

# Trekking Routes

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## Choosing a Trek

Six popular teahouse treks are described in this chapter; between them they account for 90% of all trek trips in Nepal. Easily the most popular options are the Everest Base Camp and Annapurna Circuit treks. Both offer spectacular scenery and cultural depth, as well as plenty of crowds.

Over the last few years Everest has become insanely busy in high season, while the Annapurna region has been affected by road construction along the Jomsom side. The Annapurna Circuit has the advantage of being a loop route, while Everest is an out-and-back trek, returning to Lukla via the same route.

Noticeably quieter are the Langtang and Gosainkund regions, while the Tamang Heritage Trail is quieter still and offers a good mix of traditional villages and mountain views.

If that's not enough for you, it is also possible to combine treks. The Annapurna Sanctuary Trek is easily pinned onto the end of the Annapurna Circuit to create a full month of superb trekking. Likewise the Tamang Heritage Trail is a fine way to start or end a Langtang Valley trek, which itself can be tagged onto a Gosainkund trek.

Our advice is not to rush your walk. Adding on a few days to your itinerary allows you to take in side trips, detours and monasteries, or just take a day off every now and then. These just might end up being the highlights of your trip.

Basic descriptions of the main treks are given in this chapter but these are not intended as trail guides. For full information on these routes, as well as camping treks to more remote regions, see Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya*.

## Short Treks

If you don't have time for a big trek, several shorter treks from Pokhara in the southern foothills of the Annapurnas can give you a taste of life on Nepal's trails (p282). It's also possible to cobble together a mini-trek of several days around the rim of the Kathmandu Valley (p114).

You can also throw in a couple of flights here and there to speed up the trekking process. As an example, fly in to Jomsom, overnight in Marpha (to aid acclimatisation) and take a few days to hike to the surrounding villages of Kagbeni and Muktinath before flying back to Pokhara for a four- or five-day trip.

## Life on the Trail

### Routes & Conditions

Most trails are clear and easy to follow, though they are often steep and taxing, with long stretches of switchbacks or stone staircases. A typical day's walk lasts from between five to seven hours and rarely spends much time on level ground. Distances on a map quickly become irrelevant with the many ups and downs and twists and turns of Nepal's trails.

A little rudimentary knowledge of the Nepali language will help to make your trek easier and more interesting, although finding your way is rarely difficult on the major trekking routes and English is fairly widely spoken. See p388 for some useful Nepali words and phrases.

### Sleeping & Eating

On the Everest, Langtang and Annapurna treks it's unlikely that you will walk more than an hour or two without coming across some kind of teahouse offering food and lodging, giving you great flexibility to walk as far as you wish and avoid the crowds. These lodges range from simple extensions of a traditional wooden family home to quite luxurious places with private rooms, multi-page menus, and even attached toilets and showers. Most mattresses are foam (of varying thicknesses) and some bedding is always supplied. Nevertheless, it's still a good idea to carry a sleeping bag, especially at higher elevations and during peak season. A bucket of hot water is often available for a fee.

Food in teahouses centres on endless combinations of pasta, noodles, potato, rice and vegetables, plus momos (dumplings), rice and a half-dozen types of tea, by the cup or pot. Breakfast is normally eggs, porridge or muesli. The local staple of daal bhaat (rice, lentils and vegetables) is nutritious, available everywhere and requires minimum fuel for preparation. It's also the only meal that will truly fill you up after a day trekking.

Lodges on the main trails stock expensive Snickers bars, toilet paper etc but it's wise to carry your own emergency food supplies such as granola (muesli) bars, dried fruit or chocolate. You can save some money by bringing your own instant coffee, though most places charge a small fee for a cup of boiling water.

The lodges around Jomsom and Namche Bazaar specialise in delicious apple pie, a trekkers' staple these days, along with local versions of pizza. It's surprising how many places even have cold beer available as well; before you complain about the price (as much as Rs 350 a bottle), consider that somebody had to carry that bottle of beer all the way up there and will probably have to carry the empty bottle back again!

### Organised Treks

Organised camping treks generally camp each night and all you have to do is eat and crawl into your tent. Even erecting the tent is handled by the trekking crew, who put it up for you at the site selected by your *sirdar* (group leader). The porters carry virtually all of the ingredients with them and there will be a cook with well-drilled assistants who can turn out meals with impressive ingenuity.

On an organised camping trek the day is run to a remarkably tight schedule. A typical pattern would be: up at 6am, start walking at 7am, stop for lunch at 10am, start after lunch at noon, stop walking at 3pm. Nepalis rise early, eat very little for breakfast, eat a large lunch in the late morning and a second meal before dark, then retire early – you will be best off to try and follow a similar schedule.

Some organised small groups stay in lodges and the fee you pay covers your accommodation and food costs.

## Everest Base Camp Trek

**Duration** 14 to 20 days

**Maximum elevation** 5545m

**Best season** October to December

**Start** Lukla

**Finish** Lukla

**Summary** Spectacular high mountain scenery, Sherpa culture, excellent lodges and views of beautiful Mt Ama Dablam are the highs of this busy and popular trek.