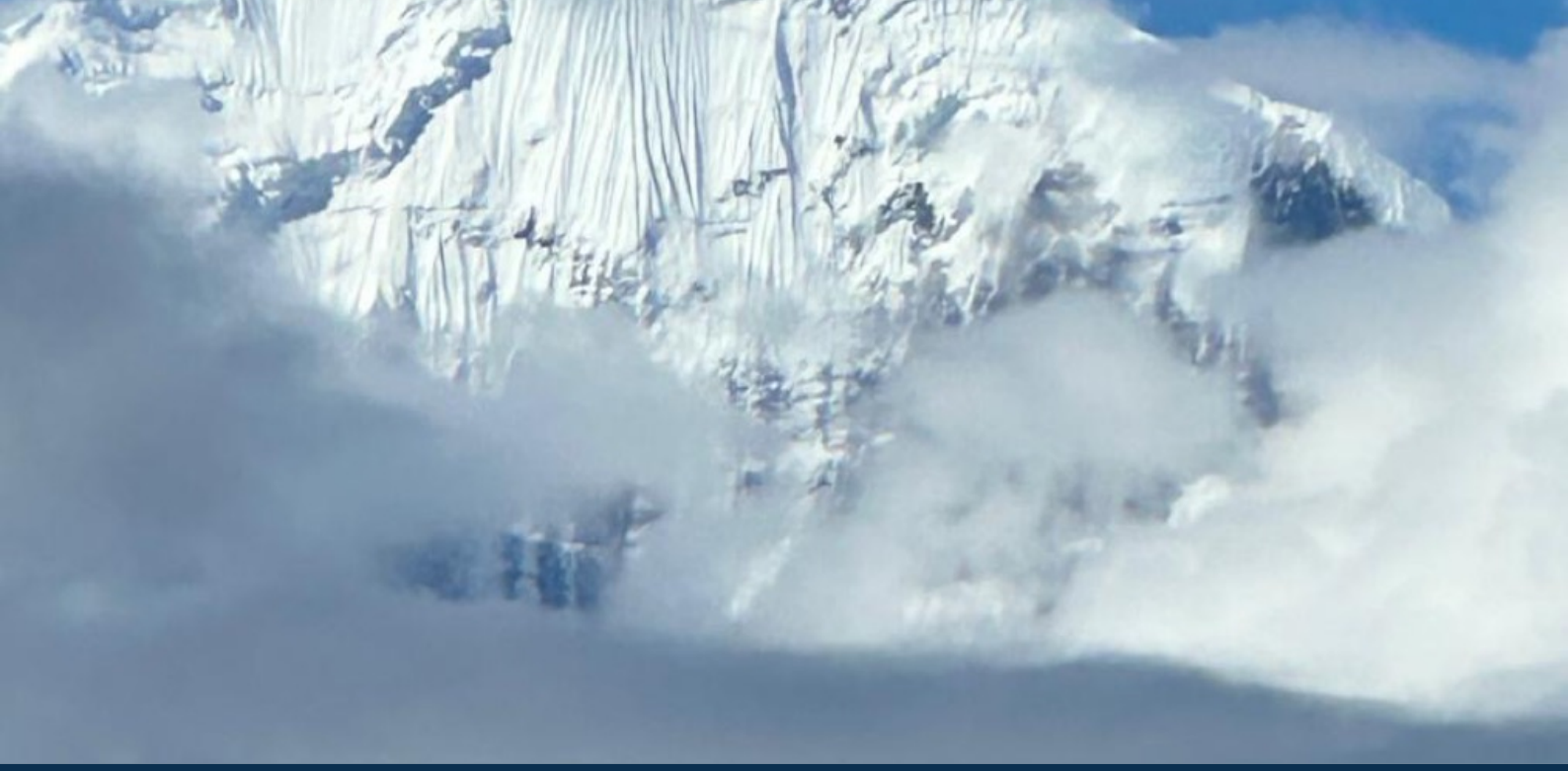


Earthbound Expeditions

Dhaulagiri Circuit Trek

18 days, from US$2,687 per person

Duration
18 days

Grade
Strenuous

Max altitude
5,360 m

Start and end
Kathmandu

On the trail
4 to 9 hours a day

Best season
Apr to May, Oct

Accommodation
Camping

Meals
All meals on the trek

Group size
4 to 12

Getting there
Via Pokhara

Dhaulagiri Circuit Trek Overview

A full circuit of the seventh-highest mountain in the world, camping from the roadhead to Marpha, over two passes above 5,000 m with no lodges or phone signal in between.

Trek overview

A complete circuit of Dhaulagiri I, at 8,167 m the seventh-highest mountain in the world, from the farmland of the Myagdi Khola over the French Pass and the Dhampus Pass into the Kali Gandaki valley. It was first walked as a trekking route in the 1990s and has never become popular, because there is no accommodation along the way. Everything you need is carried in.

Why the route is quiet

Nepal's best-known treks are popular partly because lodges have been built along them. There are no lodges here. Between Dobang and Marpha, eight days apart, there is no permanent settlement, so the only way to complete the route is with a camping crew. This keeps the cost higher and the numbers low, which is the main appeal of the trek.

Who this trip is for

Trekkers who have already completed a Himalayan trek, are comfortable at altitude and want a quiet route. It is not suitable as a first trek in Nepal, but it is a very good second or third.

Who this trip is not for

Anyone who needs a shower, a bed or a phone signal, and anyone who is not confident of walking eight hours on rough ground on the fourteenth consecutive day. There is no quick way out from the middle of this route, and this affects every decision we make on it.

Key highlights of the Dhaulagiri Circuit Trek

- Eleven nights camping in a valley with no teahouses, no lodges and nowhere to buy a meal
- The Chonbarden gorge, where the trail passes below loose rock and everyone wears a helmet
- Dhaulagiri Base Camp at 4,740 m, directly below the north face of an 8,167 m mountain
- The French Pass at 5,360 m, and the descent into Hidden Valley on the far side
- The Dhampus Pass at 5,240 m and the long descent to Marpha, with its apple brandy and a bed indoors

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
2	Kathmandu to Pokhara	25 min	-	820 m
3	Drive to Darbang, walk to Dharapani	4 to 5	8 km	1,470 m
4	Dharapani to Muri	5 to 6	13 km	1,850 m
5	Muri to Boghara	6 to 7	15 km	2,080 m
6	Boghara to Dobang	5 to 6	12 km	2,520 m

7	Dobang to Sallaghari	4 to 5	9 km	2,820 m
8	Sallaghari to Italian Base Camp	4	8 km	3,660 m
9	Italian Base Camp, acclimatisation	2 to 3	-	3,660 m
10	Italian Base Camp to Glacier Camp	5 to 6	9 km	4,200 m
11	Glacier Camp to Dhaulagiri Base Camp	4 to 5	7 km	4,740 m
12	Dhaulagiri Base Camp, crampon practice	3 to 4	-	4,740 m
13	French Pass to Hidden Valley	6 to 7	11 km	5,050 m
14	Hidden Valley, day in hand	0 to 5	-	5,050 m
15	Dhampus Pass to Yak Kharka	8 to 9	16 km	3,680 m
16	Yak Kharka to Marpha and Jomsom	5 to 6	14 km	2,720 m
17	Jomsom to Pokhara to Kathmandu	20 min	-	1,400 m
18	Fly home	-	-	1,400 m

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

We meet you at the airport and take you to your hotel. The afternoon is free. In the evening we go through the route in detail, because this is not a teahouse trek and your equipment and training are more important than usual. We check your equipment against the list and hire anything that is missing.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, arrival day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Dinner

Day 2

Travel from Kathmandu to Pokhara

The flight takes twenty-five minutes, or the drive six to seven hours along the Trishuli if the weather prevents flying. The afternoon is for final shopping and for dividing your luggage between what the porters carry and what you carry. There are no shops after tomorrow.

Altitude: 820 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Pokhara Meals: Breakfast, dinner

Day 3

Drive to Darbang and trek to Dharapani

A long morning by jeep up the Myagdi Khola to Darbang, on a road that soon becomes unpaved and further on becomes unreliable. From the roadhead we walk for two to three hours through terraced fields to Dharapani and set up the first camp. The area is subtropical, green and warm.

Altitude: 1,470 m On foot: 4 to 5 hours Night: Camp, Dharapani Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 4

Trek from Dharapani to Muri

You climb through Magar villages of stone and slate houses, which see very few trekkers. A long climb leads to the ridge at Naura, followed by a traverse to Muri. This is still farmland, and villagers often offer cucumber to passing walkers.

Altitude: 1,850 m On foot: 5 to 6 hours Night: Camp, Muri Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 5

Trek from Muri to Boghara

Today the valley narrows. The trail descends to the Myagdi Khola and follows the north bank along exposed sections that have been rebuilt several times after landslides. The day takes seven hours, with a good deal of ascent and descent, and ends at Boghara, the last village in the valley.

Altitude: 2,080 m On foot: 6 to 7 hours Night: Camp, Boghara Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 6

Trek from Boghara to Dobang

You pass Lipshe, the last permanent settlement, and enter forest of oak, then bamboo, then rhododendron. The path crosses the river on log bridges, which the crew often rebuild as needed. Dobang is a forest clearing rather than a village, and beyond this point the valley is uninhabited.

Altitude: 2,520 m On foot: 5 to 6 hours Night: Camp, Dobang Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 7

Trek from Dobang to Sallaghari

The morning is spent in deep forest, wet underfoot, with the river loud below and occasional views of Dhaulagiri through the trees. Sallaghari is a clearing in pine forest at the upper edge of the tree line. It is the last camp with firewood and the last sheltered camp.

Altitude: 2,820 m On foot: 4 to 5 hours Night: Camp, Sallaghari Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 8

Trek from Sallaghari to Italian Base Camp

You leave the forest and enter the moraine. The day is deliberately short, four hours, because both the terrain and the altitude change significantly today. Italian Base Camp is in a meadow below the west face, with the mountain filling the head of the valley. Most people spend the evening outside watching the mountain at dusk.

Altitude: 3,660 m On foot: 4 hours Night: Camp, Italian Base Camp Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 9

Acclimatisation day at Italian Base Camp

This is an active rest day. We walk for two to three hours up the side of the valley and return to sleep lower, which helps acclimatisation. From today your guide measures everyone's oxygen saturation morning and evening and records it, so that any decline is clearly identified.

Altitude: 3,660 m On foot: 2 to 3 hours Night: Camp, Italian Base Camp Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 10

Trek from Italian Base Camp to Glacier Camp through the Chonbarden gorge

This is the narrowest part of the route. The trail follows the Chonbarden gorge on scree and rock slabs below loose ground, and helmets are worn for the whole section. You reach the glacier in the afternoon. Glacier Camp is on moraine at 4,200 m, and the ice can be heard moving through the night.

Altitude: 4,200 m On foot: 5 to 6 hours Night: Camp, Glacier Camp Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 11

Trek from Glacier Camp to Dhaulagiri Base Camp

A four-hour climb up the Chonbarden glacier, roped where the crew consider it necessary, to the shelf below the north face. Dhaulagiri Base Camp, at 4,740 m, lies between Tukuche Peak on one side and the north face of an 8,000 m mountain on the other, in a bowl of ice that is constantly active.

Altitude: 4,740 m On foot: 4 to 5 hours Night: Camp, Dhaulagiri Base Camp Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 12

Acclimatisation day at Dhaulagiri Base Camp with crampon training

The second acclimatisation day. Part of the day is spent on the ice learning to use crampons and hold an ice axe, whether or not you have done so before. In the afternoon there is a short walk up towards the icefall. Tomorrow is the hardest day of the trek, and this preparation is important.

Altitude: 4,740 m On foot: 3 to 4 hours Night: Camp, Dhaulagiri Base Camp Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 13

Cross the French Pass to Hidden Valley

You set off before dawn. For most of the morning you climb snow slopes at a moderate angle to the cairns and prayer flags of the French Pass at 5,360 m, which has views of Dhaulagiri I and II, Tukuche and Sita Chuchura. The descent is on snow into Hidden Valley, a flat, enclosed and very quiet valley.

Altitude: 5,050 m On foot: 6 to 7 hours Night: Camp, Hidden Valley Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 14

Reserve day in Hidden Valley

This day is held in reserve. If snow has closed the French Pass, someone needs an extra day, or the weather has changed while we were at base camp, this day absorbs the delay. If it is not needed, those who are fit and willing can walk up towards Dhampus Peak for the morning, and the rest of the group rests at 5,050 m.

Altitude: 5,050 m On foot: 0 to 5 hours Night: Camp, Hidden Valley Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 15

Cross the Dhampus Pass to Yak Kharka

This is the longest and hardest day of the trek, and you will be briefed on it in advance. A four-hour traverse on snow and rock leads to the Dhampus Pass at 5,240 m, with Nilgiri and the western end of the Annapurna range ahead. You then descend more than 1,500 m on scree, which is hard on the knees. The day takes nine hours in total and ends at the grazing ground of Yak Kharka.

Altitude: 3,680 m On foot: 8 to 9 hours Night: Camp, Yak Kharka Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 16

Trek from Yak Kharka to Marpha and on to Jomsom

You descend through juniper and then apple orchards to Marpha, a village of whitewashed houses and flagstone streets. There is time to visit the distillery and have a full lunch before a short walk or drive to Jomsom. Tonight you stay in a lodge with a bed, a hot shower and a private room.

Altitude: 2,720 m On foot: 5 to 6 hours Night: Lodge, Jomsom Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 17

Fly to Pokhara and on to Kathmandu

The Jomsom flight leaves at first light, because the Kali Gandaki wind closes the airstrip by mid-morning. The twenty-minute flight follows the deepest gorge in the world down to Pokhara, and you continue to Kathmandu by air or by road. In the evening there is a group dinner.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, dinner

Day 18

Departure

You have a free morning and are transferred to the airport three hours before your flight. If bad weather at Jomsom has delayed us by a day, this day makes up for it, and we will already have contacted your airline if needed.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, departure day Night: No overnight Meals: Breakfast

What's included

- Airport transfers, and hotels in Kathmandu and Pokhara on a twin-sharing basis
- Flights from Kathmandu to Pokhara and from Jomsom to Pokhara to Kathmandu, with road transport as the alternative
- The jeep to the Darbang roadhead
- Annapurna Conservation Area permit and the Dhaulagiri rural municipality fee
- Full camping support: two-person tents, dining and toilet tents, mattresses, kitchen and crew
- All meals from lunch on day 3 to breakfast on day 17, cooked by our own kitchen
- A licensed leader, an assistant guide for groups of six or more, a cook and kitchen staff, and porters
- Group climbing equipment: rope, snow stakes and a helmet for each trekker for the gorge and the passes
- Oxygen cylinder, pulse oximeter and a comprehensive first aid kit carried by the leader
- All crew wages, insurance, equipment and food
- A duffel bag and a trekking map to keep

Not included

- International flights and the Nepal visa
- Travel insurance, which must cover helicopter evacuation above 5,500 m
- Personal climbing equipment: boots, crampons and an ice axe, all available for hire in Kathmandu
- A sleeping bag rated to minus 20 Celsius, available for hire in Kathmandu for about $2 a day
- Lunch and dinner in Kathmandu and Pokhara
- Drinks, snacks, hot showers where available, and laundry
- Costs resulting from a flight cancellation: extra nights, meals and changes of route
- Tips for the crew, which on a camping trek are a significant part of their income

Permits and other costs

Permit	Fee	Issued by
Annapurna Conservation Area permit (ACAP). Checked at Jomsom at the end of the trek. Included in your price, and we arrange it using your passport photograph.	NPR 3,000, about $22	Kathmandu or Pokhara, before you start
Dhaulagiri rural municipality fee. A local fee rather than a national one. Included in your price.	NPR 2,000, about $17	At Darbang, on the morning you start walking
Licensed guide, and a registered agency. Since April 2023, foreign trekkers in Nepal must be accompanied by a licensed guide booked through a registered agency. Independent trekking was never practical on this route in any case.	Inside the trek price	Nepal Tourism Board and the trekking association

TIMS card. Issued with the ACAP permit and included in your price.	NPR 2,000, about $17	Through a registered agency

Other cost	Amount	Note
Nepal visa on arrival, 30 days	$50	Paid in cash at the airport bank counter. Buy the 30-day visa, not the 15-day visa
ACAP permit	$22	NPR 3,000. The route finishes inside the Annapurna Conservation Area
Dhaulagiri rural municipality fee	$17	NPR 2,000, paid at Darbang. Included in your trip price
Camping crew, food and fuel	$95–130 a day	This accounts for the full difference in cost compared with a teahouse trek
Jomsom to Pokhara flight	$120–160	Morning flights only. The wind closes the airstrip by ten
Kathmandu to Pokhara, both directions	$120–180	Or $20 each way by tourist coach
Jeep to Darbang	$180–260	Shared by the group. The road is in poor condition
Crampons, ice axe and helmet, hired	$45–70	Hired for the trip in Thamel. Bring your own boots
Sleeping bag to minus 20 Celsius, hired	$30–40	About $2 a day. Essential on this route
Kathmandu and Pokhara hotels	$35–70 a night	Three-star, four nights in total across both cities
Travel insurance to 6,000 m	$140–220	Must cover helicopter rescue. Standard trekking cover is not sufficient
Tips for the crew	$180–260	Per trekker. A camping crew is large, and tips are an important part of their annual income

Packing list

There is no shop after day 3

On a teahouse trek, you can replace a forgotten item at the next village. On this trek there are no villages to buy from. Everything you need for fourteen days is carried in from day 3, and Pokhara is the last place to buy anything. We check your equipment carefully on the evening of day 1, because it is easy to hire a down jacket in Thamel and very difficult to manage without one at 5,050 m.

Headwear and eye protection

- A warm hat that covers your ears, and a spare in case one blows away on a pass
- A sun hat with a brim for the glacier, where the reflected light is very strong
- Category 4 glacier glasses, not ordinary sunglasses, plus a spare pair

- A buff or neck gaiter to cover your face on the passes
- A head torch with fresh batteries and a spare set, for the pre-dawn starts

Clothing

- A down jacket rated for minus 20 Celsius, not a lightweight one
- A waterproof jacket and trousers that you have tested in rain
- Two thermal base layers, and one or two fleeces
- Trekking trousers and one pair of comfortable trousers for camp
- Boots worn in over at least 60 km and stiff enough to take a crampon

Gloves and footwear

- Both liner gloves and insulated mitts. Mitts alone make it hard to use your hands
- Five pairs of trekking socks and two thick pairs for camp
- Knee-high gaiters, which are essential on the passes
- Two trekking poles with snow baskets fitted
- Light camp shoes for the time between arriving at camp and dinner

Sleeping

- A sleeping bag rated to minus 20 Celsius, which can be hired in Kathmandu if you prefer not to bring one
- A silk or fleece liner, which adds about five degrees of warmth
- An inflatable mat to use on top of the foam mattress we provide
- A pee bottle
- Two power banks, and a solar panel if you take a lot of photographs

Health

- Diamox, prescribed by and discussed with your own doctor before you travel
- A blister kit; treat hot spots before they become blisters
- High-factor sun cream and lip balm, reapplied every two hours on the glacier
- Rehydration salts and your usual remedy for an upset stomach
- Your own prescription medicines in their original packaging, carried in your daypack rather than your duffel

Bags

- One duffel of up to 15 kg for the porter, lined with a dry bag
- A 30 to 35 litre daypack with a rain cover
- Dry bags for items that must stay dry, as the duffel will sometimes be put down on wet ground
- A small padlock for the duffel and for the bag you leave in Kathmandu

Documents and money

- Passport valid for at least six months, and four passport photographs
- Travel insurance with helicopter rescue to 6,000 m, with the policy number and assistance phone number written on paper
- Your emergency contact details, on paper, given to the leader on day 1
- Cash in US dollars and rupees. There is no cash machine after Pokhara

Altitude profile

Day	Place	Sleep at	Highest point
1	Kathmandu	1,400 m	1,400 m
2	Pokhara	820 m	1,400 m
3	Dharapani	1,470 m	1,470 m
4	Muri	1,850 m	2,100 m
5	Boghara	2,080 m	2,300 m
6	Dobang	2,520 m	2,520 m
7	Sallaghari	2,820 m	2,820 m
8	Italian Base Camp	3,660 m	3,660 m
9	Italian Base Camp	3,660 m	4,000 m
10	Glacier Camp	4,200 m	4,200 m
11	Dhaulagiri Base Camp	4,740 m	4,740 m
12	Dhaulagiri Base Camp	4,740 m	4,950 m
13	Hidden Valley	5,050 m	5,360 m
14	Hidden Valley	5,050 m	5,400 m
15	Yak Kharka	3,680 m	5,240 m
16	Jomsom	2,720 m	3,680 m
17	Kathmandu	1,400 m	2,720 m

Getting there and back

The flights and long drives on this itinerary, and what happens if one is delayed or cancelled.

Arrive at least a day early

Day 1 is an arrival day, with a full equipment check in the evening. If your flight lands on the evening of day 1 you will miss it, and the equipment check ensures you can hire anything you need in Thamel, such as a down jacket for Hidden Valley. Arriving two days early is better and gives you time to see Kathmandu.

Travel to Pokhara

The flight takes twenty-five minutes in good weather; the drive takes six to seven hours. We book the flight and keep the road as the alternative. Either option fits the schedule, because day 2 has no other activities.

The Jomsom flight

Jomsom lies in the Kali Gandaki gorge, and the wind rises by mid-morning, so flights operate only at first light. Day 18 is partly intended to absorb a cancellation. If the weather keeps us at Jomsom, we drive to Pokhara, which takes most of a day on a rough road, or charter a helicopter if you have a flight to catch.

Book a flexible flight home

A changeable ticket is worth the extra cost on this route. If you fly out on the evening of day 18, we will book a day room for you in Kathmandu. However, if the Jomsom weather causes a delay of two days rather than one, a fixed ticket can become expensive.

Accommodation

Hotels at each end, a lodge at Jomsom, and eleven nights in a two-person tent, with a dining tent, kitchen and toilet tent that move with the camp.

Thirteen nights in a tent

Apart from a few basic lodges low in the Myagdi valley, there is no accommodation until Yak Kharka above Marpha, so the trek is a camping trek. You sleep in a two-person four-season tent on a foam mattress, one tent each unless you ask to share. The crew set up a dining tent and a toilet tent at each camp, cook on kerosene and bring a bowl of hot water to your tent each morning. Above Italian Base Camp the camps are on moraine, glacier and snow, and the nights are well below freezing, so a four-season sleeping bag is required.

Before and after the camping

In Kathmandu and Pokhara you stay in three-star hotels. The last night of the trek is in a lodge at Jomsom, with a twin room, a private bathroom and a hot shower.

Where	Nights	Type	Room	Bathroom
Kathmandu	2	Three-star hotel in or near Thamel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Pokhara	1	Three-star hotel near the lake	Twin or double	Private, hot water
On the trail	13	Two-person four-season tent with a foam mattress	One tent each unless you ask to share	A toilet tent, and a bowl of hot water each morning
Jomsom	1	Lodge	Twin	Private, with a hot shower

Hot shower
Available in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Jomsom only, with none for the eleven nights in between. Instead, a bowl of hot water is brought to your tent each morning.

Charging
Bring two power banks, and a small solar panel if you take a lot of photographs. There is no mains power above Darbang, and batteries drain quickly in the cold.

Wifi
Available in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Jomsom only. None on the trail, and no mobile signal above Boghara.

Drinking water
Boiled and filtered by the kitchen every morning and evening. Bring bottles holding two litres in total and a backup purification method.

Heating
None. The dining tent provides shelter from the wind but no heating. At Hidden Valley you will eat wearing a down jacket.

Toilet
A toilet tent is set up at every camp, moved with the group, and dug and filled in by the crew.

Laundry
Not available on the trail. Bring enough socks for the trek.

Luggage
One duffel of up to 15 kg is carried by a porter, and you carry one daypack. Everything else stays in Kathmandu.

Meals

Meal	Time	What it is like
Breakfast	6:00–7:00	Porridge, eggs, chapati, tea and coffee, served in the dining tent while the crew take down the camp
Lunch	11:30–13:00	Cooked on the trail: noodles, fried rice, soup, and always something hot
Dinner	18:30	Dal bhat, pasta, curry and soup, and on the last night a cake baked by the cook in a pressure cooker
Tea	16:00	Tea and biscuits on arrival at camp

Diet	How we manage it
Vegetarian	Straightforward. Most of the food is vegetarian anyway, because meat cannot be carried safely for eleven days.
Vegan	Manageable with notice. Tell us when you book, so that the cook can buy what is needed in Pokhara rather than at the roadhead.
Gluten free	Possible, but the choice is limited to rice, potatoes, dal and eggs. Bring your own bread substitute, as there are no shops after day 3.
Nut allergy	Tell us when you book and we will keep nuts out of the kitchen. Please raise this early, as there is no road for evacuation on this trek.
Halal	We can keep the kitchen meat-free, which is the practical option on a camping trek. Certified halal meat cannot be carried this far.

A typical day

Time	What happens
5:30	Wake-up tea brought to your tent
6:00	Breakfast, while the crew take down the tents
7:00	Start walking. The crew usually overtake the group within the hour
11:30	Lunch, cooked on the trail wherever there is water and shelter
13:00	Afternoon walking, usually the shorter part of the day
16:00	Arrive at camp, with tea, biscuits and your tent already set up
17:00	Oxygen saturation measured and recorded, from Italian Base Camp onwards
18:30	Dinner in the dining tent, and a full briefing on the next day
20:00	Bedtime

Difficulty and preparation

The trek is not technical, but it is long, cold and remote. Day 15 crosses a 5,240 m pass and then descends 1,500 m before camp.

Difficulty 5 of 5

This is the hardest trek we offer outside our expeditions. It is not technical, but it is long, cold, remote and self-sufficient, with two passes above 5,000 m and a nine-hour day near the end. It is a suitable next step for trekkers who have completed Everest Base Camp and the Annapurna Circuit.

- Fourteen consecutive walking days, including one of nine hours and several of six or seven hours
- Eleven nights in a tent, with overnight temperatures down to minus 20 Celsius at Hidden Valley
- A glacier crossing on which you will wear crampons and may be roped together
- A 1,500 m descent on scree on day 15, which most people find the most demanding part of the trek
- No road, lodge, shop or mobile signal for eight days in the middle of the trek

Getting ready

6 months before: Build endurance
Train three or four times a week, including one long hill walk at the weekend. Work up to six hours on rough ground with a 7 kg pack. If you cannot do this by the fourth month, consider a different trek this year and this one next year.

3 months before: Walk on consecutive days
The main challenge on this trek is not a single hard day but fourteen in a row. Twice a month, take a long walk on Saturday and another on Sunday, and note how you feel on the second day.

2 months before: Train for descents
Day 15 descends more than 1,500 m on scree. This depends on the thigh muscles and knees rather than the lungs. Add downhill repeats and step-downs to your training, and walk with poles until using them feels natural.

1 month before: Test all your equipment
Wear in your boots over at least 60 km. Sleep in your sleeping bag at home once. Practise putting on your crampons at home, so that the first time is not on a glacier at 4,200 m in the dark.

Altitude and safety

You sleep above 4,000 m for five nights and above 5,000 m for two, and the nearest road is four days behind you. For this reason our itinerary takes eighteen days rather than the sixteen offered by some operators. The two acclimatisation days, at Italian Base Camp and Dhaulagiri Base Camp, provide the trip's safety margin, and we do not offer a version without them.

What to watch for

- A headache that does not improve after water, food and paracetamol
- Nausea, or a complete loss of appetite for a whole day
- Poor sleep with a racing pulse, or waking up short of breath
- Dizziness or loss of balance
- A dry cough that gets worse when lying down, which we treat as serious rather than as a cold

How to prevent it

- Two full rest days, at 3,660 m and 4,740 m, each with a walk higher and a return lower to sleep
- Oxygen saturation measured twice a day from day 9 and recorded, so that any trend is visible
- Four litres of fluid a day, boiled and provided by the kitchen
- Diamox if your own doctor has prescribed it, started before you go high
- An assistant guide for groups of six or more, so that one person descending does not end the trip for everyone

What we do

1. Report symptoms early
Tell the leader at the first sign of a headache, not on the third morning. You will not be penalised for reporting symptoms, and our approach depends on hearing about them early.

2. Mild symptoms
Nobody with symptoms sleeps higher than the night before. There are no exceptions to this rule on this route, and the leader's decision is final.

3. Serious symptoms
If symptoms do not improve after a rest day, you descend with the assistant guide. From Hidden Valley this means crossing the Dhampus Pass to Marpha, which the leader will have planned in advance.

4. Oxygen and helicopter evacuation
We carry an oxygen cylinder and an oximeter on every departure. If the situation is serious and the weather allows flying, we call a helicopter and deal with the insurance afterwards.

Weather by month

We recommend two months of the year for this trek and run two more with a caution. The route is closed for the rest of the year.

Month	Daytime at Dhaulagiri Base Camp	Night-time at Dhaulagiri Base Camp	Night-time at Hidden Valley	Conditions	Note
January	-2°C	-18°C	-22°C	We do not run it	The passes are under deep snow and the camps cannot be used. We do not run the trek.
February	0°C	-16°C	-20°C	We do not run it	Still closed. Avalanche debris remains in the Chonbarden gorge well into the month.
March	4°C	-12°C	-15°C	Hard	The snow begins to melt, but the Dhampus Pass is usually still too deep to cross safely.
April	8°C	-8°C	-10°C	Good	The route opens from about the 20th. More snow on both passes than in autumn, and rhododendrons flowering in the lower forest.
May	11°C	-5°C	-7°C	Good	The best of spring, until about the 20th. Warm in the valley and hazier than October, with flowers in bloom.
June	12°C	-3°C	-4°C	We do not run it	The monsoon arrives. The forest section becomes muddy and full of leeches, and the views disappear. We do not run the trek.
July	13°C	-2°C	-3°C	We do not run it	Landslides on the Darbang road and no views from the passes.
August	13°C	-2°C	-3°C	We do not run it	As in July. The Myagdi Khola is in full flood and the log bridges have been washed away.
September	11°C	-5°C	-6°C	Hard	The monsoon clears during the month. The last week is sometimes fine, but the ground is still wet.
October	9°C	-10°C	-13°C	Best	The best month. Stable weather, clear air and both passes open. The trip is planned around this season.
November	5°C	-14°C	-18°C	Good	Clear and very cold. Nights at Hidden Valley in late November are hard, and the days are short.

December	1°C	-17°C	-21°C	We do not run it	Closed. Conditions at the camps above 4,000 m are too severe for the equipment we carry.

Figures for 4,740 m and 5,050 m, which is where you sleep on the cold half of the trek. The valley below Italian Base Camp is fifteen degrees warmer and tells you nothing useful about the passes.

Guides and porters

Your guide

You are accompanied by a licensed leader who has crossed both passes many times, an assistant guide for groups of six or more, a cook and two kitchen staff, and porters at a ratio of one to every two trekkers plus the camp loads. This usually means fourteen to eighteen people supporting eight trekkers, which is typical of a camping trek.

The kitchen team

The kitchen team cooks three meals a day for three weeks on kerosene, in a tent, at altitudes of up to 5,050 m, and bakes a cake for the last night. The cook boils and filters all your drinking water. On a route with no shops and no clinics, the kitchen is the most important part of our safety arrangements.

Porters and luggage

Porters carry 25 kg, not 35 kg, and wear boots and jackets that we provide. Every member of the crew is insured for rescue and medical treatment at the same altitude as you. If you would like to know what the crew are paid, please ask and we will tell you.

Responsible travel

Waste

There are no bins between Darbang and Marpha, so every wrapper, battery and tin carried in with the kitchen is carried out by the porters. The toilet tent pit is dug and filled in at every camp. We weigh the rubbish at the end of the trek as a matter of routine.

Kerosene, not firewood

The kitchen uses kerosene that we carry in. The forest between Dobang and Sallaghari is the last remaining forest in this valley, and a camping crew burning wood every night would destroy it within a decade. Carrying fuel costs more, but we do not compromise on this.

Supporting local communities

The crew are hired in Pokhara and Beni, the jeep is from Darbang, and food is bought in the Myagdi valley rather than brought from Kathmandu. On a route without lodges, crew wages are the main source of local income, which is one of the main reasons for running the trek.

Leave the glacier as you found it

Do not build cairns, leave flags or carve initials. The Chonbarden is an active glacier and the route across it changes every year, so any markers are of no use to the next group and spoil the area for everyone.

Booking and payment

How to book

Write to us or send a WhatsApp message with your preferred date and the number of people in your group. We will tell you whether the departure is confirmed, how many people have already booked, and whether we think this is the right trek for you this year.

Deposit

A 20 per cent deposit secures your place, and the balance is due sixty days before you fly. A camping trek commits us to crew and food well before you arrive, which is why the balance is due earlier than on a teahouse trek.

Cancellation

If you cancel more than sixty days before departure, the deposit can be transferred to another departure within eighteen months. Within sixty days, the crew have been hired and the food bought, so we retain fifty per cent, and within thirty days we retain the full amount. We strongly recommend travel insurance with cancellation cover.

What we ask of you

An accurate account of your fitness and your previous experience at altitude. We would much rather discuss this by email in February than at Italian Base Camp in October.

Insurance

You need helicopter evacuation cover to 6,000 m, with the policy number and the 24-hour assistance phone number. We ask for these before you fly and check them again at the equipment check, because on this route adequate insurance is essential in an emergency.

Optional extras

Dhampus Peak, 6,012 m

$690, uses day 14

A non-technical 6,000 m summit from Hidden Valley, climbed on the reserve day if the weather and the group allow. It requires a climbing permit, a climbing guide and mountaineering boots, and adds a summit to the trek. Please tell us when you book, not at base camp.

Two nights in Marpha instead of one at Jomsom

$110, 1 extra day

Marpha is the most attractive village in the Kali Gandaki valley and a good place to rest after eleven nights in a tent. You can visit the distillery and the gompa above the village, and relax at 2,670 m.

Helicopter from Jomsom to Pokhara

$550, same day

Per person on a shared charter, for use when the scheduled flights are grounded and you have a flight to catch. We keep this in reserve rather than selling it in advance, and it is the quickest solution when the Jomsom wind prevents flights.

Pokhara, three nights by the lake

$260, 3 extra days

Added at the end of the trek. A lakeside hotel, a boat trip, a massage and free time.

Private departure on your own dates

from $420 extra, same length

Your own group, on your own dates within the two seasons, with the same crew. For groups of eight or more there is no supplement.

Everest scenic flight from Kathmandu

$220, 1 morning

A one-hour flight along the range with a guaranteed window seat. It can be added on day 18 if your international flight is in the evening.

Frequently asked questions

Answers to the 14 questions travellers ask us most often. If your question is not here, contact us and we will answer it.

Is this harder than Everest Base Camp?

Yes, considerably. Everest Base Camp is a lodge trek on a wide trail with a village every two hours. This trek involves eleven nights in a tent, a glacier crossing, two passes above 5,000 m and an uninhabited valley. The altitude is similar, but every other aspect is more demanding.

Do I need mountaineering experience?

No, but you need to be willing to learn. You will wear crampons and may be roped together on the glacier. We spend a morning at base camp practising both, and people who have never used an ice axe complete the route every season. Good fitness, however, is essential.

How fit do I need to be?

You need to be able to walk for eight hours on rough ground, on consecutive days, at altitude, carrying a daypack. Day 15 is nine hours long, with a 1,500 m descent at the end. If your longest recent walk is four hours on a path, start training six months before the trek and read the fitness section.

What are the tents like?

Two-person four-season tents, one each unless you ask to share, with foam mattresses. There is a dining tent with a table and stools, and a toilet tent that moves with the camp. The tents are basic, but they are dry and warm enough.

How cold does it get?

At Hidden Valley in October, overnight temperatures of minus 10 to minus 15 Celsius are normal, and minus 20 is possible. Your sleeping bag must be rated to minus 20, and you should sleep in a hat. Days on the passes are bright and can be warm enough for a single layer while you are moving.

What are the washing facilities?

The kitchen provides a bowl of hot water each morning. This is the arrangement for eleven days. There is a shower at Jomsom on day 16.

Is there phone signal?

There is patchy signal up to Boghara. After that there is none until you cross the Dhampus Pass and descend towards Marpha. The leader carries a satellite phone for emergencies and for weather forecasts, which are more important on this route than on any other trek we run.

What happens if the French Pass is closed by snow?

We wait a day, which is what day 14 is for. If the pass is still closed, we turn back and walk out the way we came. This is rare in October and more common in spring. Turning back in these conditions is the safe choice.

What happens if someone gets altitude sickness?

They descend with the assistant guide while the rest of the group continues. This is why we bring a second guide for groups of six or more. We carry oxygen and an oximeter and use them. Above Italian Base Camp, descending means a long walk, so we aim to identify problems early.

Can I be evacuated by helicopter?

Yes, from Italian Base Camp, Glacier Camp, Dhaulagiri Base Camp and Hidden Valley, when the weather allows flying. Your insurance must cover helicopter evacuation, and the helicopter operator will ask for proof before flying. Bring your policy number and the assistance phone number, not only the certificate.

What is the best month for this trek?

October is the best month, with stable weather, open passes and the clearest air after the monsoon. Late April to mid May is the second option, with more snow on the Dhampus Pass. November is very cold at Hidden Valley. We do not recommend the trek during the monsoon or in midwinter.

Why is this more expensive than a teahouse trek of the same length?

Because there are no teahouses. All the food for eleven days is carried in by porters, along with the tents, kitchen, fuel and rope. A camping trek needs roughly three times the crew of a lodge trek of the same size, and this accounts for most of the difference in price.

How large are the groups?

Four to twelve people. With fewer than four, the camping costs per person become too high to run the trek properly. With more than twelve, the camps become difficult to manage in the narrower valleys.

Can the trek be run as a private departure?

Yes, on any dates within the two seasons. A private departure costs more per person for small groups and the same for groups of eight or more. Please write to us with your dates.

Photos, videos and reviews of this trip: earthbound.rajansimkhada.com/dhaulagiri-trek