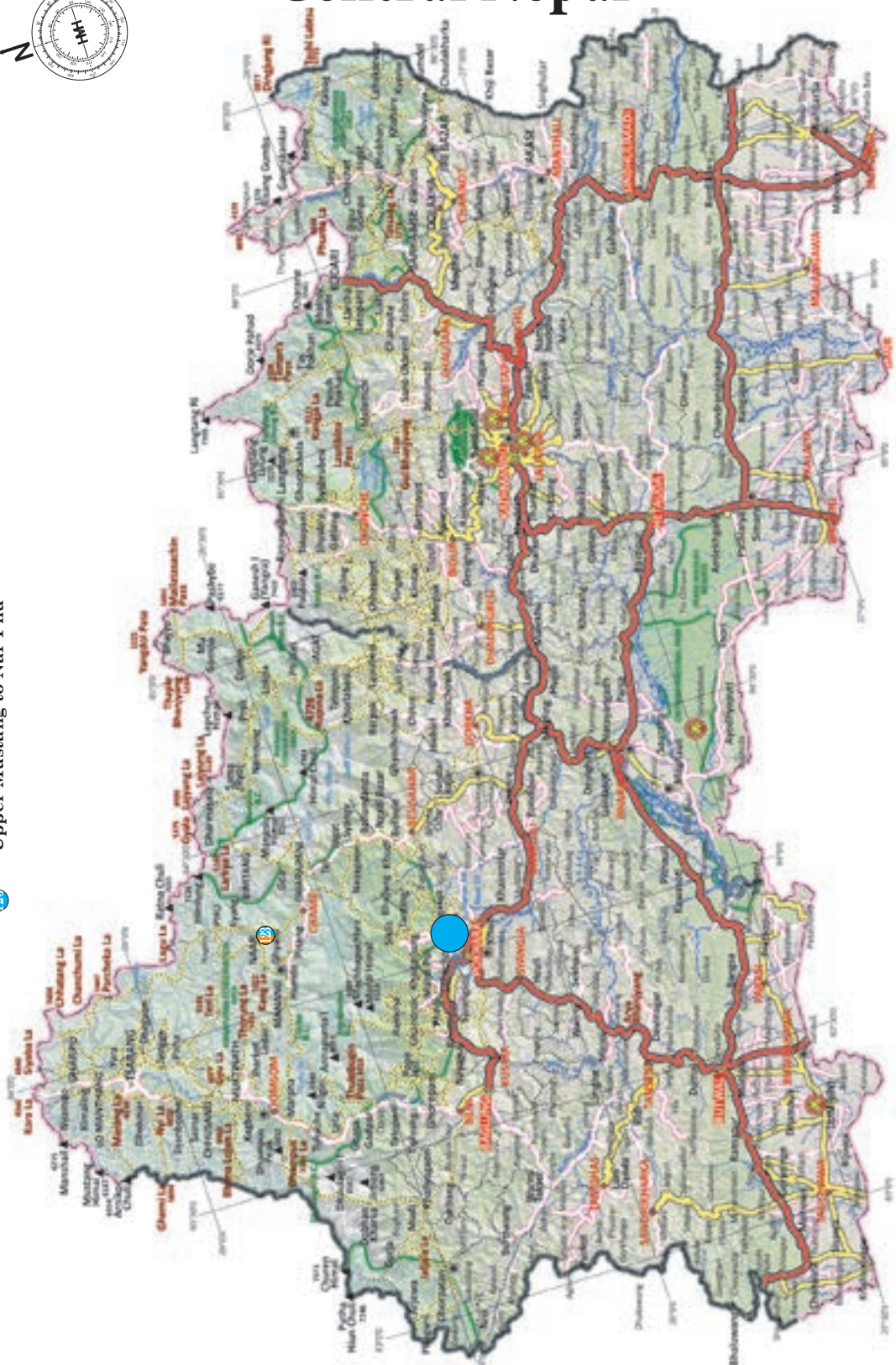


Takchhe, on the way to Jang.

© Astrid Hovden



Central Nepal



Difficulty	: Strenuous.
Lodging	: Lodges and teahouses at the beginning and end of this trek. Between Lo Manthang and Koto camping is the only possibility.
Provisions	: Pokhara, Jomsom, Lo Manthang. Trade with Tibet in Upper Mustang has allowed a considerable supply of goods to this area.
Mode of trekking	: Small focused groups.
Formalities	: Upper Mustang restricted area permit, Nar-Phu restricted area permit, TIMS, Annapura Conservation Area fee.

Location: Upper Mustang District.

Getting there and back: By plane or car, or on footpath from Pokhara to Jomsom. Return via Bulbule in the Marsyangdi Valley, and by bus to Kathmandu.

Route: 26 days or more. This trek is rarely used, but takes in the sights of Upper Mustang. Beginning in Jomsom you reach Lo Manthang (3,760 m) on day 5. After a day to rest and explore in Lo Manthang, the trek continues to Yara and a side trip to Luri Cave monastery, further east to Tangya and Yak Kharka, Samena Khola, reaching the Teri La base camp for a rest and acclimatisation day. On day 15, cross the Teri La pass (5,595 m) into the Nar Phu region. Descending to Labse Khola and Yak Kharka, you reach Nar Gaon on day 18. From Nar Gaon via Kyang, Phu Gaon (3,900 m) is reached two days later. From Phu Gaon the trail descends further south to join the Marsyangdi Valley at Koto, and Bhulbule near Besisahar six days later.

Special attractions: Mustang has brilliant desert landscapes, gorges and ravines. You can experience Tibetan (Lo-pa people) culture and lifestyle, richly decorated gompas, hermitages and rituals. There are contrasting buckwheat fields and villages, and walled Lo Manthang, capital of the former Kingdom of Mustang. Crossing over to the Nar Phu basin you trek through a desolate high desert and mountain landscape, which changes to a more colourful and somewhat more fertile landscape in the Nar and Phu valleys and settlements. The Phu gorge and Marsyangdi River valley are lush, compared with most of the trek.

Connecting adventures: Trekking from Pokhara to Upper Mustang. It is possible to

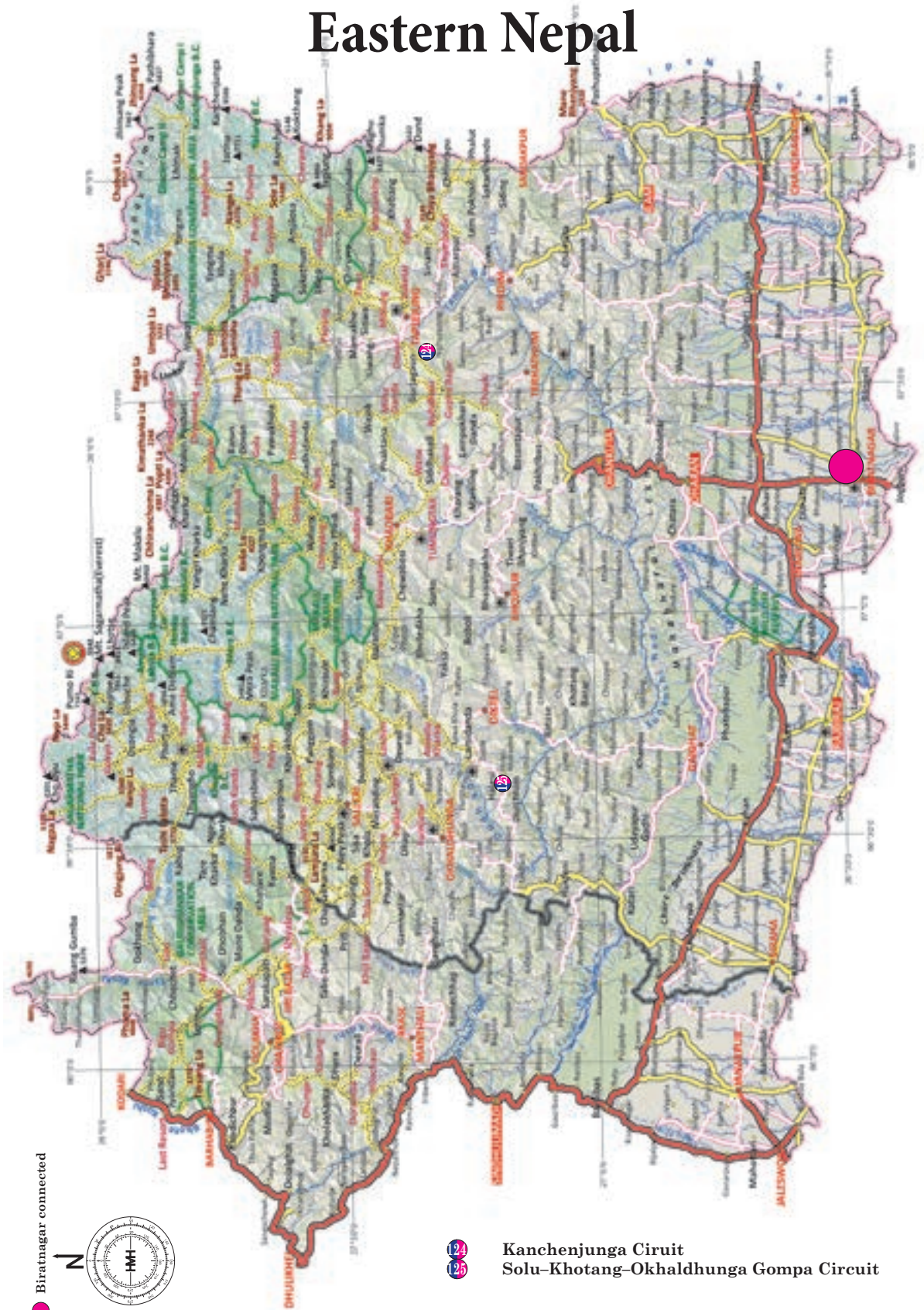
link with the Great Himalayan Trail (No. 126) into the Manaslu Conservation Area (No. 106) via Larkya La. From Koto it is also possible to turn west into Manang, crossing Meso Kato or Thorung La back into the Kali Gandaki Valley, arriving at Jomsom for a complete circuit.

Special advice: This is high desert country, but extremely colorful and photogenic. Do not forget your camera and lens protection. You can shorten this trek considerably by choosing to drive on a rough road from Pokhara to Kagbeni.



Most common transport mode in Mustang. © HMMH

Eastern Nepal



Difficulty	: Strenuous.
Lodging	: With growing tourism, the network of lodges and teahouses is increasing.
Provisions	: Trekking gear and clothing in Kathmandu, food in Biratnagar, Ilam and Taplejung. There are limited choices during the trek.
Mode of trekking	: Small groups.
Formalities	: TIMS, Kanchenjunga Conservation Area fee.

Location: Taplejung District.

Getting there and back: There are three main options: (1) by plane from either Biratnagar or Kathmandu to Suketar/Taplejung. (2) By plane or car via Jhapa (Bhadrapur airport), and by jeep or bus via Ilam and Phidim to Taplejung. (3) By plane or car to Biratnagar, then continue by bus or jeep via Dharan and Dhankuta to Basantapur, and trekking for four days Suketar/Taplejung.

Route: 25 days. This route takes you from Taplejung and Suketar airstrip to the Kanchenjunga North Base camp, entering the Southern Kanchenjunga Loop at Ghunsa on the return toward Taplejung. The route begins with four days on a long, undulating and interesting trail along the Ghunsa River to Guyabla. Here the culture turns Tibetan and the landscape subalpine at 2,730 m. The next day you reach the park headquarters and the Sherpa village of Ghunsa (3,595 m) where you stay for one day for acclimatisation. The next day offers delightful hiking to Kambachen, with another day of acclimatisation and then on to Lhonak (4,785 m), the staging post to visit Pangbema, the Kanchenjunga North Base Camp at 5,100 m. Turning downhill again on day 12, arriving

at Ghunsa two days later, the trek enters the southern loop of Kanchenjunga. Ascending from Ghunsa by way of Sele La (4,300 m), Mirgin La (4,480 m), via Oktang and Torontan over Lasiya Bhanjang, eventually into Phawakhola Valley, you reach Taplejung/Suketar after nine more days.

This trek can be shortened by three to four days by retracing the trail from Ghunsa to Taplejung.

Special attractions: The spectacular mountain scenery of the Kanchenjunga massif, the lush nature of the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area's Ghunsa River Valley wilderness with waterfalls, undisturbed forests and animal life, and the mix of highland peoples and cultures in Eastern Nepal.

Connecting adventures: This Kanchenjunga trek is already comprehensive and might not need additions. You can, however, exit south via the Singalila Panchthar highlands and end in Ilam.

Special advice: This area is known for adverse weather conditions, including unseasonable rainshowers and snowfalls.



Kanchenjunga trek.

© HMH



Making Yak cheese.

© HMH

#125 Solu–Khotang–Okhaldhunga Gompa Circuit Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Easy.
Lodging	: A mix of camping and lodges.
Provisions	: Kathmandu and village shops.
Mode of trekking	: Small, focused groups.
Formalities	: TIMS.

Location: Lower Solukumbu, Okhaldhunga and Khotang Districts.

Getting there and back: By plane or bus from Kathmandu to Lamidanda–Halesi. The trek circuit ends at Rumjatar, then by plane back to Kathmandu.

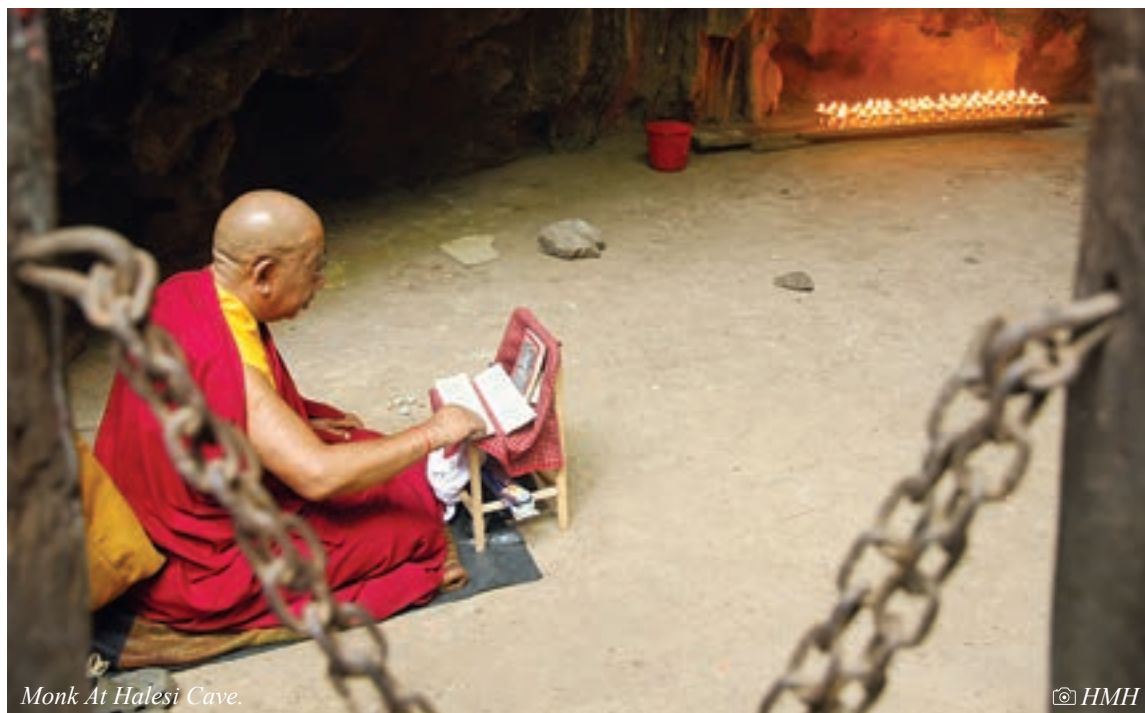
Route: 21 days. The route starts at the pilgrimage temple of Halesi Mahadev in Khotang, and continues via the villages Karpa, Dumre to Kurima. From there it continues via Chitre, Dimbul and Nirkum for one day's rest. From Nirkum the route goes to Shyare-Nimchola, Bung, Khiraule, Cherem, and Kharikhola to the monastery Taksinhindu. After Ringmo you should visit the famous Thupten Chholing monastery, established in 1960s. Via Junbesi you arrive to Phaplu on day sixteen. Via Pikey Peak (4,070 m) and Ngwar you come to Kilkurdding and Tolu Gompas. From Tolu, the

final section goes past Patale to Rumjatar, where the trek ends.

Special attractions: The trek takes in the major important religious sites (Hindu, Buddhist, shamanist and syncreticist), and other key sights in the homeland area of the Sherpa and Magar peoples south of Everest–Makalu. There is ample time and opportunities for interacting with local people and visit monasteries.

Connecting adventures: To shorten the trek, you can stop in Phaphlu and return by plane. To prolong the trek, the best option is to head toward Lukla, joining the Everest trail (No. 96). Or you could even turn southwest and join the Middle Hills trek in Sindhuli and all the way back to Kathmandu.

Special advice: Bring extra cash for donations to monasteries you visit during the trek.



Monk At Halesi Cave.

LONG-DISTANCE TREKS

#126 The Great Himalayan Trail (GHT)

Eastern Nepal

Difficulty	: Doing the whole 1,700 kilometres is of course extremely strenuous, even expedition style, and would take about 100 days. However, most sections are moderate, parts of the Cultural Route even easy.
Lodging	: Because parts of the GHT run in remote areas, often against the grain of the landscape, you cannot rely on staying in lodges or teahouses. Most of the GHT High Route must be done camping or expedition style with tents.
Provisions	: Available at roadheads and where the routes pass small towns and interface with other popular trekking routes.
Mode of trekking	: Small team with porter and guide support. Sections can be undertaken as a normal group trekking. Most sections on the Cultural Route can be done as lodge and teahouse trek, although sometimes low on the comfort scale.
Formalities	: Many. You need permits for national parks, conservation areas and remote areas as well as TIMS.

Location: The Great Himalayan Trail crosses along the length of Nepal. It has two different routes, the High Route, and the Cultural Route.

Getting there and back: To reach the starting point of the GHT High route, go by plane or bus/4WD to Taplejung in the east, or by plane to Simikot in the west. The GHT Cultural Route's western end is best reached by plane or bus to Dhangadhi, and by bus to Darchula.

Route: 90 days or more. The Great Himalayan Trail (GHT) High route's eastern starting/ending point is the Kanchenjunga Base Camp, and its western starting/ending point is at the Hilsa border post in Humla. The Cultural Route's eastern starting/ending point is the Rengu Pass in the Singalila Range south of Kanchenjunga, and its western starting/ending point is Darchula.

The two trails are essentially two parallel routes running east–west through the northern length of Nepal, the full length requiring minimum 90 days. A comprehensive description of routes is provided on <http://greathimalayatrails.com/>. For practical purposes, the GHT is divided into several trekking segments (see below), with different access points and side trails. Each segment has several options besides the GHT east–west route and functions as separate

destinations. You might not want to do the entire GHT, but the segments constitute separate trekking option.

The GHT high route goes partially in alpine terrain, crossing five very high and permanently snow bound passes. The GHT Cultural Route sticks to the northern region also, but avoids the alpine passes, and no mountaineering skills are required. Most of the terrain is populated, and shelter, supplies, and access to roadheads are easier.

Special attractions: Amazing scenery, crossing several passes, visiting village inhabited by various ethnic groups. For further details, check guidebooks, biographies, and the GHT web pages at <http://greathimalayatrails.com/>.

Connecting adventures: Many of the GHT sections and side routes can be done separately. Search the web for an overview.

Special advice: Some sections on the high route are extremely remote and require mountaineering skills. Each section needs to be thoroughly planned and researched before you set out. The Nepal government has not coordinated the remote areas permit and fee system to fit with the GHT needs, so confusion reigns.



Trekking the Great Himalayan Trail – but can't do it all!

How to trek the GHT in different sections

Not many have 100+ days at their disposal and the physical ability to trek the high passes and terrain and the entire length of the GHT. The Great Himalayan Trail Alliance has stipulated a break-up into nine sections lasting from 15 to 22 days each, and combined the High Trail and the Cultural Trail to make the route more “trekkable”. All sections should be commercially available, but may require some planning by the operator from the time you ask until you are ready to start. They are all dedicated camping treks: however, the route passes through areas where there are lodges, teahouses and homestays. The sections are, starting in the east:

1. Taplejung to Tumlingtar via Milke Danda (3,690 m), 17 days.
2. Tumlingtar to Lukla via Salpa La (3,565 m), 15 days.
3. Lukla to Barabise via Pikey Peak (4,065 m), 20 days.
4. Barabise to Syabrubesi via Laurebina La (4,610 m), 19 days.
5. Syabrubesi to Besisdahar via SingLa (4,040 m), 22 days.
6. Besisdahar to Jomsom via Mesokanto La (5,120 m), 17 days.
7. Jomsom to Juphal via Sangda La (5,195 m), 21 days.
8. Juphal to Jumla via Maure Lagna (3,895 m), 15 days.
9. Jumla to Simikot via Khari Lagna (3,642 m), 18 days.



Everest

📷 HMH



Syanda, Humla.

📷 Olav Myrholt



Sherpa house, Alampu, Dolakha.

📷 Olav Myrholt



Ascending Tashi Labtsa Pass.

📷 Øyvind Amundsgård

EXPEDITIONS AND MOUNTAINEERING



Mera high camp.

© HMH



Climbing Island Peak.

© HMH

This book does not deal specifically with expeditions and peaks. Mountaineering activities, along with other extreme sports activities, demand a whole different approach, a legal regime and sets of procedures and equipment. Moreover, due to the objective dangers, the responsibility for other people, your partners, guides, and porters increase with elevations, remoteness and logistical complexities.

The rules of climbing and expeditioning are established, but are sometimes broken and unwarranted risks taken, involving a class difference and gap that we do not like to invite people into. Expeditions and mountaineering require specialist knowledge.

There are many good sources and fora for information for those who are keen to scale a mountain peak. Many of the trekking routes in this book describe possibilities for scaling a high ridge or a peak. Some peaks above 5,500 m to approximately 6,500 m involve alpine challenges, and are officially designated as trekking peaks. Access permits to trekking peaks that officially are called *expedition* peaks are managed by the Nepal Mountaineering Association. Websites for group A and B: <http://www.nepalmountaineering.org/article-NMA%20Peaks> , see also http://www.visitnepal.com/getaway/nepal_peaks_climbing/list_of_peaks.htm.

Higher expedition and climbing peaks are administered by the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, with a different set of regulations and fees. For such activities you will need to join an expedition or create one, and then have it officially registered. It is best to get a Nepalese expedition outfitter and organiser to undertake the preparations for you.

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

For seniors, children and less-abled persons

The existing and upcoming tourism hubs described in the beginning of this section are some of the best options for diverse activities and cultural, social and environmental activities in Nepal for people who are not inclined to push out on major treks or expeditions. This is where you find the ‘Nepal light’ opportunities for getting out and about. Beyond its cultural attractions, Kathmandu might not be so tempting today, due to congestion, pollution, noise, and what the Nepalese themselves call ‘pressure’.



Canoeing on Phewa Lake, Pokhara. © Marit Bakke

However, there are some very good opportunities for getting out and about besides seeking the hubs. Some of the trekking areas in Nepal readily lend themselves to taking it easy and seeking out diverse experiences and enjoyment, with slow-paced, short and flexible days on the trails and in villages. These areas are where the trail network is dense, lodges, teahouses and campsites are available at short intervals, and the terrain and infrastructure offers diversity.

In short, in addition to the ‘hubs’, these outstanding areas are Helambu, the trekking areas south of Annapurna between the Kali

Gandaki Valley and Pokhara, Pokhara Valley and surroundings, the areas south of Pokhara, the lower Khumbu area, ‘hill stations’ east of the Kathmandu Valley, such as Dhulikhel, Nagarkot, and in the plains, Chitwan’s Sauraha.

There are tourist operators that offer tours and treks for seniors along the Kathmandu Valley rim, treks to Everest Base Camp, and various other areas. Another pleasant and environmental friendly option is to stay at one of the so-called ‘eco-hotels’ that are being built in reasonable distances from Kathmandu, Pokhara and major towns.

All this said, it is a fact that elderly people tend to manage elevation changes better than younger people, and that children are fabulous trekkers and love village life in Nepal. If they tire, they can be carried in *dhokos* and baby carriers. There are books published on the topic of travelling with children in Nepal. There is no real reason to segregate, but again we stress that visitors should opt for treks and adventures that suit their physical conditions and needs. Taking your child to Nepal can be the best thing you ever did, but only if you adjust your programme to the child’s needs and interests.

With sufficient time available, flexibility and adjustments, less able-bodied can trek with ease on nearly all the major well-known trekking routes.



Paragliding over Pokhara and Annaurna. © HMMH

Trail-running

Nepal has a mix of elements that make it an unforgettable place for running. To explore it all, visit various web sites of organisers and organisations for trail-runners, local sports organisations, trekking agents and expats' forum. Nepal's trails really lend themselves to trail-running, whether it is for a day's exercise or a multi-day or really long-distance running. Everything is possible in Nepal, so there are providers for this kind of trip as well as a good selection of very good trails, and unlimited virgin territory. About 80–85% of the trails are away from roads, in forests, and away from habitation, yet with a proliferation of tea stalls.

The Kathmandu Rim run is both a competition and a running route, and a bike route about 100 km. The route is not very well marked – so even for doing segments of it, make sure you have a clear description and a map, or GPS.

The Annapurna Circuit is recommended by

insiders as a fantastic running route, with good services, frequent stopping points and watering holes along the trail.

The Great Himalayan Trail, in particular the Cultural Route, is also suggested for running. Obviously, some segments are better than others in terms of starts and ends and facilities en route.

The Guerilla Trek of Myagdi, Rolpa and Rukum has recently been put on a recommendation list of skyline trails – a run with a view! The trail network in the Pokhara Valley area and below Annapurna South and into the Kali Gandaki Valley is very attractive, with many trail and gradient options, on solid trails and many teahouses and waterholes.

Thulo Sirubari in Sidhupalchowk is a village area that was destroyed twice: by aerial bombardment during the 1996–2006 insurgency and again by the 2015 earthquake. Local runners and authorities have established a marked 29 km running route that has now become an annual competition event.



Endurance runner Mira Rai in Mustang.

Bicycling

Anyone visiting Kathmandu a few decades ago found bicycling in the city and surroundings easy and enjoyable. Due to air pollution and traffic congestion this no longer holds true. However, there is no reason for visiting bikers to despair, because bicycling has really taken off, now on trails and country roads in the hills and mountains. Most main trekking routes can be biked, but for those who dislike the idea of lugging their bikes over high passes and narrow and steep trails, there are good alternatives and splendid routes.



Cycling around Pokhara.

📷 HMMH

Some long-distance routes follow country roads and footpaths, and can keep you going for a two-week holiday without crossing your own path. Specialist biking tour operators offer dramatic and ingenious tours with bike maps and service vehicles – even starting, for instance, in Lhasa and running downhill all the way to Kathmandu. The old trekking route between Pokhara and Kathmandu – before the cars arrived – has been restored for biking purposes. Some areas are especially suitable for biking tours, such as the Kali Gandaki Valley and Mustang. Mountain biking is increasingly featured in guidebooks on Nepal.

Downhill and regular mountain bike races are organised on a regular basis in Nepal. There is a downhill run at Hattiban at the southern edge of the Kathmandu Valley, and also a famous Kathmandu Valley Rim race route. To find a bicycling tour that fits your interests and abilities, and to obtain suitable equipment, it is essential to conduct some advance research.

Horseback riding in Nepal

Nepal has many horses, mules and donkeys used for cargo transport, and in the Terai lowlands, mules and oxen for pulling carts. In the Middle Hills, especially in the east of the country, horses and mules are used for milk transport and other trading goods. In the north and west of the country, horses and mules are used in trading caravans.

In the mountain valleys and Trans-Himalayan settlements, horses are used for riding. There is a growing number of horseback adventures offered in Nepal. Here we note:

- Riding trek with children, Langtang Heritage – 8 days.
- Riding, Classic Langtang, lodge trek – 11 days.
- Riding Trek with Children, Annapurna Panorama between Pokhara and Ghandruk – 10-11 days.
- Riding trek with children, Everest Panorama – 10 days.
- Riding to Everest Base Camp, lodge trek – 15 days.
- Riding to Upper Mustang, lodge trek – 17 days.

You can organise horse trekking from Pokhara and from Jomsom. There are many good alternatives, and you also can tailor your own. In western and far western Nepal many places will be able to offer horses for riding and treks. You can also organise treks with horses from Kathmandu. Early booking is recommended!



Horse back Riding around Annapurna.

📷 HMMH



Bird watching in Chitwan.

© HMH

Bird watching

Nepal is a diversity hot spot for birds, hosting about 8% of the total number of species on the planet, altogether 646 species. Some of the diversity can be explained by the elevation differences – from 80 m above sea level in the Terai to Nepal's eight 8,000+ m Himalayan peaks. Nepal is also the overlapping zone between southern and northern species, and hosts many northern migratory birds as well.

Lastly, located in the Central Himalayas with the dry western part and the tropical, humid eastern part, Nepal is where South-East Asian and Eurasian birds meet. A particular overlapping hotspot zone for birds and also butterflies is the three Mai River valleys in far eastern Nepal. Birds are always present in the Nepalese landscapes, and a pair of binoculars will be

useful and a delight whether you are a keen bird watcher or not.

The many wetlands, such as moors, bowlakes, ponds, tanks and riverine areas in the Terai are good places to see birdlife in Nepal during all seasons. The national parks and other areas with good natural forests and intact habitats all have a profusion of birds.

Many foreign and national ornithological associations organise bird-watching trips, treks and expeditions in Nepal. Regular tours to Chitwan and Koshi Tappu focus on migratory birds. Godawari and Pulchowk Hill in Kathmandu are bird hotspots, and one-day excursions are organised regularly. Langtang and other mountain national parks are frequently featured as birding destinations combined with trekking. Annapurna and Chitwan bird watching tours are also available.

Honey hunting

Since the documentary film and book by Eric Valli on the honey-hunting people of the Himalaya was presented, visits to sites with cliffbees and guiding by honey hunters have become popular. The best-known areas are in Kaski and Lamjung districts of the lower Annapurna, Lamjung Himal and Langtang.



Honey hunting.

© Punya



Wild beehives.

© Marit Bakke

Botanical Trekking

Specific botanical treks are organised, mostly in suitable parts of conservation areas and national parks. Nepal has an incredible variation of biotopes and a biodiversity that is well recognised. While Nepal is most famous for its rhododendrons and orchids, there are also medical plants, wild edible plants and simply beautiful and rare plants to behold.

The Shey-Phoksundo botanical trek is thematically oriented towards the trans-Himalayan flora. The Makalu Barun National Park botanical trek focuses on rhododendron forests in addition to the enormous biodiversity

of that area. Langtang botanical treks examine the interaction between people and plants in the conservation area. The Rara botanical treks focus mostly on the trees and high mountain forests that can be explored while circuiting the Rara Lake. A Marsyangdi botanical trek follows the Marsyangdi River from the lower part north of Besisahar to the Gangapurna glacier moraines of Manang and back, with diverse biotopes and covering a vertical transect of Himalayan botany. The Shivapuri National Park on the northern Kathmandu Valley Rim is also a place for botanical treks and excursions, focusing on the subtropical flora.



Orchids.

© HMM



Ginger.

© Marit Bakke



Yartung festival in lower mustang.

© HMMH

Festival Trekking

Nepal's unique festivals (Hindu, Buddhist, Kirati, local ethnic festivals and shamanistic rituals) are the basis for a unique festival trekking concept in Nepal. Local people go on pilgrimages and attend festivals for the fun of it, while visitors go festival trekking. Festival dates are assigned according to the lunar calendar, the Nepali BS calendar, religious calendars, positions of the planets, and other astrological indications.

The festivals are repeated in yearly cycles, many of them being presented in the section on culture in Part I. Festival treks entail some remoteness, and a proper hike to get to the festival sites is part of the picture.

One famous festival along a trekking circuit is the Mani Rimdu Festival along with similar festivals on the Sherpa, Tamang and Tibetan calendars in October–November, located in Solu in the Solukhumbu District. Likewise, the

boisterous Yartung Mela in Muktinath for the full moon festival in August has parallels at many lakes and mountains. Lake Dudh Pokhari ('milky lake') and lakes with names of deities are likely places to look. The shamanistic aspects of these festival rituals are prominent at the Gosainkund Lake in Langtang National Park and Kalinchowk in Dolakha. There are special tours to shamans and shamanistic rituals in Dolakha, Sindupalchowk and Kavrepalanchok Districts. The Tejj, or Tenji in Lo Manthang in Upper Mustang is among the more exotic and special places for festival trekking.

In the western part of Nepal, the Saga Dawa festival at Humla's Raling Gompa is important and easy to visit and observe. Twice a year major new moon festivals for far western Nepal are held at the Kailashpat Mandir on the Badi Malika plateau in Bajura.

Visiting some of Nepal's numerous other festivals is a good way to get to know the local people and learn something of their customs and heritage.

Hot springs

Nepal has many hot springs along the Himalayas in narrow belts that mark the major faultlines of the Indian and Eurasian continental plates. Most of the hot springs are at fairly low elevations, several of them quite accessible at places invariably named Tatopani – ‘hot water’. You find this name on maps and may chance to visit one during your trek.

As yet, these thermal sources have been very little exploited for tourism, and the local people use them mostly for washing and traditional ritual baths. Best known are Tatopani on the Kali Gandaki River below Dana, Tatopani on the Modi Khola River between Annapurna South and Pokhara, and Tatopani near the Tibetan border checkpoint Kodari (earthquake damaged).

The water is rarely so hot or of such volumes as to

have potential for large-scale geothermal energy production. However, there are good possibilities for upgrading the close to 40 geothermal sources known so far in terms of access and facilities, enhancing the visitors’ experience and comfort by offering spa, balneotherapy and other treatments. It is a true delight to immerse yourself in hot, mineral-rich water along the many trails in Nepal. In Darchula a temple and a guesthouse have been built for visitors to the local hot springs.

The largest development to date is near Beni Bazaar in Myagdi District, the Singa Tatopani, with a roofed pool that can hold about 300 people at a time.

For more information <http://www.geothermal-energy.org/pdf/IGAstandard/WGC/1995/1-ranjit.pdf> and <https://pangea.stanford.edu/ERE/db/WGC/papers/WGC/2015/01010.pdf>



Trekkers enjoying a hot spring rest.



Rafting at BhoteKoshi.

© HMMH

Whitewater rafting and kayaking

Whitewater rafting in Nepal has become famous. All the big rivers coming from the Himalayas are good rafting rivers. The best source of information on details is Nepal Association of Rafting Agencies (NARA): <http://www.raftingassociation.org.np/>. There are 6 key commonly raftable rivers in three main river systems, see: http://www.raftingassociation.org.np/content/category/river_system.html. NARA's qualified members are: <http://www.raftingassociation.org.np/member/memberlist.html>.

You can undertake a river rafting expedition for three weeks, one week, for two days in conjunction with other activities or for just one day. You can raft in remote locations where starting points higher up the river require a long walk-in, or you can simply find a stretch along the highways.

Rafting is graded according to the rapid's position on a technical challenge scale. Most trips are easy to moderate. The expensive, tough

trips tend to be heavily advertised, obscuring the opportunities offered to less technically or macho-oriented adventurers. Most trips stress the scenery and what you see and experience along the river. Programmes for more than one-day rafting include village visits and evenings with bonfire parties.

Choose a rafting trip that suits your comfort level, but challenges you a little as well. The guides are undisputed kings of the water, knowing the river and its rapids, while you participate in the paddling and steering as part of the crew. Rafting skills are obtained through experience, so unless you already are qualified or certified as a guide, you never can be or aspire to be the captain aboard running the rapids.

River kayaking is a specialist adventure that always needs some technical experience. You can gain kayaking skills by taking courses in Nepal, and do beginners kayaking trips as a follow-up. Search the Internet for a place and a course that suits you.

The Karnali River

The Karnali River offers adventurous river rafting in far western Nepal. The Karnali River originates in the country's northwestern corner and winds its way to the Terai, where it emerges from the foothills at the Bardiya National Park. Put-in is at Sauli, requiring a combination with trekking. The 180 km long rafting trip includes rapids grades 3 to 5. The end point is at Chisapani where the Karnali River enters the Terai plains. Be sure you have 11–12 days available.

Trishuli River

The Trishuli River rafting begins about one hour's drive from Kathmandu, along the road to Pokhara. Rapids are up to grade 3, suitable for novices. You can go on a short trip with one camping night, or on longer trips all the way to Chitwan, where a visit to the Chitwan National Park is a natural continuation.

Kali Gandaki River

The starting point is west of Pokhara and the

rafting continues for three days, covering 60 km. Several rapids are grade 3 to 4, requiring advanced rafting and swimming skills.

Sun Koshi River

The river runs east of Kathmandu, where the usual put-in point is Dolalghat on the Arniko Highway. The trip includes 270 km of continuous rafting for 11–12 days, ending at the Chatra Gorge in southeastern Nepal.

Bhote Koshi River

Bhote Koshi offers the steepest rafting in Nepal, lasting two days. The beginning is steep, then decreasing gradually. The grade 3 to 5 rapids require previous rafting experience.

Marsyangdi River

The river comes from eastern Annapurna and meets the Kathmandu–Pokhara highway at Dumre. Put-in is at Ngadi above Bulbule in the Marsyangdi Valley. The Marsyangdi offers the most extreme and intense rafting experience in the country, lasting 4–5 days.



Boating on Bengas Lake.

© Olav Myrholt

Rafting with children

There are rafting trips designed for families with children in Nepal. The Trishuli River is high on the agenda for child-friendly rafting, due to its proximity to Kathmandu, with Chitwan National Park as a potential end point, and short distance to the main roads. This is generally an entertaining, relatively easy trip, but with some excitement, and with pleasant beaches and land-based entertainment.

‘Rafting light’, using the tube of a large tyre, is available on Seti Khola and other rivers near Pokhara.

Extreme sports in Nepal

Nepal is famous for trail-running events: the Everest Marathon (<http://everestmarathon.com/>), and trail running in Mustang (<https://mustangtrailrace.com/>), Manaslu (<https://manaslutrailrace.org/>), and Annapurna (<https://annapurna100.com/>). For other scheduled races

and running, see trail-running schedules: <http://trailrunningnepal.org/>. Bungee jumping is available in the Bhote Kosi Canyon about 15 km south of Tatopani on the Tibetan border. In Pokhara, you can bungee jump into the Seti Khola Gorge. See: www.nepaltourism.info/nepalbunjeejumping/index

Canyoning can be done in the Sundhulpalchowk District, between Barhabise and Tatopani on the road to Tibet. In Pokhara, Lwang Ghale is the best site for a one-day canyoning. There is a big waterfall in this canyon as well. The Jalbire Canyon at Kabilas, near the confluence of the Seti and Trishuli Rivers south of the Mugling and Chitwan Districts, offers an extensive canyoning, natural waters and nature. A visit here with professionals can be combined with a visit to Chitwan National Park. Search ‘canyoning in Nepal’ on the Internet.

High ropes, rope skill adventures and courses, can be done in the Gokarna Forest in Kathmandu, and 15 km south of Tatopani on the Arniko Highway.



Bungee Jumping.

Paragliding, solo and tandem, can be done in Pokhara, from the paragliding centre at Sarangkot. Bandipur in Tanahun is also a good place for paragliding. Paratrekking and parahawking are also available. Near Pokhara, there is a 600 m drop-zipline from the top of Sarangkot Hill down to Phewa Tal. See: www.paragliding-nepal.com/

Cave exploration can be done in Mansjuree Park and Cave near Dakshinkali, and at Chobar Gorge along the Bagmati River at the southern end of the Kathmandu Valley. This is probably the longest cave in South Asia (3,250 m) – about 350 m can be visited with local guides. There are five openings to the cave, the largest one at Bagh

Gohpha. Lamps are provided by the guides.

The largest, most cavernous of all caves in Nepal is the Siddha Gufa in the Tanahun District, at Bimal Nagar near Bandipur between Pokhara and Kathmandu. It is thought to be the largest cave in South Asia, and its innards are yet to be explored.

One rappel drop is 70 m free hanging. A few tour operators organise fully equipped visits to this cave with a programme according to skills and dare. Siddha Gufa is a local pilgrimage site, with a pool, stalactites and stalagmites as objects of worship. Search ‘cave explorations in Nepal’ on the Internet.



© Marit Bakke

End notes

You should now be ready to select treks and adventures that you want to explore further in guidebooks, on maps and on the Internet. Or you may be interested to go to a particular district.

Do you still miss something? The keen reader may have observed that there is no information about 15 of Nepal's 75 districts, most of them located in the lowlands in southern Nepal. Some of these districts are not very attractive for visitors, with hot climate and very few sites of particular interest. However, there may be interesting places for visitors that the authors of this book have not yet discovered. These districts may be little marketed, and lack appropriate infrastructure for visitors.

We are delighted if you discover anything that visitors should know about in these or other areas in Nepal. Send a note to: Nepal@deurali.no

APPENDIX

Information sources

Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, Singha Durbar, Kathmandu. www.tourism.gov.np
Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu. <http://www.welcomenepal.com>

Bookshops in Kathmandu/ Patan

Mandala Book Point, Kantipath. Specialities: Academic and documentary literature.
<http://www.mandalabookpoint.com>
Pilgrims Book House, Thamel. Well stocked, an old favourite among foreign visitors.
www.pilgrimsonlineshop.com
Vajra Book Shop, Jyatha, Thamel. Specialities: Tibet and Buddhism. www.vajrabookshop.com

Himalayan Map House, Thamel. <http://www.himalayanmaphouse.com/> Specialities: Nepal, guide and souvenir books, coffee table books, office equipment.

Ektabooks Distributors, <http://www.ektabooks.com/> In Patan. Specialities: educational, fiction, technical.

Ratna Pustak Bandar, Chittadar Road between Asan and Kantipath (no web page). One of the oldest publishing houses in Nepal, mostly books by Nepalese writers and educational books.

Patan Book Shop, next to Patan Gate and Dokhaima Café, <https://www.facebook.com/patan.b.shop/>

Educational Book Store, on Kantipath road in Kathmandu (no web page).

Internet bookshops in Nepal:

Himalbooks: <http://himalbooks.com/shop/categories/HIMAL-BOOKS/>

Pilgrim: <https://www.pilgrimsonlineshop.com/>

Libraries in Kathmandu/ Patan

American Library, Embassy of the United States. <https://np.usembassy.gov>

British Council. www.britishcouncil.org.np/

Nepali newspapers in English

nepalnews (updated regularly). www.nepalnews.com

The Himalayan Times (daily). www.thehimalayantimes.com

The Kathmandu Post (daily). www.kathmandupost.com

Nepali Times (weekly). www.nepalitimes.com

Republica (daily) www.myrepublica.com/

Useful sources on Nepal

Amnesty International Nepal Page (human rights in Nepal). www.amnestynepal.org

BBC News Nepal Country Profile. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12511455

CIA Handbook: <http://www.cia-worldfactbook.us/asia/nepal>

Digital Himalaya (archive for journals, including Pdf issues of Nepali Times). www.digitalhimalaya.com/

Himal Southasian: www.himalmag.com

Human Rights Watch Nepal Page (human rights in Nepal). <https://www.hrw.org/asia/nepal>

Martin Chautari Policy Briefs (on current affairs). www.martinchautari.org

Nepal Information Platform (www.un.org.np)

Studies in Nepali History and Society (www.martinchautari.org.np)

Nepalese organisations

Amnesty International Nepal. www.amnestynepal.org

International Porter Protection Group (IPPG). www.ippg.net Nepal branch: Himalayan Rescue Association. www.himalayanrescue.org

Jazzmandu: <http://jazzmandu.org>

Just-one (sustainable rehabilitation of street children). www.just-one.org

Kathmandu Environmental Education Centre (KEEP) www.keeppnepal.org

Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (kimff). <https://kimff.org>

Maiti Nepal (www.maitinepal.org) Anti-trafficking organisation. The chairperson in 2010, Anuradha Koirala, was elected 'CNN Hero of the Year'. Nepal Participatory Action Network (NEPAN)

Nepal Participatory Action Network (NEPAN). www.nepan.org.np

Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) – has branches in countries throughout the world. www.nrna.org.np

Radio Sagarmatha – the first FM radio in Nepal. <https://radiosagarmatha.org.np>

READ Nepal Room to Read. <https://www.roomtoread.org/Nepal>

The World Bank (www.worldbank.org/en/country/nepal)

Digital sources

Altitude sickness: http://www.altitude.org/altitude_sickness.php

Digital Himalaya: Archival and contemporary photography and literature, including magazines and newsprint in Nepal, historical documents, etc. www.digitalhimalaya.com/

Digital guide books (downloadable and printable) by David, 2016, TheLongestWayHome:

Patan: <http://www.thelongestwayhome.com/travel-guides/nepal/guide-to-patan.html>

Kathmandu: <https://www.thelongestwayhome.com/guidebooks/nepal/kathmandu-city-guidebook.html>

Bhaktapur: <https://www.thelongestwayhome.com/guidebooks/nepal/bhaktapur-guidebook.html>

Chitwan: <https://www.thelongestwayhome.com/guidebooks/nepal/chitwan-guidebook.html>

Bardiya: <https://www.thelongestwayhome.com/guidebooks/nepal/bardia-guidebook.html>

Kathmandu Valley: <https://www.thelongestwayhome.com/guidebooks/nepal/kathmandu-valley-guidebook.html>

Digital, Downloadable trekking and town maps, Nepal Tourism Board:

<http://www.welcomenepal.com/downloads-cat/map/>

Great Himalayan Trail: There are two different GHT-homepages. The first and original one is from the creators of the GHT: <http://greathimalayatrails.com/>. The second one is from the Great Himalayan Trail Alliance, user-groups and organisations linked to the use and development of the GHT: <http://greathimalayanepal.com/>

Great Himalayan Trail film part 1: <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=robin+boustead&&view=detail&mid=118098D53BB1FA3E76E3118098D53BB1FA3E76E3&FORM=VRDGAR>

Great Himalayan Trail film part 2:

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=robin+boustead&qpv=robin+boustead&view=detail&mid=A766FD6FE1E29ECAD47CA766FD6FE1E29ECAD47C&FORM=VRDGAR>

Great Himalayan Trail film part 3:

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=robin+boustead&&view=detail&mid=409EB653EDBAA4FB19BA409EB653EDBAA4FB19BA&FORM=VRDGAR>

Great Himalayan Trail film part 4:

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=robin+boustead&&view=detail&mid=20CA852AB32DFF9D083420CA852AB32DFF9D0834&FORM=VRDGAR>

Useful apps

Taxi fares in Kathmandu:

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.applikali.taxifareskathmandu&hl=en>

Load-shedding schedule: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.cm.xml&hl=en>

Nepali–English dictionary: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.hamropatro.dictionary>

Nepali currency value, converter: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.sanjaal.nepali.forex>

Flight status in Nepal:

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ekbana.nepflights.ui>

Apps for the main treks in Nepal: <http://adventurem-apps.com/trek-the-world/>

Everest Trail: <http://adventurem-apps.com/trek-the-world/everest-base-camp-app/>

Manaslu Circuit (forthcoming): <http://adventurem-apps.com/trek-the-world/>

Annapurna Base Camp: <https://honeyguideapps.com/#regions>

Ghorepani-Poon Hill trek: <https://honeyguideapps.com/#regions>

Literature about Nepal

Literature about Nepal abounds – about the country in general, and also about specific topics such as ethnic groups, climbing, bicycling, birds, flowers as well as guidebooks for special areas. You can find information of a more scientific nature in journals and books.

You will be amazed at the number of book stores in Nepal, particularly in Kathmandu (see brief listing above). Books are cheap, so be sure to set aside ample time to look at the range of wonderful photo books, fiction by Nepali and foreign writers, excellent guidebooks and maps and cultural artifacts. The best place for scholarly and scientific literature is Mandala Book Point, located in Kantipath Street in the heart of Kathmandu.

Below is a selection of some books you might find of interest.

Trekking and tourism

Bezruchka, Stephen. 2011. *Trekking in Nepal – A Traveller’s Guide*.

Child, John. 2006. *Street of Silver and Street of Gold: Ten Easy Walks among the Gods, Legends and Bazaars of Kathmandu*. Kathmandu: Himal Books.

Dawood, Richard (ed.). 2012. *Travellers’ Health. How to stay healthy abroad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Diverse agriculture in Terai.

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Fish farm, Pokhara.

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Prayer flags at Syangboche.

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Charging old batteries by cow dung.

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Noodle making Tibetan style.

© Olav Myrholt

Marit Bakke

It was the mountains, the Annapurna Circuit in particular, that brought Marit Bakke to Nepal for the first time in 1984. Having done the Manaslu Circuit in 1989, she decided it was time to explore beyond the mountains and to learn more about Nepal's history and its people.

Since 1999, she has been fortunate to be able to combine treks in various parts of Nepal with a professional interest in culture and health communication. Nepal's rich cultural heritage has been a never-ending journey of new discoveries, from spectacular stupas, temples and palaces in the Kathmandu Valley to ancient mandus in Humla.

For more than twenty years, Marit has been a member of the Norway Nepal Association, and has also been the editor of its newsletter, Hamro Patrika.

Being a retired professor for several years, co-authoring *Adventures in Nepal* offered her a wonderful opportunity to bring information about Nepal and its fantastic people to a wider audience.



Olav Myrholt

Olav first set foot in Nepal in 1980 and promised to come back, which he did again and again, and again. With a student year in Nepal behind him he found himself wrapped into the lives of two Kathmandu and Pokhara Valley families. Academic life in the US and UK also touched on Nepal. A 15-year association with local development work brought him to the far corners of Nepal and lesser-trodden trails to meet many diverse people and places - always with the camera at the ready. Interested in ecology and sustainability solutions, he runs his own company Deurali. Never the first one into camp while walking in Nepal; prefers to spend the full day out and creating time. He carries a fistful of marbles in his pocket while on the trail, ready to play guchha with the children he meets.



The Norway Nepal Association (Norge-Nepalforeningen)

The Norway Nepal Association, established in 1984, is a politically independent member association. Its purpose is to provide and distribute information and knowledge about Nepal, facilitate cultural exchange between Norway and Nepal, and serve as a forum for people with an interest in Nepal. This is done by arranging public meetings as well as bringing information on the association's website www.norge-nepal.no, on Facebook, and in its newsletter Hamro Patrika. The book *Adventures in Nepal* is the association's most recent project to fulfill its purpose.



What do we mean by adventure tourism? It can mean jumping off cliffs in parachutes, diving off a bridge with a rope around the ankles, and climbing Everest, but also so much more. Adventures are to go beyond your realm and knowledge, be challenged physically and mentally, and to create memories. Nepal has a rich cultural heritage that is worth exploring, and hosts a range of spectacular natural wonders found only in Nepal. Within km you can go from sub-tropical flora and fauna, via alpine valleys and desert landscapes, all the way to the top of the planet's highest snow covered peaks.

- Information about less-known routes, side trips and new trekking destinations
- Facts about the mountains, people, culture and society
- Pre-departure practical information
- Information about health, safety and altitude aspects
- Maps and route summaries
- Photos of people and places in Nepal

Adventures
in
Nepal



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