

Earthbound Expeditions

Ghorepani Ghandruk Circuit Trek

10 days, from US$897 per person

Duration
10 days

Grade
Easy to moderate

Max altitude
3,210 m

Start and end
Kathmandu

On the trail
4 to 6 hours a day

Best season
Mar to Apr, Oct to Nov

Accommodation
Teahouses

Meals
All meals on the trek

Group size
Up to 12

Getting there
Fly to Pokhara

Ghorepani Ghandruk Circuit Trek Overview

The full anticlockwise circuit through the Annapurna foothills: sunrise on Poon Hill, the forest ridge east to Tadapani, and the descent to the Gurung village of Ghandruk, with no section walked twice.

Trek overview

A five-day circuit on the ridges west of Pokhara, walked anticlockwise so that you finish somewhere new rather than returning the same way. You climb the Bhurungdi valley to Ghorepani at 2,874 m, reach Poon Hill at 3,210 m at sunrise, then cross east over the Deurali ridge to Tadapani and descend through forest to Ghandruk. You stay in teahouses every night, and there are no passes or glaciers.

A full circuit

Most Poon Hill itineraries turn back at Ghorepani and descend the same staircase they climbed. This trek does not. Completing the circuit through Tadapani and Ghandruk adds two walking days and includes the whole second half of the region: the mossy ridge forest east of Deurali, the Gurung heartland, and close views of Annapurna South above Ghandruk. It is the longer and more complete of the two treks we offer in this area.

Who this trip is for

This trek is for people who want a real Himalayan trek but have a week and a half rather than three weeks. It suits first-time trekkers, families with children who enjoy walking, and anyone who does not want to sleep at high altitude. It requires strong legs rather than acclimatisation: there are two long sections of stone steps, and the highest overnight stop is 2,874 m.

Crowds on Poon Hill

Poon Hill is busy. In late October and early April, a few hundred people gather on the hill at sunrise, and the last fifteen minutes of the climb is a line of headtorches. The view of Dhaulagiri and the Annapurnas at sunrise is worth it, and later the same morning, the ridge east of Deurali is quiet.

Key highlights of the Ghorepani Ghandruk Circuit Trek

- Sunrise over Dhaulagiri from Poon Hill (3,210 m)
- The complete circuit: Ghorepani, Deurali, Tadapani and Ghandruk
- Rhododendron forest in flower, from late March into April
- Ghandruk, a stone Gurung village below Annapurna South
- Teahouses and hot showers every night, and no pass to cross

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
2	Kathmandu valley, fly to Pokhara	-	-	830 m
3	Drive to the road head, walk to Tikhedhunga	3–4 hrs	9 km	1,540 m
4	Ulleri staircase to Ghorepani	6–7 hrs	12 km	2,874 m

5	Poon Hill at dawn, over Deurali to Tadapani	6–7 hrs	12 km	3,210 m
6	Tadapani down to Ghandruk	3–4 hrs	7 km	1,940 m
7	Walk out to Kimche, drive to Pokhara	2–3 hrs	6 km	830 m
8	Pokhara, free day	-	-	830 m
9	Fly or drive to Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
10	Fly home	-	-	-

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

A member of our team will meet you at the airport and take you to your hotel. If you arrive early, you have time to walk into Thamel and explore the shops and shrines. In the evening, we meet to go through the route day by day, check your boots and answer your questions.

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

Day 2

Kathmandu Valley sightseeing and fly to Pokhara

In the morning, you visit the historic sites of the valley: the hilltop stupa at Swayambhunath, the riverside ghats at Pashupatinath and the carved courtyards of Patan. In the afternoon, a twenty-five-minute flight takes you west to Pokhara, at 830 m beside a lake, with the Annapurnas rising above the far shore.

Altitude: 830 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Pokhara Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3

Drive to the trailhead and trek to Tikhedhunga

An hour and a half by jeep from Pokhara to the point where the road is in good condition, somewhere between Nayapul and Hile. The walking then begins, following the Modi river past the checkpoint at Birethanti, through rice terraces and villages where the footpath is also the main street. This is an easy half day.

Altitude: 1,540 m On foot: 9 km, 3–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Tikhedhunga Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4

Trek to Ghorepani via Ulleri

This is the only demanding day. More than three thousand stone steps climb to the Magar village of Ulleri. After that, the gradient eases and the trail winds up through Banthanti and Nangethanti into rhododendron forest. In late March and April, the forest is in red flower all the way to Ghorepani.

Altitude: 2,874 m On foot: 12 km, 6–7 hrs Night: Teahouse, Ghorepani Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5

Hike to Poon Hill and trek to Tadapani

Get up in the dark for the forty-five-minute climb to Poon Hill at 3,210 m, where Dhaulagiri, Annapurna South and Machhapuchhre turn gold at sunrise. Return to the lodge for breakfast, then walk east over the Deurali ridge and down through mossy forest full of birds to Tadapani. From here, the circuit leaves the Poon Hill route.

Altitude: 3,210 m at Poon Hill On foot: 12 km, 6–7 hrs including Poon Hill Night: Teahouse, Tadapani Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6

Trek to Ghandruk

A short, steep and scenic morning: the trail descends through oak and rhododendron forest beside the Kimrong stream, past Bhaisi Kharka, and out of the trees onto the terraces above Ghandruk. You arrive by lunchtime, leaving the afternoon free for the Gurung museum, the stone lanes of the village and the views of Annapurna South.

Altitude: 1,940 m On foot: 7 km, 3–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Ghandruk Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

Trek to Kimche and drive to Pokhara

Watch the sunrise on Annapurna South from the village, then walk down the last stone steps to the road at Kimche. From there, it is a couple of hours by jeep back to Pokhara, where you have a free hot shower and dinner beside the lake.

Altitude: 830 m On foot: 6 km, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Pokhara Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

Free day in Pokhara

The day is free. Most people have a late start and then take a rowing boat on Phewa Lake, visit the Sarangkot viewpoint at sunrise if they feel up to it, see the mountain museum, have a massage, or go paragliding, for which this valley is one of the best places in the world.

Altitude: 830 m On foot: Optional 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Pokhara Meals: Breakfast

Day 9

Return to Kathmandu

A twenty-five-minute flight, or the longer road journey along the Trishuli river if you would like to see the countryside. In the evening, you have a farewell dinner with your guide.

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

Day 10

Departure

We take you to the airport. If your flight is late in the day, we will store your bags and suggest parts of the old city you did not see on day 2, or a good café where you can relax.

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

What's included

- Airport transfers & ground transport
- Licensed English-speaking guide
- Accommodation throughout the trip
- All permits & conservation area fees
- Meals as per the itinerary

Not included

- International flights
- Travel & rescue insurance
- Personal trekking gear
- Tips & personal expenses

- Nepal entry visa (on arrival)

Permits and other costs

Permit	Fee	Issued by
Annapurna Conservation Area permit (ACAP). Issued by the National Trust for Nature Conservation, which manages the conservation area. SAARC nationals pay NPR 1,000, and children under ten are free. Checked at Birethanti on the way in and again above Ghandruk.	NPR 3,000, about $22	In Kathmandu or Pokhara, ahead of the drive out
TIMS card. Since April 2023, the card is not sold to independent trekkers. Checks on this route have been inconsistent for two seasons, and some checkpoints no longer ask for it, so we buy it and carry it to avoid any problems.	NPR 2,000, about $15	Only through a registered agency
Licensed guide. Compulsory for foreign trekkers in the conservation area since April 2023, and consistently enforced since then. This is a legal requirement, and it is checked at Birethanti.	Inside the trek price	Not applicable

Other cost	Amount	Note
Kathmandu to Pokhara flight, both ways	$120–180	Or $20 by tourist coach, which takes six to seven hours each way
ACAP permit	$22	NPR 3,000. SAARC nationals NPR 1,000
TIMS card	$15	NPR 2,000, through a registered agency
Jeep, Pokhara to the road head and back	$60–90	Per vehicle, not per person
Teahouse bed	$5–10 a night	The least expensive accommodation of any trek in Nepal
Food on the trail	$18–25 a day	Three meals a day and tea. Ghorepani is the most expensive stop
Licensed guide	$28–35 a day	Including their accommodation and meals
Porter, one per two trekkers	$20–25 a day	Including their accommodation and meals
Kathmandu and Pokhara hotels	$35–60 a night	Three-star, five nights in total
Travel insurance to 4,000 m	$70–120	Must still cover helicopter rescue
Hot shower, charging, wifi	$2–4 each, each time	Not included, paid in cash
Tips, guide and porter	$80–130	Per trekker, at the end

Packing list

Baggage weight limit

Your porter carries a maximum of 20 kg, shared between two trekkers, and there is no airstrip weight limit on this trek. Many people pack too much for this circuit: it is five days, every lodge has a hot shower, and you can wash a shirt at Ghorepani and have it dry by Ghandruk. We provide the duffel bag and the sleeping bag, and anything you leave behind is stored free at our office in Kathmandu or Pokhara.

Head and eyes

- Sun hat with a brim, and a warm hat for the early morning on Poon Hill
- Buff or neck gaiter
- Category 3 sunglasses
- Headtorch and spare batteries, because day 5 starts in the dark
- SPF 50 sunscreen and lip balm with sun protection

Clothing

- Two or three merino or synthetic base layers, not cotton
- One fleece, and a light down or synthetic jacket for the evenings
- Waterproof jacket and trousers that pack small
- Two pairs of trekking trousers
- A change of clothes for the evening, as you can shower every night on this route

Hands and feet

- Light gloves for the early morning climb
- Trekking boots with ankle support, which must be broken in before the trek
- Three pairs of wool trekking socks
- Camp shoes or trainers for the evenings
- Microspikes, only if you are travelling in January or February

Bags

- Duffel bag for the porter, 20 kg maximum. We provide one
- Daypack, 25 to 30 litres, with a rain cover
- Dry bags or thick liners, because the forest stays wet after rain

Sleeping

- Sleeping bag rated to -10°C. We provide one
- Silk or cotton liner, for warmth and hygiene
- Earplugs. Teahouse walls are thin plywood, and Ghorepani is busy

Health

- Personal first aid kit: blister plasters, tape, painkillers and rehydration salts
- Any regular medication, in its original packaging
- Water purification: tablets, a filter or a SteriPen
- Hand sanitiser and wet wipes
- A knee support if you have had knee pain on descents

Documents and money

- Passport valid for six months, and two photocopies
- Four passport photographs for permits
- Travel insurance certificate showing trekking cover to 4,000 m
- $150 to $250 in small rupee notes. The reliable cash machines are in Pokhara

For this trek

- Trekking poles, which are essential. The circuit involves long stone staircases both up and down
- A camera you can operate in the dark, for the sunrise on Poon Hill
- Leech socks if you are trekking close to the monsoon season
- Binoculars. The forest between Deurali and Tadapani has many birds

Altitude profile

Day	Place	Sleep at	Highest point
1	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-
2	Pokhara	830 m	-
3	Tikhedhunga	1,540 m	-
4	Ghorepani	2,874 m	-
5	Tadapani	2,630 m	3,210 m
6	Ghandruk	1,940 m	-
7	Pokhara	830 m	-
8	Pokhara	830 m	-
9	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-

Getting to the trailhead

There are no mountain flights to be cancelled, and the road now reaches further up the hill each year.

Flights to Pokhara

The flight from Kathmandu takes twenty-five minutes and lands at an airport on flat ground at 830 m. Delays are measured in hours rather than days. This trek does not depend on small mountain aircraft finding a break in the cloud, which is why the itinerary has no spare day and does not need one.

Travelling by road

The drive from Kathmandu to Pokhara takes six to seven hours along the Trishuli river on the Prithvi Highway and costs about twenty dollars by tourist coach. On a trip with no tight connections, this is a good option, and you see part of central Nepal that you would miss by air. Tell us which you prefer when you book.

Where the walking starts

Nayapul, at 1,070 m, was the traditional starting point. The jeep track now continues past Birethanti and Hile and, in dry conditions, as far as Ulleri, so where you start walking depends on the month and the condition of the road. We drive as far as the road is in good condition on your dates and start from there, which keeps day 3 to three to four hours.

Leaving early

This is the easiest trek in Nepal to leave early. Ghandruk has a road, Ghorepani has a rough one, and a jeep is at most a few hours away from anywhere on the circuit. A helicopter is available but is rarely needed here. If someone in your group wants to stop, they can be in a hotel in Pokhara the same afternoon while the others continue.

Accommodation

Teahouse accommodation

The four nights on the trail are spent in teahouses: family-run lodges with one warm dining room, heated by a single stove, and simple twin rooms with foam mattresses and thin walls. Bring a sleeping bag for Ghorepani and Tadapani, where the nights are cold. Hot showers and charging are usually paid for separately.

Accommodation on the circuit

At Tikhedhunga, you stay in a teahouse beside the Bhurungdi river, with private bathrooms in most lodges. Ghorepani is the highest night of the circuit, with private bathrooms and a hot shower for a fee. Tadapani is on a forest ridge, and the older lodges there have shared bathrooms. Ghandruk has the best rooms on the route, in a stone Gurung house with private bathrooms.

Where	Nights	Type	Room	Bathroom
Kathmandu	3	Three-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Pokhara	3	Three-star hotel, lakeside	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Tikhedhunga	1	Teahouse beside the Bhurungdi	Twin	Private in most lodges

Ghorepani	1	Teahouse, the highest on the loop	Twin	Private, hot shower for a fee
Tadapani	1	Teahouse on the forest ridge	Twin	Shared in the older lodges
Ghandruk	1	Teahouse in a stone Gurung house	Twin	Private, in the best rooms on the route

Heating
One stove in the dining room, lit at dusk. At Ghorepani, evenings are spent around it. Bedrooms are not heated anywhere.

Hot shower
Available at every stop on this route for $2 to $4, heated by gas or solar. This is unusual in Nepal and is one of the advantages of a lower-altitude trek.

Charging
$2 to $3 per device in the dining room, and free in a few lodges at Ghandruk. Mains electricity reaches the whole circuit.

Wifi
Free or one to two dollars in most lodges, and it works well at Ghorepani and Ghandruk.

Phone signal
Ncell and NTC cover almost the whole circuit. The signal is weak in the forest between Deurali and Tadapani.

Water
Boiled water costs $1 to $2 a litre, and there are safe drinking water stations at Ghorepani and Ghandruk that are even cheaper.

Sleeping bag
Provided, rated to -10°C, which is warmer than this route requires outside winter. For use during the trek and r eturned at the end.

Bedding
A mattress, a pillow and a blanket. Use your sleeping bag on top of these, not instead of them.

Meals

Meal	Time	What it is like
Breakfast	7:00–7:30	Porridge, Tibetan bread, eggs, chapati, pancakes, tea or coffee
Lunch	12:00–13:00	Dal bhat, fried rice, noodles, soup, momo and potatoes cooked in many ways
Dinner	18:30–19:30	Soup to start, then dal bhat, pasta, thukpa, or curry and rice
Tea	on arrival	Black, milk, lemon, ginger or masala tea. Included at every stop.

Diet	How we manage it
Vegetarian	Easy throughout this circuit. Dal bhat is vegetarian, refills are free, and it is the best dish on the menu.
Vegan	Easy to arrange with advance notice. Be aware that fried rice and porridge are often made with egg or milk unless you ask otherwise.

Gluten free	Rice, dal, potatoes and eggs are safe. Bread, noodles and momo are not, and a teahouse kitchen cannot guarantee separate cookware.
Halal	There is no certified halal kitchen on the route. A vegetarian diet is the practical option.
Meat	Safer here than on high-altitude treks, because the road reaches Ghandruk and refrigeration is available. We still recommend dal bhat.

A typical day

The days are shorter than on a high-altitude trek, which leaves long evenings in a warm dining room.

Time	What happens
6:30	Tea in your room, and a bowl of warm water to wash in
7:00	Pack, and put the duffel outside your door for the porter
7:30	Breakfast together in the dining room
8:15	On the trail. The guide sets a slow, steady pace
12:00	Lunch at a teahouse on the route, for about an hour
13:00	One to three more hours of walking, depending on the day
15:00	Arrive at the teahouse for tea, choose a bed, and have a shower while the water is hot
16:30	Free time: reading or cards in the dining room as the stove is lit
18:30	Dinner, and a briefing from the guide on the next day
21:00	Bed, earlier on the night before Poon Hill

Difficulty and preparation

Difficulty 2 of 5

Long stone staircases up and down, at low altitude.

- Four to six hours of walking a day for five days, with one day of six to seven hours.
- The Ulleri staircase is the hardest section: more than three thousand stone steps and around 500 m of ascent, which takes most people two to three hours.
- The highest overnight stop is 2,874 m, which is low enough that altitude sickness is unlikely.
- No passes, no glaciers, no snow underfoot in the trekking seasons and no exposed sections.
- The descent from the Deurali ridge and the long descent to Ghandruk are hardest on the knees. Trekking poles are more important here than fitness.

Getting ready

6 weeks before: Build endurance

Train three times a week for 40 minutes, at a pace at which you can still hold a conversation. Walking, cycling or swimming are all suitable. Most people who find this trek difficult were fit enough but had not walked on several consecutive days.

5 weeks before: Train on stairs
Replace one session with stair training: a stairwell, a stadium or a steep path, for half an hour of climbing and descending. The Ulleri staircase uses muscles that flat walking does not, and general cardio training does not replace stair training.

4 weeks before: Train in your boots
Wear the boots you will trek in for every session, with a daypack loaded to 5 kg. Blisters end more short treks than anything else, and they can be prevented by training in your boots in the month before you travel.

3 weeks before: Train for descents
Find a hill with 300 m of descent and walk down it repeatedly, using trekking poles. This circuit descends 690 m to Ghandruk on day 6 and another 300 m the next morning, and very few people train for descents.

2 weeks before: Walk on consecutive days
Walk for four hours on Saturday and for two hours on Sunday morning. The trek involves five consecutive days of walking, and a single long walk every two weeks does not prepare you for that.

1 week before: Rest
Halve the amount of training and keep the same number of sessions. Training in the last week will not make you fitter and may cause an injury. Do not break in any new equipment, and rest well.

Altitude and safety

Altitude is a minor concern on this trek. This section explains why, and the precautions we still take.

The highest point where you sleep is Ghorepani at 2,874 m, and the highest point you reach is Poon Hill at 3,210 m, for about an hour at sunrise. Acute mountain sickness is uncommon below 3,000 m and is very rare on this route: in most seasons, nobody in the group experiences more than a restless night and slight breathlessness on the climb from Ulleri. A walk to 3,210 m is not an altitude challenge. However, altitude sickness is rare rather than impossible, and the precautions below are easy to follow.

What to watch for

- A headache that does not improve with water and paracetamol
- Nausea, or no appetite at mealtimes
- Dizziness, or feeling light-headed without having had any alcohol
- A poor night at Ghorepani, waking repeatedly and short of breath
- Loss of coordination, which at any altitude means you must descend immediately

How to prevent it

- Take the climb from Tikhedhunga to Ghorepani slowly. It is the only significant ascent on the trek, and people often go too fast.
- Drink two to three litres of water a day, even if you do not feel thirsty.
- Eat well at Ghorepani, even if you are tired.
- Limit beer at Ghorepani. It is readily available and is the most common cause of a poor night's sleep here.
- Sleep in your sleeping bag to stay warm at 2,874 m, as a warm night is a restful one.

What we do

1. Daily health checks
Your guide carries a pulse oximeter and measures your oxygen saturation and pulse on the one night you sleep above 2,500 m, at Ghorepani. It is a quick check, and the results are recorded.

2. Serious symptoms
If someone is unwell, we descend early. Descent is the only effective treatment, and on this route it is easy. Day 5 descends 244 m, and missing the sunrise climb means missing a view, not the trek.

3. Road access
There is a rough road to Ghorepani and a good one to Ghandruk. Anyone who needs to leave can be in Pokhara, at 830 m, within a few hours, which is not the case on most treks in Nepal.

4. Helicopter evacuation
Helicopters are available but are rarely needed. Evacuation to Pokhara takes about twenty minutes from anywhere on the circuit and costs $2,000 to $3,500. Your insurance should cover it. In practice, the problems we treat on this trek are blisters, knee pain and stomach upsets.

Weather by month

There are two months when we do not run this trek, and two months when conditions are at their best.

Month	Daytime on the trail	Night-time, lower villages	Night at Ghorepani	Conditions	Note
January	12°C	2°C	-7°C	Hard	Very clear air and very few trekkers. There is snow at Ghorepani, and the shaded forest trail to Tadapani becomes icy.
February	14°C	3°C	-6°C	Hard	Getting warmer, but still cold at the top. The first rhododendrons flower on the lowest slopes late in the month.
March	17°C	6°C	-2°C	Best	The forest flowers from the bottom of the hill upwards, and the woods around Ghorepani reach their peak in the last week.
April	20°C	8°C	1°C	Best	The best month to visit. The rhododendrons around Ghorepani are in full flower in the first two weeks, and the walking is warm.
May	22°C	11°C	4°C	Good	Warm and increasingly hazy. Afternoon thunderstorms build, and views from Poon Hill are unreliable after about the 10th.
June	23°C	13°C	7°C	Hard	The monsoon arrives. Leeches in the forest, cloud over the mountains, and the stone steps are slippery all day.

July	23°C	14°C	8°C	We do not run it	We do not run this trek in this month. Cloud usually hides the view from Poon Hill.
August	23°C	14°C	8°C	We do not run it	Similar to July, with a risk of landslides on the access road and leeches throughout the forest.
September	21°C	12°C	5°C	Good	The rain clears during the month. From about the 20th, it is green, clear and very quiet.
October	18°C	8°C	1°C	Best	The most reliable month of the year and by far the busiest. Ghorepani is fully booked by mid-afternoon.
November	15°C	5°C	-3°C	Best	Cold nights, clear mornings and fewer trekkers after the festivals. One of the best months on this route.
December	13°C	3°C	-6°C	Hard	Clear, bright and quiet. Very walkable with a warm sleeping bag, and snow is likely at Ghorepani late in the month.

Averages from Nepal DHM station data for the Pokhara valley and the Annapurna foothills, adjusted for height. Any given week can sit several degrees either side, and a clear December night at Ghorepani is colder than the table suggests.

Guides and porters

Your guide

Every departure is led by a government-licensed guide trained in wilderness first aid, with one porter for every two trekkers. A second guide joins from 13 trekkers, so that nobody is ever alone at the back of the group. Our guides come from these hills, and several of those who work on this circuit grew up in Ghandruk or Ulleri.

Porters and luggage

Each porter carries 20 kg, which is your duffel bag and one other. This is below the 25 kg limit set by the trekking association and well below the loads you will see carried by some other groups. If your bag is overweight, the load is split rather than added to. Porters carry duffel bags, not daypacks: you carry your own water, camera, jacket and snacks.

Staff pay and insurance

Wages, insurance, food and accommodation for every guide and porter are included in the price on this page, and are not requested from you on the trail. All staff are insured for accidents and helicopter evacuation on the same terms we require of you. The trekking industry has a long history of porters climbing stone steps in poor footwear for very low pay. Including fair pay in the package price is the way to avoid this.

Tipping

Tipping is customary but not compulsory, and it never replaces wages. On a trek of this length, $80 to $130 per trekker for the whole team is usual, given together on the last evening rather than during the trek. Your guide will not ask for a tip and would prefer that it is not given in front of everyone.

Responsible travel

Drinking water

A trekker drinking bottled water uses fifteen or twenty plastic bottles on this short circuit, and each one has to be carried back down by a porter. There are safe drinking water stations at Ghorepani and Ghandruk that cost much less than bottled water, and boiled water is available at every lodge. Bring water purification as a backup.

Waste

We carry out everything we bring onto the trail that is not eaten. This is the busiest short trek in Nepal, so careless groups cause the most visible damage here, and every operator should leave the ridge as they found it.

Supporting local communities

Every lodge you stay in on this circuit is a family business in its own village, and Ghandruk in particular has funded much of its school and water supply from trekking. The ACAP fee goes to a national trust rather than to the government, and a documented share returns to these villages. Nearly everything you pay us is spent within a day's walk of the trail.

Local customs

Ask before photographing anyone, and especially before photographing a house or a shrine. Stand on the mountain side of the path when a mule train passes. The Gurung museum at Ghandruk is run by the village rather than as a tourist attraction, and a small donation there is more helpful than most souvenirs.

Booking and payment

How to book

Send us an email or a WhatsApp message with your approximate month of travel. You will receive a personal reply from someone who has walked this circuit. Nothing is payable at this stage, and nothing is due until you pay a deposit.

Deposit

A 30% deposit secures your dates, and the balance is due on arrival in Kathmandu, in cash or by card. At the same time, we ask for a copy of your passport, your insurance certificate and any dietary or medical information, because the permits are issued using your passport details.

Payment

You can pay by bank transfer or by card through a secure link. Card payments carry a bank fee of about 4 per cent, which we show you before you pay. In Kathmandu, we accept US dollars, pounds, euros or rupees.

Cancellation

If you cancel more than 30 days before departure, your deposit can be transferred to any other date or trip we run, with no time limit. If you cancel within 30 days, the deposit is kept, because by then the crew has been booked and the permits bought. If we cancel for any reason other than weather, you receive a full refund.

Private and group departures

Both cost the same for a group of five or more. A private departure runs on your dates at your pace and can be arranged for one person. A group departure runs on the dates in the table, with a maximum of twelve people. This trek is enjoyable both in a group and alone with a guide.

Late bookings

Outside October, a week's notice is enough, as there are no mountain flights to book. For the middle two weeks of October, we need three weeks' notice, because beds at Ghorepani are limited. We have started travellers on this trek two days after they contacted us.

Optional extras

A night at Jhinu and the hot springs

$110, +1 day

Continue from Ghandruk to Jhinu Danda and down to the natural hot pools beside the Modi river. After five days of stone steps, this is a very welcome addition.

Paragliding over Pokhara

$95, 1 morning

Half an hour in the air from Sarangkot, facing the whole Annapurna range. Day 8 is already free, and Pokhara is one of the best places in the world for paragliding.

Mardi Himal high camp

from $420, +4 days

Join the ridge east of Ghandruk and climb to 3,580 m below Machhapuchhre. A good next step if you would like to go higher after this circuit.

Chitwan jungle safari

from $390, +3 days

Look for rhinos, sloth bears and possibly a tiger in the lowland forest, between Pokhara and Kathmandu on the return journey.

Two more nights in Pokhara

$120, +2 days

Two extra nights by the lake at the end of the trip. Many travellers wish they had added them.

Single room

$130

A room to yourself for all six hotel nights, and for the teahouse nights wherever the lodge has one available, which on this route is usually the case.

Luxury lodge upgrade in the Annapurna foothills

Price on request

Mountain Lodges of Nepal runs lodges in the Annapurna foothills at Dhampus, Landruk, Ghandruk, Majgaon, Tomijong and Birethanti. Where this route stops in one of those villages, we can book the lodge in place of the teahouse: a private room with its own bathroom, a garden and a good dinner.

Higher on the route there are only teahouses, so those nights stay the same. We confirm availability for your dates before you book.

Frequently asked questions

Answers to the 20 questions travellers ask us most often. If your question is not here, contact us and we will answer it.

How is this different from the Annapurna Panorama trek?

The Panorama trek goes up to Ghorepani, climbs Poon Hill and returns down the same valley. This trek continues east over the Deurali ridge to Tadapani, down through the forest to Ghandruk, and out on the other side of the loop. It is two days longer, never repeats a section, and is the more complete of the two. We recommend the Panorama trek only if you are short of time.

Is this trek suitable as my first trek in Nepal?

Yes, it is one of the best first treks. You sleep in teahouses every night, the highest overnight stop is 2,874 m, a road is never far away, and you still see Dhaulagiri and the Annapurnas at sunrise. However, it is a proper trek, not a short introduction: five days of walking with two long staircases. People often underestimate it because it is at low altitude.

How fit do I need to be?

You need to be able to walk four to six hours on stone steps for five consecutive days, carrying a light daypack. The six-week training plan on this page is suitable for someone who is reasonably active. The most important thing to train on is stairs, both up and down, because the circuit consists largely of stone steps.

Can I bring children?

Yes. This is the trek we recommend for families. The minimum age is eight, with a parent. The days are short enough to keep children interested, and there is a hot shower and usually wifi at the end of each day. The early morning climb to Poon Hill is the only part children may find difficult.

Can I trek on my own?

You can book as a single traveller, but you will still have a guide with you: since April 2023, a licensed guide has been compulsory for foreign trekkers in the conservation area, and this is enforced at the Birethanti checkpoint. A private trek for one person runs on your dates for $1,240, regardless of other bookings.

How difficult is the Ulleri staircase?

It has more than three thousand stone steps, climbs around 500 m, and takes most people two to three hours. It is tiring rather than dangerous: the steps are wide, well built and dry in the trekking seasons. Porters climb it in under an hour, but that is not a useful comparison. Use poles, keep a slow rhythm and stop whenever you need to.

Where does the walking start?

It depends on the condition of the road. Nayapul, at 1,070 m, was the traditional starting point, but the jeep track now continues beyond Birethanti and Hile, and in dry conditions almost to Ulleri. We drive as far as the road is in good condition on your dates and start walking from there, which keeps day 3 to three to four hours. We do not drive to Ulleri to avoid the staircase unless you ask us to.

When do the rhododendrons flower?

The forest flowers from the bottom of the hill upwards. The lowest slopes near Ulleri start flowering in the first week of March, the forest around Ghorepani is in full flower between the last week of March and mid-April, and the highest trees are still flowering in early May. If the flowers are your main reason for coming, the first two weeks of April are the most reliable time to book.

How crowded is Poon Hill at dawn?

In peak season, in October and early April, there can be a few hundred people at the top, and the last part of the path is a slow line of headtorches. It is busy. We leave earlier than most lodges, and by 8 am, once you are past Deurali on the ridge to the east, you will see very few other trekkers for the rest of the day.

Which is better, spring or autumn?

Autumn is best for clear views and spring for colour. October and November have the most reliable mountain views of the year, and November is quieter once the festivals are over. March and April bring the rhododendrons in flower, the highlight of this route, though the horizon is slightly hazier.

Will I get altitude sickness?

It is unlikely. You sleep at 2,874 m for one night and reach 3,210 m for an hour, and acute mountain sickness is uncommon below 3,000 m. A few people sleep poorly at Ghorepani and some find the climb from Ulleri makes them breathless, and that is usually all. Your guide still checks your oxygen saturation at Ghorepani, because altitude sickness is rare but not impossible.

Do I still need insurance with helicopter cover?

Yes. It is a condition of booking, even though you are unlikely to need it on this route. Cover to 4,000 m is sufficient. A rescue flight to Pokhara costs $2,000 to $3,500, and the helicopter will not fly without a guarantee of payment, which must be in place before an emergency.

What are the lodges like?

The lodges are comfortable and better than most people expect. Ghandruk has some attractive stone houses with private bathrooms and good beds. Ghorepani is the busiest and coldest stop, with a large dining room heated by a central stove. Every stop on the circuit has a hot shower for two to four dollars, which is not the case on any high-altitude trek.

Is there wifi, phone signal and charging?

Yes, all three, and they all work. Mains electricity reaches the whole circuit, charging costs two to three dollars per device, and the wifi at Ghorepani and Ghandruk is good enough for a video call. Ncell and NTC cover almost the whole route; the forest between Deurali and Tadapani is the only area with weak signal.

How cold does it get at night?

At Ghorepani, the coldest overnight stop, temperatures fall to about -6°C in December and January and to one or two degrees above freezing in April and October. The lower villages are mild all season, and in April you can walk in a shirt. Bedrooms are not heated anywhere, which is why we provide a sleeping bag.

Which permits do I need?

You need the Annapurna Conservation Area permit, at NPR 3,000 (about $22), issued by the National Trust for Nature Conservation, and a TIMS card at NPR 2,000 (about $15). Both are included in the price, and we arrange them using your passport details. TIMS checks have become inconsistent on this route, but we buy the card so that you have no problems at checkpoints.

How much cash should I bring?

Bring $150 to $250, changed into small rupee notes in Pokhara, to cover showers, charging, drinks, snacks and tips. There are cash machines at Ghorepani and Ghandruk, but they are not reliable, so plan to carry all the cash you will need.

How much notice do you need?

A week's notice is usually enough for most of the year. For the middle two weeks of October, give us about three weeks, because Ghorepani becomes fully booked and we want to reserve beds in advance. Outside the peak season, we have started travellers on this trek at two days' notice.

Can you change the itinerary?

Yes, and most groups make some changes. You can add a second night at Ghandruk to walk up to the Australian Camp viewpoint, finish at Jhinu for the hot springs, walk out via Landruk instead of Kimche, or split day 6 into two days to make the descent easier on your knees. For a group of five or more, a private trek on your own dates costs no more than joining a group.

What is the most useful advice for this trek?

Bring trekking poles and use them on the descents. Very few people have difficulty on the climb to Ghorepani, but many arrive at Ghandruk with sore knees that could have been avoided. Also, go to bed early at Ghorepani and leave for Poon Hill ten minutes before the other lodge guests.

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