

Earthbound Expeditions

Khopra Ridge Trek

12 days, from US$1,090 per person

Duration **12 days**	Grade **Moderate**	Max altitude **4,500 m**
Start and end **Kathmandu**	On the trail **4 to 6 hours a day**	Best season **Mar to May, Oct to Nov**
Accommodation **Community lodges**	Meals **All meals on the trek**	Group size **Up to 10**
Getting there **Via Pokhara**		

Khopra Ridge Trek Overview

A quiet ridge above the busy Poon Hill trail, where the lodges belong to the villages and Dhaulagiri fills the western sky.

Trek overview

This is a twelve-day trip, with eight days of walking, on a ridge one valley west of the busy Poon Hill trail. You drive to Ghandruk, climb through forest to Dobato, cross to Chistibung and go up onto Khopra Danda at 3,660 m, where a single community lodge stands on a grass ridge facing Dhaulagiri across the valley. From there the trek descends through Swanta and Ghorepani.

Community-owned lodges

On the main Annapurna trails, the lodges are family businesses competing with each other. At Chistibung, Khopra and Swanta they are owned by the villages. They were built from about 2014 on a model promoted by Mahabir Pun, and households from the community take turns to manage them. A large share of the profit goes to village funds for the school and the health post rather than to an owner.

Who this trip is for

This trek suits people who have walked in the hills at home, want five to seven hours of walking a day rather than nine, and prefer to share a dining room with fourteen people rather than a hundred and forty. It is not technical and there is no pass to cross. If you have done the Poon Hill trek and found it busy, this route goes through the same forest to a much quieter ridge above it.

The two demanding parts

The lodges are simpler than the commercial ones an hour away: fewer rooms, shorter menus, solar power that can run out after a cloudy day, and hot water that sometimes comes in a bucket. The Khayer Lake day is long, high and dependent on the weather, and many trekkers either skip it or turn back. Neither is a problem if you know about them before you book.

Key highlights of the Khopra Ridge Trek

- Two nights on Khopra Danda (3,660 m) facing Dhaulagiri
- Community-owned lodges that fund village schools
- Sacred Khayer Lake at about 4,500 m, weather allowing
- Sunrise from Muldai (3,637 m) and Poon Hill (3,210 m)
- Rhododendron forest and the Gurung village of Ghandruk

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
2	Kathmandu to Pokhara, fly or drive	-	-	820 m
3	Jeep to Ghandruk, walk to Tadapani	3 hrs walk	6 km	2,630 m
4	Tadapani to Dobato	5–6 hrs	11 km	3,420 m

5	Muldai at dawn, down to Chistibung	5–6 hrs	10 km	3,637 m
6	Chistibung to Khopra Danda	3–4 hrs	7 km	3,660 m
7	Khayer Lake and back, weather allowing	8–10 hrs	16 km	about 4,500 m
8	Khopra Danda to Swanta	5–6 hrs	12 km	2,270 m
9	Swanta to Ghorepani	4–5 hrs	9 km	2,874 m
10	Poon Hill, down to Birethanti, drive to Pokhara	5–6 hrs	13 km	3,210 m
11	Pokhara to Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
12	Fly home	-	-	-

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

We meet you at Kathmandu airport and drive you to your hotel. The rest of the day is free to rest after your flight or explore the streets around Thamel. In the evening we have dinner together, check your equipment and brief you on the trek.

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

Day 2

Fly or drive to Pokhara

A twenty-five minute flight, or six hours by road west along the Trishuli river, depending on what you chose when you booked. Pokhara lies at 820 m beside a lake, with the Annapurnas above it, and the afternoon is free. Buy anything you have forgotten here, as there are no proper shops on the trek.

Altitude: 820 m On foot: None, flight or 6 hr drive Night: Hotel, Pokhara Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 3

Drive to Ghandruk and trek to Tadapani

The drive up the Modi Khola to Ghandruk takes three to four hours by jeep. Ghandruk is a large Gurung village at 1,940 m, with slate roofs and views of Annapurna South. From there a short afternoon walk through rhododendron and oak forest takes you to Tadapani, a gentle start to the trek.

Altitude: 2,630 m On foot: 6 km, 3 hrs Night: Teahouse, Tadapani Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4

Trek to Dobato

The main climbing begins today. The trail goes through forest all morning, thinning as you gain height, with views of Machhapuchhre behind you through the trees. Dobato is a clearing with three lodges at 3,420 m. This is the biggest climb of the trek, so your guide will keep the pace slow.

Altitude: 3,420 m On foot: 11 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Lodge, Dobato Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5

Sunrise at Muldai and trek to Chistibung

You set off in the dark for the forty-five minute climb to Muldai at 3,637 m, where Dhaulagiri, the Annapurnas and Machhapuchhre are visible together, usually with few other people. After returning for breakfast, you descend a long way through forest to Chistibung at 2,975 m. Sleeping lower than the high point of the day helps your acclimatisation.

Altitude: 2,975 m On foot: 10 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Community lodge, Chistibung Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6

Trek to Khopra Danda

This is a deliberately short day. The trail leaves the last trees behind and climbs open pasture onto the ridge, where the community lodge stands alone at 3,660 m with Dhaulagiri filling the western sky. You arrive by early afternoon and have the rest of the day to rest and enjoy the view.

Altitude: 3,660 m On foot: 7 km, 3–4 hrs Night: Community lodge, Khopra Danda Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

Optional hike to Khayer Lake

This is the hardest day of the trek, and it is optional. You leave before dawn and follow the ridge north above 4,000 m to the sacred lake and the shrine at Khayer Barah, then return the same way. It takes eight to ten hours, there is no lodge or shelter, and in some weeks snow closes the route completely. Your guide decides on the morning whether it goes ahead.

Altitude: about 4,500 m at Khayer Lake On foot: 16 km, 8–10 hrs Night: Community lodge, Khopra Danda Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

Trek to Swanta

After a final sunrise from the ridge, you make a long descent, losing nearly 1,400 m through pasture and terraced fields to Swanta. The village grows apples, runs its own lodge and has a warmer climate. The descent is hard on the knees, and trekking poles are more useful here than anywhere else on the trek.

Altitude: 2,270 m On foot: 12 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Community lodge, Swanta Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 9

Trek to Ghorepani

You descend to the river, cross it, then climb the far side through Chitre to rejoin the main trail at Ghorepani. After five quiet days, you are back among lodges with long menus, hot showers and many more trekkers.

Altitude: 2,874 m On foot: 9 km, 4–5 hrs Night: Teahouse, Ghorepani Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10

Sunrise at Poon Hill and return to Pokhara

You start in the dark to reach Poon Hill at 3,210 m, the best-known viewpoint in this area. It is usually busy, with around a hundred other people, but the view is worth the hour's climb. You then make a long descent on the stone staircase through Ulleri to Birethanti, where a jeep takes you back to Pokhara for a hot bath and dinner.

Altitude: 3,210 m at Poon Hill On foot: 13 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Hotel, Pokhara Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 11

Return to Kathmandu

The morning is free in Pokhara, and a boat trip on the lake is a relaxing option. You fly or drive back to Kathmandu in the afternoon, and in the evening we have a farewell dinner together with the guide and the crew.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, flight or 6 hr drive Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 12

Departure

We take you to the airport for your flight home. If you have a free morning, Bhaktapur and Patan are an hour away, and we can arrange a car and a guide who can explain the carvings to you.

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 for the National Trust for Nature Conservation, which runs the conservation area. SAARC nationals pay NPR 1,000. Checked at Ghandruk on the way in and at Birethanti on the way out.	NPR 3,000, about $22	Nepal Tourism Board counters in Kathmandu or Pokhara, before you start
TIMS card. Registered online by the agency before you leave Kathmandu. Individual trekkers have not been able to buy one since April 2023. SAARC nationals NPR 1,000.	NPR 2,000, about $15	Through a registered trekking agency only
Licensed guide. Compulsory for foreign trekkers in the conservation area since April 2023. A guide is also needed on this route, because the ridge trail is poorly waymarked above Chistibung.	Inside the trek price	Arranged by us

Other cost	Amount	Note
Kathmandu to Pokhara flight, both ways	$120–180	Or $20 by tourist coach, six hours each way
ACAP permit	$22	NPR 3,000. SAARC nationals NPR 1,000
TIMS card	$15	NPR 2,000, issued only through a registered agency
Jeep, Pokhara to Ghandruk	$8–60	Shared seat or the whole vehicle, 3 to 4 hours

Community lodge bed	$3–7 a night	Cheaper and simpler than on the Poon Hill trail
Food on the trail	$20–28 a day	Three meals and tea a day. Prices are higher on the ridge, where everything is carried up
Licensed guide	$28–35 a day	Plus their bed and board
Porter, one per two trekkers	$20–25 a day	Plus their bed and board
Kathmandu and Pokhara hotels	$35–60 a night	Three star, four nights across the two
Travel insurance to 5,000 m	$90–150	Must cover helicopter rescue
Hot shower and charging	$2–4 each, each time	Not included, paid in cash, and often unavailable on the ridge
Tips, guide and porter	$100–160	Per trekker, at the end

Packing list

Porters and baggage limits

Your porter carries a strict maximum of 20 kg, which is your duffel and one other. There is no 15 kg flight limit on this trek because there is no mountain airstrip, so the only limit is what a porter should carry. Anything you do not need on the trek can be stored free of charge at our office in Kathmandu or at your hotel in Pokhara. We provide the duffel, the sleeping bag and the down jacket, so you do not need to bring these.

On your head

- Sun hat with a brim, and a warm hat that covers your ears
- Two buffs or neck gaiters
- Category 3 sunglasses, for the snow glare on the Khayer Lake day
- Headtorch and spare batteries. The walks to Muldai, Khayer Lake and Poon Hill all start in the dark
- Sunscreen SPF 50 and lip balm with sun protection

On your body

- Three merino or synthetic base layers, no cotton
- Two mid layers, one fleece and one light insulated jacket
- Down jacket. We provide one, but bring your own if you feel the cold at night
- Waterproof jacket and trousers that pack small
- Two pairs of trekking trousers
- Underwear for four days, and wash it at Swanta or Ghorepani

Hands and feet

- Liner gloves and warm outer gloves for the early mornings on the ridge
- 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 if you are trekking in December, January or February

Bags

- Duffel bag for the porter, 20 kg maximum shared between two people. We provide one
- Daypack, 30 litres, with a rain cover
- Dry bags or thick liners, as rain and damp get into packs on this trail

Sleeping

- Sleeping bag rated to -10°C. We provide one
- Silk or cotton liner, for warmth and hygiene
- Earplugs, as the lodge walls are thin plywood and the ridge is windy

Health

- Personal first aid: blister plasters, tape, painkillers, rehydration salts
- Diamox, if your doctor agrees, plus any medication you take regularly
- Water purification: tablets, a filter or a SteriPen
- Hand sanitiser and wet wipes, for the two nights without a shower
- Trekking poles, which are most useful on the descent to Swanta

Papers and money

- Passport valid for six months, plus two photocopies
- Four passport photographs for permits
- Travel insurance certificate showing helicopter cover to 5,000 m
- $150 to $250 in small notes, changed into rupees. There is no ATM after Ghandruk and no lodge accepts cards

Altitude profile

Day	Place	Sleep at	Highest point
1	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-
2	Pokhara	820 m	-
3	Tadapani	2,630 m	-
4	Dobato	3,420 m	-
5	Chistibung	2,975 m	3,637 m
6	Khopra Danda	3,660 m	-
7	Khopra Danda	3,660 m	4,500 m
8	Swanta	2,270 m	-
9	Ghorepani	2,874 m	-
10	Pokhara	820 m	3,210 m

11	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-

Getting to the trailhead

There is no mountain airstrip on this trek, so weather delays are short, and a jeep road is within a day's walk of most of the route.

Pokhara flights and weather

The flight from Kathmandu takes twenty-five minutes and lands at an airport on flat ground at 820 m. Delays are measured in hours, not days, and the six-hour drive along the Trishuli river is a practical alternative. Nothing on this trek depends on a seat in a small mountain aircraft, which is why the itinerary has no spare day at the end.

The jeep to Ghandruk

The drive takes three to four hours on a road that was a footpath fifteen years ago, climbing to 1,940 m. A seat in a shared jeep costs a few dollars, and a private vehicle costs around $60. The road is bumpy and slow, the last hour is very scenic, and it saves a day of walking on a jeep track.

The end of the trek

From Ghorepani you walk down the stone staircase to Birethanti and take a jeep for the ninety-minute drive back to Pokhara. If you would prefer to avoid the Ulleri steps, tell us and we will finish down the Kali Gandaki through Shikha to the hot springs at Tatopani instead, then drive back to Pokhara.

Leaving the trek early

This is one of the Himalayan treks closest to a road. From Khopra Danda, Swanta and a jeep track are a day's walk away, and from Ghandruk or Ghorepani you are an afternoon's drive from Pokhara. A helicopter can land on the ridge, and a charter to Pokhara costs about $2,500 for the aircraft. Most problems here can be solved by descending on foot.

Accommodation

Five of the eight nights on the trail are in lodges owned by the villages. They are warm, clean and simple.

Community lodges

Three of the nights, at Chistibung, Khopra Danda and Swanta, are in community lodges owned by the villages. They are simple: twin rooms, with a dormitory if the lodge is full, and shared bathrooms. At Khopra Danda, where you spend two nights, the lodge is the only building on the ridge, with twin or four-bed rooms, blankets on every bed and a bucket of hot water when there is any. Bring a sleeping bag.

The other nights

Tadapani is a privately run teahouse with a hot shower for a fee. Dobato is three basic lodges in a clearing, with no reliable shower. Ghorepani, on the way out, is the most comfortable night on the trek, with private bathrooms in the better lodges.

Where	Nights	Type	Room	Bathroom
Kathmandu	2	Three-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Pokhara	2	Three-star hotel, lakeside	Twin or double	Private, hot water

Tadapani	1	Teahouse, privately run	Twin	Shared, hot shower for a fee
Dobato	1	Lodge, one of three in a clearing	Twin, basic	Shared, no reliable shower
Chistibung	1	Community lodge	Twin, and a dorm if the lodge is full	Shared
Khopra Danda	2	Community lodge, the only building on the ridge	Twin or four-bed, blankets on every bed	Shared, with a bucket of hot water when available
Swanta	1	Community lodge, in the apple orchards	Twin	Shared, hot shower for a fee
Ghorepani	1	Teahouse, the most comfortable night on the trek	Twin	Private in the better lodges

Heating
Every community lodge has a stove in the dining room, lit at dusk, and it is the warmest room on the trek. Bedrooms are not heated anywhere.

Hot shower
At Tadapani, Swanta and Ghorepani for $2 to $4. At Dobato and Khopra Danda there is a bucket of hot water when available, which is not every day.

Charging
$2 to $3 per device in the dining room, from solar panels. After two cloudy days in a row, the lodge on the ridge may have no power available. Bring a power bank.

Wifi
Usually free and working at Khopra Danda, and unreliable everywhere else. Do not rely on it.

Phone signal
Ncell and NTC cover Ghandruk, Tadapani, Ghorepani and Swanta. On the ridge, the signal is weak in places and absent in others.

Water
Boiled water costs $1 to $2 a litre, and there are spring taps in every village. We ask you to use these with purification rather than buying bottled water.

Sleeping bag
Provided, rated to -10°C, and returned at the end of the trek.

Bedding
A mattress, a pillow and thick blankets. 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, chapati, eggs, pancakes, tea or coffee
Lunch	12:00–13:00	Dal bhat, fried rice, noodles, soup, potatoes, seasonal greens
Dinner	18:30–19:30	Dal bhat, thukpa, curry and rice, pasta, soup to start
Tea	on arrival	Black, milk, lemon, ginger or masala tea. Included at every stop.

Diet	How we manage it
Vegetarian	Easy throughout, and on this trail most of the food is grown locally.
Vegan	Manageable with notice. Please tell us when you book, because the ridge lodges order their supplies days in advance.
Gluten free	Rice, dal, potatoes and eggs are safe. Bread, noodles and momo are not, and village kitchens cannot rule out cross-contamination.
Halal	There is no certified halal kitchen on the route. Vegetarian meals are the practical option.
Meat	Available at lower altitudes, but best avoided above Dobato, where it has been carried up without refrigeration.

A typical day

Time	What happens
6:15	Tea in the dining room, and a bowl of warm water to wash with
6:45	Pack, and leave the duffel by the door for the porter
7:15	Breakfast together, cooked to order and unhurried
8:15	On the trail, at a slow and steady pace set by the guide
12:00	Lunch at a lodge on the route, about an hour
13:00	Two to three hours more, depending on the day
15:00	Arrive at the lodge, have tea, choose a bed, wash and rest
17:00	Oxygen saturation and pulse measured and recorded, from Dobato upwards
18:30	Dinner together, and the guide briefs you on the next day
20:30	Bed. The stove goes out and the ridge gets cold quickly

Difficulty and preparation

Difficulty 3 of 5

Moderate walking, with one hard optional day.

- Four to six hours of walking a day for seven days, which is a gentler pace than most Annapurna itineraries.
- Day 4 climbs about 800 m to Dobato, and day 8 descends nearly 1,400 m to Swanta. The descent is the hardest on the knees.

- You sleep at 3,660 m for two nights, which is high enough to feel the altitude, but most people manage it well.
- Day 7 to Khayer Lake is much harder: eight to ten hours, 16 km, about 850 m of climbing, with no shelter on the way.
- No ropes, no crampons, no pass and no exposed sections, except on the Khayer Lake traverse when it holds snow.

Getting ready

10 weeks before: Build endurance
Do three cardio sessions a week, 40 minutes each, at a pace where you can still hold a conversation. Walking, cycling, swimming or rowing are all suitable. This is the most important part of your preparation.

8 weeks before: Add hill walking
Replace one session with an hour's hill walk with 300 m of ascent. Add a strength session with squats, step-ups, lunges and calf raises. The 1,400 m descent to Swanta is harder on your thigh muscles than any climb on this trek.

6 weeks before: Train with a pack
Start walking with the daypack you will carry, loaded to 5 kg, in the boots you will trek in. On a trek at this altitude, blisters stop more people than altitude does, and they are preventable.

4 weeks before: Consecutive days
Do a four-hour walk at the weekend, then two or three hours the next morning. The trek involves walking on consecutive days, so this is the best preparation.

3 weeks before: Prepare for Khayer Lake
Do one walk of seven hours with 800 m of ascent and the same descent. If you finish it able to eat a meal and sleep normally, you should be able to manage day 7. If not, you can spend that day on the ridge instead.

2 weeks before: Reduce training
Halve the volume but keep the frequency. Training in the last two weeks will not improve your fitness and increases the risk of injury. Rest well instead.

Altitude

You sleep two nights at 3,660 m and, if the weather allows, reach about 4,500 m. This altitude needs care, but most people manage it well.

You sleep two nights at 3,660 m on the ridge and, if the weather allows, reach about 4,500 m at Khayer Lake. Acute mountain sickness can occur at these altitudes, and people do get it here, usually at Dobato on the fourth night after climbing 800 m that day. This itinerary is manageable because of its profile: you climb to 3,420 m, descend to 2,975 m, then climb again, and after the highest day you return to a lodge where you have already slept.

What to watch for

- Headache that does not improve with water and paracetamol
- Nausea, or loss of appetite
- Dizziness, or feeling unsteady
- Breathlessness at rest rather than while climbing
- Sleeping badly at Dobato or Khopra, or waking short of breath

- Loss of coordination, which means you must descend immediately

How to prevent it

- Walk slowly on day 4. It is the biggest single climb of the trek, and the day people most often go too fast.
- Drink three litres of water a day, even if you do not feel thirsty.
- Eat at Khopra even if you have no appetite. Loss of appetite is often the first sign of altitude.
- No alcohol above Tadapani, and no sleeping pills at any altitude.
- The descent to Chistibung on day 5 is part of the acclimatisation plan: it gives you a night 685 m lower before the ridge.
- If you wake on day 7 with a headache, skipping Khayer Lake is the right decision.

What we do

1. Daily health checks
Your guide carries a pulse oximeter and measures your oxygen saturation and pulse every evening from day 4, and again on any morning you feel unwell. The readings are recorded, so any decline over two days is clear.

2. Mild symptoms
This itinerary descends twice on its own. A night at Chistibung, or a rest day on the ridge while the others walk to the lake, resolves most cases here without changing the trek for the rest of the group.

3. Serious symptoms
Descent is the only effective treatment. From Khopra Danda, Swanta at 2,270 m can be reached in an afternoon, which is low enough for anything short of an emergency. This decision is made by the guide and is not open to discussion.

4. Helicopter evacuation
A helicopter can land on the ridge at Khopra and reach Pokhara in twenty minutes. Your insurance must cover this: the cost is $2,500 to $4,000, and the helicopter will not take off without a guarantee of payment.

5. Road access
No point on this trek is more than a long day's walk from a jeep track, and the hospital in Pokhara is a couple of hours' drive beyond that. This is very different from being four days from an airstrip.

Weather by month

We do not run this trek in two months of the year, and in two further months the Khayer Lake day is often not possible.

Month	Daytime on the trail	Night in the villages	Night at Khopra Danda	Conditions	Note
January	9°C	-2°C	-9°C	Hard	Clear, cold and very quiet. There is snow on the ridge, and the Khayer Lake day is usually not possible.
February	11°C	-1°C	-8°C	Hard	Slowly warming, with snow still above Chistibung. Bring microspikes, and expect the lake day to be cancelled.

March	14°C	3°C	-5°C	Best	The season begins and the rhododendron below Tadapani starts to flower. Old snow can still block the Khayer Lake traverse early in the month.
April	16°C	5°C	-3°C	Best	The best month on this trek. The rhododendron forest is in full flower and the ridge is clear most mornings.
May	18°C	7°C	-1°C	Good	Warm and increasingly hazy. From mid-month, Dhaulagiri is often hidden by cloud by ten in the morning.
June	20°C	10°C	2°C	Hard	The monsoon arrives. There are leeches in the forest and cloud on the ridge, so there are no mountain views.
July	21°C	11°C	3°C	We do not run it	We do not run this trek. The mountains are hidden by cloud for weeks at a time.
August	21°C	11°C	3°C	We do not run it	Similar to July, with a risk of landslides on the Ghandruk road. Pilgrims still walk to Khayer Lake for the Janai Purnima festival.
September	19°C	8°C	0°C	Good	The monsoon clears during the month. Late September is green, clear and very quiet on the ridge.
October	16°C	5°C	-3°C	Best	The most reliable month. Ghorepani and Ghandruk are busy, but there are still only about a dozen people on the ridge.
November	13°C	1°C	-6°C	Best	Cold, clear and increasingly quiet. The best combination of views and few other trekkers all year.
December	10°C	-1°C	-8°C	Hard	Clear and bright, with very few trekkers. There is snow on the ridge from mid-month, and the lake day is uncertain.

Built from Nepal DHM station data for the Ghorepani area, adjusted for the ridge some 800 m higher. Any week can run several degrees either side, and the wind on Khopra Danda makes the difference between cold and very cold.

Guides and porters

Your guide

A government-licensed guide with wilderness first aid training leads every departure, and there is one porter for every two trekkers. From 11 trekkers, a second guide joins the group. Our guides on this route are from these valleys, which is a real advantage on a trail with many unmarked junctions above Chistibung.

Porters and luggage

Each porter carries a maximum of twenty kilos, which is your duffel and one other. This is below the 25 kg limit set by the trekking association and well below the loads you will see on the trail. If your bag is over the limit, the load is split rather than added to. Porters carry the duffels, not daypacks: your water, camera, jacket and snacks for the day stay with you.

Staff pay and insurance

Salary, insurance, food and accommodation for every guide and porter are included in the price you pay, not collected on the trail. Every guide and porter is insured for altitude and for helicopter evacuation on the same terms we ask of you. Porters in this industry have often carried too much, in poor footwear, for very low pay. Including fair pay in the package price is how we avoid this.

Tipping

Tipping is customary but not compulsory, and it never replaces the wage. The usual amount for this trek is $100 to $160 per trekker for the whole team, given together on the last evening rather than daily. Your guide will not ask for a tip, and it is best not to hand it over in front of the group.

Responsible travel

Community lodges

Between Chistibung and Swanta you stay in buildings owned by the villages. They were built from about 2014 on a model promoted by Mahabir Pun, who is also known for bringing wireless internet to these hills. Households take turns to run them, and a large share of the profit goes into village funds for the school and the health post. Your accommodation and meals directly support this.

Spending money in the lodges

On most teahouse treks it makes little difference whether you buy your tea at the lodge or carry your own. Here it does. Eat where you sleep, buy boiled water rather than bottled water, pay for the shower and the charging, and avoid bringing packaged snacks. The benefit of this route to the villages depends on the lodges earning an income.

Drinking water and waste

A trekker drinking bottled water uses about twenty plastic bottles on this trip, each one carried up by a porter and carried down again. Boiled water costs $1 to $2 a litre at every stop, and there are spring taps throughout the route. We carry out everything we bring in that is not food.

Local customs

Ask before photographing anyone. When a mule train passes, stand on the mountain side of the trail, not the drop side, and let it go by. Khayer Lake is a shrine as well as a viewpoint: do not bathe in it, do not walk through offerings, and if pilgrims are there, wait until they have finished.

Booking and payment

How to book

Write to us or send a message on WhatsApp and tell us roughly when you would like to travel. You will receive a reply from a member of our team who has walked this ridge. Nothing is payable at this stage, and there is no obligation before you pay a deposit.

Deposit

A deposit of thirty per cent holds your dates, and the balance is paid when you arrive 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 ridge lodges order food days in advance.

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. The balance in Kathmandu can be paid in US dollars, pounds, euros or Nepali rupees.

Cancellation

If you cancel more than 30 days before departure, the deposit can be transferred to any other date or trek we run, with no time limit. Within 30 days of departure, the deposit is retained, because the permits, the lodges and the crew have been booked. 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 above, with a maximum of ten people. Most people book a private trek, which costs no more.

Late bookings

Outside October, a week's notice is enough, because nothing on this trek depends on a flight seat. In October the limit is accommodation: there is one lodge on Khopra Danda, it holds about thirty people, and trekkers who arrive without a booking in high season can be sent back to Chistibung after dark.

Optional extras

Mohare Danda, the rest of the community trail

from $320, +3 days

Continue west from Swanta to Mohare Danda at 3,300 m and descend through Nangi, the villages where the community lodge model started. This is an excellent extension to the trek, and few trekkers take it.

Finish at Tatopani hot springs

$110, +1 day

Descend from the ridge down the Kali Gandaki through Shikha to the hot springs at Tatopani, then drive back to Pokhara. This route avoids the Ulleri staircase entirely.

Paragliding over Pokhara

$95, 1 morning

A thirty-minute flight from Sarangkot with views of the Annapurnas across the valley. Pokhara is one of the best places in the world for paragliding, and the morning of day 11 is free.

Two more nights in Pokhara

$120, +2 days

Two extra nights by the lake at the end of the trek, to rest before travelling home.

Chitwan jungle safari

from $390, +3 days

Travel down to the lowlands to see rhino. This is an easy addition between Pokhara and Kathmandu, with flat ground, a warm climate and no trekking.

Single room

$110

A room to yourself for all four hotel nights. On the ridge, the lodges offer only twin-share rooms or a dormitory.

Frequently asked questions

Answers to the 26 questions travellers ask us most often. If your question is not here, contact us and we will answer it.

How hard is this compared with Annapurna Base Camp?

It is easier on every day except one. The days are four to six hours rather than five to eight, the highest overnight stop is 3,660 m rather than 3,700 m, and there are far fewer stone steps. The exception is the Khayer Lake day, which is harder than any day on the Annapurna Base Camp trek.

Do I need any climbing experience?

No. There are no ropes, no crampons and no pass to cross. The route is on forest trails and open pasture. The only section that needs care is the traverse towards Khayer Lake when it holds snow, and in those conditions your guide will cancel that day.

Is this a good first Himalayan trek?

Yes, it is one of the best. The altitude profile is gentle, a road is never far away, the days are short, and you reach a 3,660 m ridge facing Dhaulagiri without the crowds of the better-known routes. Treat the lake day as an optional extra rather than the main goal.

Is there an age limit?

There is no upper age limit, and we have taken trekkers in their seventies onto this ridge. The minimum age is ten, with a parent, and children usually do well here because the days are short. Your walking experience matters more than your age.

How many people will be in the group?

Ten at most, and departures run from one person. From 11 people we add a second guide. In practice the size of the lodge on the ridge sets the limit, which is why we cap this trek lower than our Everest treks.

How hard is the Khayer Lake day?

It takes eight to ten hours, covers about 16 km there and back with roughly 850 m of climbing, and starts before dawn. There is no lodge or shelter anywhere on the route. It is the hardest day on any of our moderate treks. Many trekkers choose to stay on the ridge instead, and they still see the best of the trek.

How likely is it that the lake day goes ahead?

In October, November and April, the chances are good. In March and December they are about even, because old snow stays on the traverse long after the trail below is dry. In January and February, expect it not to go ahead. Your guide decides on the morning, and sometimes the decision at five in the morning is not to go.

How high is Khayer Lake?

About 4,500 m, although different maps give heights from 4,500 m to 4,660 m. It is the highest point on this trek, roughly 850 m above the ridge where you sleep, and the altitude makes the return walk feel longer than the walk out.

What happens if I skip the Khayer Lake day?

The itinerary does not change and there is no refund, because the cost is the same either way. You spend the whole day on the ridge facing Dhaulagiri, with the option of a shorter walk up towards the shepherds' pastures, and a hot lunch at the lodge while the others eat a packed lunch at 4,500 m.

What does community owned mean?

The lodges at Chistibung, Khopra Danda and Swanta belong to the villages rather than to families. Households take turns running them for a few months at a time, and a large share of the profit goes to village funds for the school and the health post. The model dates from about 2014 and was promoted by Mahabir Pun.

How do the lodges compare with those on the Poon Hill trail?

They are simpler. There are fewer rooms and shorter menus, the solar power can run out after several cloudy days, and hot water may come in a bucket. The dining rooms are warm, the blankets are thick and the food is good. If you need a private bathroom and a wide international menu, this trek is not the right choice.

Can I book a specific lodge in advance?

We book every night in advance, and in October this is important: there is one lodge on Khopra Danda and it fills up. We also aim to arrive there before lunch. Independent trekkers who arrive late in high season are sometimes sent back down to Chistibung.

Will I get altitude sickness at 3,660 m?

It is possible. Acute mountain sickness can start around 2,500 m, and on this trek the most difficult night is usually at Dobato, after the biggest climb. Your guide measures and records your oxygen saturation every evening from day 4, and the route drops back to 2,975 m the next day, which resolves most symptoms.

How cold does it get?

On the ridge at Khopra Danda, expect roughly -3°C to -8°C after dark in the trekking seasons, colder in De cember and January, and windier than the figures suggest. Daytime temperatures on the trail are 13°C to 18 °C and pleasant in the sun. The bedrooms are not heated, so you will need the sleeping bag.

What insurance do I need?

You need a policy covering trekking to 5,000 m, with helicopter evacuation and repatriation. We ask to see the certificate before you leave Pokhara. A rescue here costs $2,500 to $4,000, and the helicopter will not take off without a guarantee of payment.

Is there wifi and phone signal?

There is usually free wifi at Khopra Danda, and it works better than the phone signal at Dobato. Ncell and NTC cover the villages reasonably well. Buy a SIM card in Kathmandu or Pokhara, because you cannot register one on the trail.

Can I charge my phone and camera?

Yes, for $2 to $3 per device in the dining room, from solar panels. After two cloudy days in a row the lodge on the ridge may have no power available. Bring a 20,000 mAh power bank, charge it in Pokhara, and keep it in your sleeping bag overnight.

Are showers available?

At Tadapani, Swanta and Ghorepani, for $2 to $4. At Dobato and on the ridge there is a bucket of hot water when the lodge has fuel to spare, which is not every day. Plan on using wet wipes for those two nights.

Is the food safe, and can you cater for my diet?

Yes. Dal bhat is the best choice on every menu: it is cooked fresh and refills are free. Avoid meat above Dobato, because it has been carried up without refrigeration. Vegetarian food is easy to find, and vegan and gluten-free diets can be managed with notice, so please tell us when you book.

What permits do I need and who issues them?

You need two permits. The first is the ACAP entry permit, NPR 3,000 (about $22), issued at Nepal Tourism Board counters in Kathmandu or Pokhara on behalf of the National Trust for Nature Conservation. The second is a TIMS card, NPR 2,000 (about $15), which only a registered agency can issue. Both are included in your trek price, and we arrange them before you leave the city.

Do I have to take a guide?

Yes. Since April 2023 foreign trekkers must have a licensed guide in Nepal's conservation areas, and the TIMS card is only issued through an agency. On this route a guide is also important for navigation: above Chistibung the junctions are unmarked, and in cloud the ridge looks the same in both directions.

How much cash should I carry?

$150 to $250 changed into rupees, in small notes. This covers showers, charging, drinks, snacks and tips. There is no ATM after Ghandruk and no lodge on the route accepts cards, including the community lodges.

How do I reach the trailhead?

You fly or drive to Pokhara on day 2, then take a three to four hour jeep ride up to Ghandruk at 1,940 m on day 3. No mountain airstrip is used on this trek, so there is no spare day at the end and bad weather causes delays of hours rather than days.

When should I book?

For October, book two to three months ahead, because the single lodge on the ridge fills first. For April, six weeks ahead is usually enough. Outside the peak season a week is often enough, and if you are already in Pokhara we can usually start your trek within two days.

Can you change the itinerary?

Yes, and most people do. You can add a second night on the ridge so the lake day has a spare morning, finish down the Kali Gandaki to the hot springs at Tatopani instead of over Poon Hill, shorten the trek to nine days from Pokhara, or continue west to Mohare Danda. From five people, a private trek costs the same as joining a group.

What is the most important advice for this trek?

Treat Khayer Lake as an optional extra rather than the goal. Trekkers who feel the trek only counts if they reach the lake are the ones who continue in poor snow conditions. The ridge at sunrise is the main reason to do this trek.

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