

Earthbound Expeditions

Kathmandu Valley Day Hikes

6 days, from US$497 per person

Duration **6 days**	Grade **Easy to moderate**	Max altitude **2,762 m**
Start and end **Kathmandu**	Walking time **2 to 7 hours a day**	Best season **Oct to Apr**
Accommodation **Hotel and guesthouse**	Meals **Breakfast and lunch**	Group size **Private, from 1**
Getting around **Private vehicle**		

Kathmandu Valley Day Hikes Overview

Four different hills on the rim of the Kathmandu Valley, walked one a day from a single hotel base, with a night at a monastery at the end.

Tour overview

Five days of walking on the hills around the Kathmandu Valley, based at a hotel in the city rather than on a trail. The trip includes four summits, two of them close to 2,750 m, and a night in a working monastery, with no permits, porters or domestic flights. It offers the most walking you can do in Nepal without going on a trek.

The hills around the valley

Many visitors see only the valley floor and assume the surrounding hills are suburbs. In fact, Shivapuri is a national park where leopards live. Phulchowki has around three hundred recorded bird species and the finest broadleaf forest within fifty miles of the city. From either summit on a winter morning, you can see two hundred kilometres of the Himalaya.

Ending at a monastery

After four days of out-and-back walks, the final walk leads to a destination. The route from Dhulikhel to Namobuddha is a one-way walk, and Namobuddha is one of the three most important Buddhist sites in Nepal, set on a hill among fields and receiving few visitors. The guesthouse is simple, and the evening prayers are the part most travellers remember.

Who this trip is for

Walkers with a week available, travellers with a gap in their Nepal itinerary, families with teenagers, and anyone who wants days in the hills without living out of a duffel bag. It also works well in the week before a Himalayan trek, because four days of climbing to 2,700 m is proper preparation.

Key highlights of the Kathmandu Valley Day Hikes

- Shivapuri at 2,732 m, through the national park forest above Budhanilkantha
- Phulchowki at 2,762 m, the highest hill on the valley rim and the best birdwatching forest near the city
- Champadevi at 2,285 m, from the Pharping monasteries down to the old town of Kirtipur
- The walk from Dhulikhel to Namobuddha, and a night in the monastery guesthouse
- No repeated packing, no permits and no early flights. You sleep in the same bed for four of the five nights

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
2	Budhanilkantha to Shivapuri and back	6 to 7	16 km	2,732 m
3	Godavari to Phulchowki and back	6 to 7	18 km	2,762 m
4	Pharping to Champadevi to Kirtipur	5 to 6	14 km	2,285 m
5	Dhulikhel to Namobuddha	4	10 km	1,750 m

6	Namobuddha to Panauti, and out	2 to 3	8 km	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 four hills with you, check the weather forecast for the week and decide the order of the walks, so that the clearest morning is used for the highest hill.

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

Day 2

Hike to Shivapuri

Drive half an hour north to the Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park gate at Budhanilkantha, then climb steadily through oak and rhododendron forest. Nagi Gompa, a Tibetan nunnery on a shoulder of the hill at 2,300 m, is an hour and a half up and a good place to stop. The summit at 2,732 m is two hours further, with views of Ganesh Himal and Langtang to the north. You descend by the same route and are back at the hotel for tea.

Altitude: 2,732 m On foot: 6 to 7 hours, 16 km Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, packed lunch

Day 3

Hike to Phulchowki

Drive forty minutes south-east to Godavari and the botanical garden, then walk four hours up through the finest forest near the city: subtropical at the bottom, oak and laurel in the middle, and moss and rhododendron near the top. Phulchowki, at 2,762 m, has a shrine, an army post and, on a clear day, a view of Everest to the east. The descent in the afternoon is easier.

Altitude: 2,762 m On foot: 6 to 7 hours, 18 km Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, packed lunch

Day 4

Hike from Pharping to Champadevi and Kirtipur

Drive south to Pharping, where the Asura cave and the Tibetan monasteries above it are worth an hour before you start walking. You then climb the pine ridge to Champadevi at 2,285 m, which has a stupa, prayer flags and a view over the whole valley. The descent follows the ridge north and down into Kirtipur, a Newar hill town that few visitors reach.

Altitude: 2,285 m On foot: 5 to 6 hours, 14 km Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, packed lunch

Day 5

Walk from Dhulikhel to Namobuddha

Drive an hour east to Dhulikhel, an old trading town on the road to Tibet with a Himalayan view from its ridge. The walk to Namobuddha takes four hours through terraced farmland and Tamang villages, and ends at the stupa where, according to legend, a prince gave his body to a starving tigress. You stay at the monastery guesthouse, which is simple, and can attend the evening prayers.

Altitude: 1,750 m On foot: 4 hours, 10 km Night: Monastery guesthouse, Namobuddha Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 6

Walk from Namobuddha to Panauti and return to Kathmandu

You can attend the morning prayers at six if you wish, then walk two hours down through the fields to Panauti, a Newar town at the meeting of two rivers, with a thirteenth-century temple and very few visitors. From there the vehicle takes you to the airport or back to your hotel, an hour away.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: 2 to 3 hours, 8 km Night: No overnight Meals: Breakfast

What's included

- Airport transfers, and a private vehicle with a driver to and from every trailhead
- Five nights: four in the same Kathmandu hotel and one at the Namobuddha monastery guesthouse
- A licensed hiking guide on all five walking days
- Breakfast every morning, a packed lunch on each day hike, and full board at Namobuddha
- Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park entry, and the Phulchowki and Namobuddha fees
- A valley hiking map, and the option to change the order of the hills to suit the weather

Not included

- International flights and the Nepal visa
- Dinner in Kathmandu, which is inexpensive and best chosen yourself
- Drinks, tips and personal expenses
- Travel insurance
- Optional extras: the Everest scenic flight, a valley heritage day, Nagarkot at the end

Permits and other costs

Permit	Fee	Issued by
Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park entry. Charged per entry rather than per day. Children under ten enter free and SAARC nationals pay a lower fee. Included in your price.	NPR 1,000, about $8	At the Budhanilkantha gate on the morning
Phulchowki forest and Godavari botanical garden. Small fees, included in your price. The botanical garden is worth a fifteen-minute visit on the way.	About NPR 600 in total	At the Godavari gate
Namobuddha monastery. There is no entry fee. The guesthouse is run by the monastery and the money you pay for your stay goes directly to it.	A donation, and the guesthouse charge	At the monastery
TIMS card and trekking permit. None of these walks are classified as trekking, so there is no TIMS card, no conservation area permit and no paperwork beyond your visa. This is one reason the trip can be arranged at short notice.	Not required	-

Other cost	Amount	Note
Nepal visa on arrival, 15 days	$30	Cash at the airport bank counter
Kathmandu hotel	$35–70 a night	Three-star, four nights in the same room
Namobuddha monastery guesthouse	$25–40 a night	One night, full board and vegetarian

Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park entry	$8	NPR 1,000, paid at the Budhanilkantha gate
Phulchowki forest and Godavari garden fees	$5	Small fees, paid at the start of the walk
Licensed hiking guide	$30–35 a day	For five days. The trails branch often and are poorly marked
Private vehicle and driver	$55–85 a day	To each trailhead and back, and to Dhulikhel and from Panauti
Packed lunches	$6–10 a day	Prepared by the hotel. There is nowhere to buy food on three of the four hills
Dinner in Kathmandu	$10–25 a day	Not included. There are many good restaurants within walking distance of the hotel
Travel insurance	$40–80	Standard travel cover that includes hiking. None of the walks are high or remote
Tips, guide and driver	$50–80	Per walker, paid at the end of the trip

Packing list

Luggage stays at the hotel

On this trip you only unpack once. Bring a daypack for the hills and a small overnight bag for the single night at Namobuddha. Everything else stays in your Kathmandu hotel room, which we keep for you across the two nights you are away from it.

Headwear

- A sun hat with a brim, for the open ridge on Champadevi
- A warm hat for the summits between November and February
- Sunglasses

Clothing

- Layers rather than one warm coat. You start in the valley at 1,400 m and finish at 2,700 m
- A light waterproof jacket, in any month
- A warm layer for the summits and for evenings at the monastery, which has no heating
- Clothes that cover shoulders and knees for the monasteries at Pharping and Namobuddha

Footwear

- Boots with ankle support and good grip, for forest tracks with roots and loose stone
- Three pairs of walking socks
- Trekking poles, which we can lend you if you prefer not to fly with them. Both descents are long
- Comfortable clothes and shoes for evenings in Kathmandu

Health

- Sun cream, factor 30 or above. The valley is at altitude and the sun is stronger than the temperature suggests
- A blister kit, to be used as soon as you feel rubbing
- A dust mask or buff for the traffic on the drive out of Kathmandu
- Insect repellent, which is needed on the forest hills in warmer months
- Your own prescription medicines in their original packaging

Bags

- A 20 to 25 litre daypack with a rain cover, which is all you carry
- A small overnight bag for the one night at Namobuddha
- Bottles or a bladder holding two litres of water, as there is nowhere to buy water on the hills
- Binoculars, which are especially useful for birdwatching on Phulchowki

Documents

- A passport valid for at least six months, and two passport photographs for the visa
- US dollars in clean notes for the visa counter
- Travel insurance details, on paper as well as on your phone

Altitude profile

Day	Place	Sleep at	Highest point
2	Shivapuri	1,400 m	2,732 m
3	Phulchowki	1,400 m	2,762 m
4	Champadevi	1,400 m	2,285 m
5	Namobuddha	1,750 m	1,820 m
6	Panauti	1,400 m	1,750 m

Getting there and back

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

Getting to Kathmandu

You fly into Tribhuvan International Airport via Delhi, Doha, Dubai, Istanbul, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur or Singapore. There are no direct flights from Europe or North America. There are no activities on day 1, so a late arrival is not a problem.

Visa on arrival

Fill in the form at the kiosk, pay US$30 in cash for a 15-day visa at the bank counter, then go through immigration. Bring clean dollar notes. Indian nationals do not need a visa.

No domestic flights

This is an advantage of this trip. Nothing can be cancelled by weather at Lukla or wind at Jomsom, nothing needs to be rebooked, and no spare day is needed for delays. Everything is within an hour's drive of your hotel.

Departure

Day 6 finishes at Panauti in the late morning, and the vehicle takes you to the airport, an hour away, or back to the hotel. If your flight is in the evening, we will arrange a day room for you.

Accommodation

You stay four nights in a Kathmandu hotel and one night in a monastery guesthouse, which keeps the logistics of this trip simple.

Where	Nights	Type	Room	Bathroom
Kathmandu	4	Three-star hotel, in or near Thamel	Twin or double, the same room throughout	Private, hot water
Namobuddha	1	Monastery guesthouse	Twin, plain and quiet	Private, hot water, and no heating

Hot shower
Every night, in your own bathroom, which is one of the main advantages of this trip after a day on the hills.

Wifi
Available at the hotel and, with a good connection, at the monastery. There is none on the hills, and mobile signal is patchy above 2,400 m.

Charging
Mains power at both, with round-pin sockets. Bring an adaptor.

Heating
There is no heating at the monastery, and Namobuddha at 1,750 m is cold indoors in January. Thick blankets are provided.

Drinking water
Filtered at the hotel and boiled at the monastery. The guide carries a filter on the hills, and you should carry two litres.

Food on the hill
There is no food available on Shivapuri or Phulchowki above the gate. A packed lunch is provided every day, and there are teahouses at Pharping and on the Namobuddha walk.

Laundry
Same-day service at the hotel, charged by the kilo and inexpensive, which is useful after four days of walking.

Luggage
Your luggage stays in the hotel room. You carry a daypack, and you only need an overnight bag for the night at Namobuddha.

Meals

Meal	Time	What it is like
Breakfast	6:30–7:30	At the hotel, served early so that you reach the trailhead before the day warms up
Packed lunch	12:00–13:30	Prepared by the hotel: sandwiches, boiled eggs, fruit, a snack bar and juice. Usually eaten at the top
Dinner	19:00	Your own choice in Kathmandu, where there are many good restaurants. Included and vegetarian at Namobuddha
Tea	16:00	At a teahouse near the trailhead on the way back, chosen in advance by the driver

Diet	How we manage it
Vegetarian	Easy. Namobuddha is entirely vegetarian, and the hotel will prepare a vegetarian packed lunch on request.
Vegan	Straightforward in Kathmandu. Tell us when you book so that the packed lunches can be prepared to suit you.
Gluten free	Manageable. The packed lunch is rice, eggs and fruit instead of sandwiches, which needs a day's notice.
Nut allergy	Tell us when you book. The hotel kitchen will keep nuts out of the packed lunches and the guide will inform the monastery.
Halal	Available in Kathmandu. The monastery meals are vegetarian, which covers the one night away.

A typical day

You leave at seven, climb a hill, have a packed lunch at the top, return by four and have dinner wherever you choose in Kathmandu.

Time	What happens
6:30	Early breakfast at the hotel
7:15	Leave by vehicle, early enough to avoid about an hour of Kathmandu traffic
8:00	Arrive at the park gate, pay the entry fee and start walking
12:30	Reach the top and have a packed lunch

13:30	Descend, which on these hills takes about two thirds of the time of the ascent
16:00	Tea at a teahouse near the trailhead, then the drive back
17:00	Back at the hotel, with a shower and a free evening

Difficulty and preparation

Difficulty 2 of 5

There are two demanding hill days, one moderate day and two easy days. Shivapuri and Phulchowki each climb about 1,300 m and take six to seven hours out and back, which is a full day's walking. The other walks are gentler, and any day can be swapped or skipped without affecting the rest.

- Two climbs of about 1,300 m, each in one continuous ascent and descended by the same route
- Forest tracks with roots, loose stone and, after rain, mud
- A high point of 2,762 m, which is low enough that altitude sickness is not a concern
- You carry only a daypack, every day
- A vehicle waits at the trailhead at the end of every walk, so a day can be shortened at any point

Getting ready

8 weeks before: Build up to six hours

Two of the walks climb 1,200 m or more and take six to seven hours. If your usual walk is two hours on flat ground, increase it gradually. One long hilly walk a week for eight weeks is enough.

4 weeks before: Practise descents

Shivapuri and Phulchowki are out-and-back walks, so you descend everything you climb, which puts strain on the knees. Practise walking downhill, and bring poles. We can lend you poles if you prefer not to fly with them.

1 week before: Check boots and socks

These are forest tracks with roots, loose stone and, after rain, mud. Trainers are suitable for the Namobuddha walk but not for the other three. Bring boots that are already well worn in.

Weather by month

The figures are for the valley floor. On the summits of Phulchowki and Shivapuri, expect temperatures about eight degrees lower, with wind.

Month	Day in the valley	Night in the valley	Day at the summits	Conditions	Note
January	18°C	2°C	8°C	Best	Cold, bright mornings and the clearest views of the year, with Everest visible from Phulchowki on the clearest days. Frost on the summits.
February	20°C	4°C	10°C	Best	Similar clear conditions with milder mornings. The hills are quiet and the forest is starting to come into leaf.

March	25°C	8°C	15°C	Best	Rhododendron in bloom on Phulchowki and Shivapuri, the best birdwatching of the year, and warm walking. Our recommended month for this trip.
April	28°C	12°C	18°C	Good	Warm, sometimes too warm on the climbs, and hazy, so Himalayan views are uncertain. The forest is still very good.
May	30°C	16°C	20°C	Hard	Hot on the lower slopes, with pre-monsoon storms in the afternoon. Start very early or choose a different month.
June	30°C	19°C	21°C	Hard	The monsoon arrives. There are leeches on the forest hills and the views disappear. We recommend coming in October instead.
July	29°C	20°C	21°C	We do not run it	The wettest month, and the forest trails become difficult and unpleasant. We do not run the trip at this time.
August	29°C	20°C	21°C	We do not run it	Much the same as the previous month. Green and inexpensive, but not suitable for a walking trip.
September	28°C	18°C	20°C	Good	The monsoon clears during the month, and the last ten days often have the clearest air of the year.
October	26°C	13°C	17°C	Best	The best month overall. Clear air, warm days, dry trails and mountain views from both northern hills.
November	23°C	7°C	13°C	Best	Clear, cool and still, with short days and quiet trails. Excellent walking conditions.
December	19°C	3°C	9°C	Best	Cold and very clear. Valley fog often lasts until about ten in the morning, and you climb above it early in the day.

Averages for the valley floor at 1,400 m, with the summit figure alongside. Phulchowki and Shivapuri run about eight degrees colder than Kathmandu, and windier.

Guides and porters

Your guide

One licensed hiking guide accompanies you on all five days and knows which of the many forks on Shivapuri leads where. One driver takes you to the trailhead and, when the route crosses a hill, meets you at the end of the walk.

Why a guide is needed near the city

There are two practical reasons. The forest tracks on Shivapuri and Phulchowki branch often and are poorly signed, and there have been occasional robberies on the quieter trails of the valley rim over the years. A local guide deals with both, and also knows the good places to stop for tea.

Bird guide option

Phulchowki and Shivapuri are two of the best birdwatching forests in central Nepal. We can provide a specialist bird guide instead for $25 a day. The walking is then slower and quieter, and the focus of the trip changes.

Responsible travel

National park fee

Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park protects the forest you walk through as well as the catchment that supplies much of Kathmandu's water. The NPR 1,000 gate fee directly supports this.

Waste

Your packed lunch leaves the hotel in a box and comes back in the same box. There are no bins on these hills, and litter left on Shivapuri stays there, as you can see on the lower track at weekends.

Local customs

The Namobuddha guesthouse exists to support the monastery, and the money stays there. Meals are served at the monks' times, prayers are religious practice rather than a performance, and you should ask before taking photographs inside the shrine. Visitors who sit quietly at the back during evening prayers are welcome.

Drinking water

The hotel provides filtered water for refilling your bottle, and the guide carries a filter on the hills. Over six days, this avoids around fifteen plastic bottles in a valley that has no proper way of disposing of them.

Booking and payment

How to book

Write to us or send a WhatsApp message with your arrival date and the number of people in your group. A week of notice is enough. We confirm within a day.

Deposit

A deposit of twenty per cent secures the hotel and the monastery guesthouse, and the balance is paid on arrival in Kathmandu. Very little is booked in advance for this trip, which keeps it flexible.

Cancellation

If you cancel more than fourteen days before the start, the deposit can be transferred to another date within a year. Within fourteen days, the rooms have been paid for and we keep the deposit. As it is a short trip, the amount at risk is small.

Changes during the trip

You can change the plan freely. You can swap a hill, skip a day, add the heritage day, or go to Nagarkot instead of Namobuddha. We decide the order on the evening of day 1 based on the weather, and we can change it again on day 3.

Training for a longer trek

Tell us, and we will adjust the week. We will schedule the two hardest hills on consecutive days rather than spacing them out, which is good preparation for Everest Base Camp but less suitable for a holiday.

Optional extras

A valley heritage day
$95, 1 extra day
Patan, Bhaktapur and Swayambhunath with a cultural guide instead of a hiking guide, added as a rest day between the two long hill days. This is the most popular addition.

Everest scenic flight
$220, 1 morning
An hour-long flight along the range with a guaranteed window seat, returning before eight, so it can fit before any of the hill days. It depends on the weather and is refunded in full if it does not operate.

Two nights at Nagarkot at the end
$210, 2 extra days
A ridge hotel at 2,175 m with a north-facing room, two sunrises, and a walk down to Changu Narayan on the last morning. It is the gentlest way to finish the trip.

Chandragiri, up on foot and down by cable car
$65, replaces a day
A 900 m climb from Thankot to the ridge at 2,550 m, with a temple and a very good view at the top, and a cable car for the descent. It takes half the effort of Shivapuri and offers most of the views.

A bird guide instead of a hiking guide
$25 a day, same length
Phulchowki and Shivapuri are two of the best birdwatching forests in central Nepal. If birdwatching is your main interest, we provide a specialist guide, and the walking becomes slower and more focused on birds.

Upgrade to a garden hotel in Patan
$180, same length
A quieter base than Thamel, in a Newari courtyard house, and ten minutes closer to the two southern hills. Recommended if you prefer to avoid the noise of central Kathmandu.

Frequently asked questions

Answers to the 12 questions travellers ask us most often. If your question is not here, contact us and we will answer it.

How difficult are the walks?
Two of them are full hill days. Shivapuri climbs 1,300 m and Phulchowki 1,200 m, both in one continuous ascent, and each takes six to seven hours. Champadevi is shorter and Namobuddha is a gentle walk through farmland. If you walk in hills at home for five or six hours at a time, you will be comfortable on all four.

Can I skip a day?

Yes. Some travellers walk three hills and spend the fourth day in Patan. We can plan this when you book or on the morning itself. The hotel is paid for either way, and the guide can take you round a city instead of up a hill.

How does this compare with a trek?

A trek involves a domestic flight, permits, a porter, a week of packing and unpacking, and a fixed route. This trip gives you five days of proper walking, with a hot shower and the same bed at the end of four of them, ten minutes from a good restaurant. It suits travellers who have a week, and those who want to walk without committing to a single trail.

Will I see the Himalaya?

From Shivapuri and Phulchowki on a clear morning, yes. From the north rim you can see Ganesh Himal, Langtang and Dorje Lakpa, and on the clearest winter days Everest is visible from Phulchowki. From October to February this is usual. In the monsoon you will see cloud, although the forest is very good.

Are the trails marked?

Some of them are, but poorly. The forest tracks on Shivapuri and Phulchowki branch often, and there are several routes up Champadevi. This is the main reason for having a guide. There have also been occasional robberies on quiet trails on the valley rim over the years, and walking with a local guide is the simplest precaution.

Do I need a permit?

You only need the Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park entry at NPR 1,000, the Phulchowki forest fee and the small Namobuddha donation, all of which are included in your price. There is no TIMS card and no trekking permit, because these walks are not classified as trekking.

What is the monastery guesthouse like?

Simple, clean and quiet. You have a twin room with a bathroom and blankets. There is no heating and no bar. Meals are vegetarian and served at the monks' mealtimes. Prayers are at six in the morning and visitors are welcome to sit at the back. Many travellers find it the most memorable night of the trip.

Can I swap a hill for something else?

Yes. Nagarjun and Jamacho are a shorter half-day walk above the ring road. Chandragiri can be climbed on foot with the descent by cable car, and Nagarkot to Changu Narayan is a pleasant ridge descent. Tell the guide the evening before and it will be arranged.

Is it good for birdwatching?

Phulchowki is one of the best birding hills in Nepal, with around three hundred species recorded, and the Godavari end of the forest is particularly rich in March and April. Bring binoculars. If birdwatching is the main purpose of your trip, we can provide a bird guide instead of the hiking guide.

What is the best month?

October and November have clear air. December and January have the clearest mountain views, with cold, bright mornings. March brings rhododendron on Phulchowki and Shivapuri. April is hazy. During the monsoon the hills are green, but the forest trails have leeches, and we do not recommend this trip at that time.

Does it suit children or older walkers?

Yes, with the right choice of hills. We would replace Shivapuri and Phulchowki with Nagarjun, Chandragiri and the Nagarkot ridge, which involve half the climbing and offer most of the views. Tell us who is travelling and we will plan the week to suit your group.

Can I add this to a trek or a tour?

Yes. It works well at the start of a longer trip, because four hill days at 2,700 m are useful training before a Himalayan trek. Several travellers use it as the week before Everest Base Camp. Tell us when you book and we will combine them into one itinerary.

Photos, videos and reviews of this trip: earthbound.rajansimkhada.com/kathmandu-valley-day-hikes