

Earthbound Expeditions

Annapurna Circuit Trek

14 days, from US$1,497 per person

Duration
14 days

Grade
Moderate to strenuous

Max altitude
5,416 m

Start and end
Kathmandu

On the trail
4 to 6 hours a day

Best season
Mar to May, Oct to Nov

Accommodation
Lodges

Meals
All meals on the trek

Group size
Up to 10

Getting there
Drive in, fly out

Annapurna Circuit Trek Overview

A classic teahouse trek over the Thorong La pass, through landscapes ranging from subtropical valleys to high desert.

Trek overview

This is a traverse rather than a return trek, which defines its character. You walk up the Marsyangdi valley on the wet, green, Hindu side of the Himalaya, cross a pass at 5,416 m, and descend the Kali Gandaki valley into high desert on the dry, Tibetan Buddhist side. Over seven walking days the vegetation, architecture, people and religion all change completely. No other trek in Nepal offers this, and it is why the circuit was one of the best-known treks in the world for thirty years.

Who this trip is for

Trekkers who want variety rather than a single mountain destination. Most days are moderate, four to six hours on good trails, but there is one very long day: you get up at three in the morning, climb for four to five hours to the pass, and descend for three to four hours on the other side. If you can manage one very long day at altitude, the rest of the trek is comfortable. If an eight to nine hour day at 5,400 m concerns you, Annapurna Base Camp is a better choice.

The road

A jeep track now runs from Besisahar to Manang, and another from Muktinath down to Jomsom and Beni. Some trekkers who walked the circuit before the roads were built consider it spoiled. In fact it is now shorter. The four days that were spent walking along the road are now driven, which is why this itinerary takes fourteen days rather than twenty-one. The most important section, from Manang over the Thorong La to Muktinath, has no road and never will. We drive the jeep tracks and walk the NATT trails, marked alternative paths that keep you off the jeep road for most of the remaining route.

Why the acclimatisation day in Manang is essential

Manang, at 3,540 m, is where you acclimatise for a pass that is nearly two kilometres higher. The Himalayan Rescue Association aid post in the village, run by volunteer doctors, gives a free altitude talk every afternoon during the season, and every group attends. Some itineraries skip this day and cost less. The Thorong La is the most common place in Nepal for trekkers to develop serious altitude sickness, and this day is the main reason our groups generally avoid it.

Key highlights of the Annapurna Circuit Trek

- Cross Thorong La pass (5,416 m)
- Diverse landscapes & ecosystems
- Manang village & Muktinath temple
- Views of Annapurna & Dhaulagiri

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
2	Kathmandu valley sites	-	-	1,400 m
3	Drive to Besisahar	6 hrs	-	760 m
4	Jeep up the valley to Chame	5–6 hrs	-	2,670 m
5	Chame to Pisang	5–6 hrs	15 km	3,300 m
6	Pisang to Manang	5–6 hrs	14 km	3,540 m
7	Manang, acclimatisation day	3–4 hrs	-	3,540 m
8	Manang to Yak Kharka	3–4 hrs	9 km	4,050 m
9	Yak Kharka to Thorong Phedi	3–4 hrs	7 km	4,540 m
10	Over the Thorong La to Muktinath	8–9 hrs	15 km	5,416 m
11	Muktinath to Jomsom	5–6 hrs	18 km	2,720 m
12	Fly Jomsom to Pokhara	25 min	-	820 m
13	Fly or drive to Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
14	Fly home	-	-	-

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

We meet you at the airport and take you to your hotel. The evening is free for you to rest, and we meet to brief you on the days ahead.

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

Day 2

Kathmandu Valley sightseeing

An easy day around the old city: Swayambhunath (the Monkey Temple) on its hill, the great stupa at Boudhanath, and the carved squares of Patan. A gentle start before the mountains.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3

Drive to Besisahar

We leave Kathmandu and drive west into the hills, past rivers and terraced farms, to the small town of Besisahar, where the circuit begins.

Altitude: 760 m On foot: Drive, 6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Besisahar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4

Drive to Chame

A rougher jeep road climbs north beside the Marshyangdi river to Chame, the main village of the district, with the first close view of Annapurna II above the pine forest.

Altitude: 2,670 m On foot: Drive, 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Chame Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5

Trek to Pisang

The first day of walking. A steady climb through forest past Bhratang and the great curved rock face, before the valley opens out at Pisang, with its peak rising behind the village.

Altitude: 3,300 m On foot: 15 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Pisang Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6

Trek to Manang

A high, scenic route through the old villages of Ghyaru and Ngawal, with houses and prayer walls in the Tibetan style, to the large village of Manang below the Annapurnas.

Altitude: 3,540 m On foot: 14 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Manang Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

Acclimatisation day in Manang

A day to allow your body to adjust to the altitude before going higher. There is an optional short climb to a viewpoint or to the glacial lake, with wide views, before returning to rest.

Altitude: 3,540 m On foot: Optional 3–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Manang Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

Trek to Yak Kharka

A shorter day at a higher altitude, leaving the forest for open grazing land. Yaks graze on the juniper slopes, and the air is noticeably thinner by the time you reach Yak Kharka.

Altitude: 4,050 m On foot: 9 km, 3–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Yak Kharka Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 9

Trek to Thorong Phedi

A short, slow walk to the foot of the pass, to save energy for the next day. Thorong Phedi is the last stop before the pass, so we arrive early and rest.

Altitude: 4,540 m On foot: 7 km, 3–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Thorong Phedi Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10

Cross the Thorong La to Muktinath

The longest day of the trek, with an early, cold start. A long, slow climb leads to the Thorong La, the highest point of the trek, marked with prayer flags. Then a long descent on the far side to the temple town of Muktinath, which is sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists.

Altitude: 5,416 m at the pass On foot: 15 km, 8–9 hrs Night: Teahouse, Muktinath Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 11

Trek to Jomsom

After visiting the pilgrims' water spouts at Muktinath, we descend into the dry, wind-eroded Kali Gandaki valley and follow it down to Jomsom, an old trading town between the peaks.

Altitude: 2,720 m On foot: 18 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Jomsom Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 12

Fly to Pokhara

A short, scenic morning flight between the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri massifs down to the lakeside town of Pokhara. The rest of the day is free to relax by the lake.

Altitude: 820 m On foot: Flight, 25 min Night: Hotel, Pokhara Meals: Breakfast

Day 13

Return to Kathmandu

A short flight or a scenic drive takes you back to Kathmandu. The evening is free for a farewell dinner and a last walk around Thamel.

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

Day 14

Departure

We take you to the airport for your flight home.

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 & national park 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). SAARC nationals pay NPR 1,000. Checked at Dharapani going in and again at Jomsom coming out.	NPR 3,000, about $22	Kathmandu or Pokhara, before you start
TIMS card. Individual trekkers have not been able to obtain one since April 2023. SAARC nationals pay NPR 1,000.	NPR 2,000, about $15	Through a registered trekking agency only
Licensed guide. Required by law for foreign trekkers in the conservation area since April 2023, and enforced at Dharapani.	Inside the trek price	-
Tilicho Lake. The lake, at 4,919 m, is inside the same conservation area, so the ACAP permit covers it. It adds three days and is a demanding extension.	No extra permit	-

Other cost	Amount	Note

Private jeep, Besisahar to Chame	$180–260	A shared jeep is slower and costs $25 a seat, and makes for a hard day
Jomsom to Pokhara flight	$120–160	Morning flights only. The wind closes the airstrip by ten
Kathmandu to Pokhara, return leg	$60–90	Or $20 by tourist coach
ACAP permit	$22	NPR 3,000. SAARC nationals NPR 1,000
TIMS card	$15	NPR 2,000, issued only through a registered agency
Teahouse bed	$5–15 a night	More expensive above Manang, where all supplies arrive by mule
Food on the trail	$22–32 a day	Three meals and tea. Thorong Phedi is the most expensive stop
Licensed guide	$28–35 a day	Plus their food, lodging and journey home
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 in total
Travel insurance to 6,000 m	$110–180	Must cover helicopter rescue. The pass is at 5,416 m
Hot shower, charging, wifi	$2–6 each, each time	Not included, cash only, and more expensive above Manang
Tips, guide and porter	$130–200	Per trekker, at the end

Packing list

Two weight limits, and the Jomsom flight has the lower one

Your porter carries a strict maximum of 20 kg, shared between two trekkers. The Jomsom to Pokhara flight allows 15 kg and bags are weighed, so anything you buy in Manang has to fit within that limit. We provide the duffel bag and the sleeping bag, and store the rest of your luggage free of charge in Kathmandu.

On your head

- Sun hat with a brim, and a warm hat that covers your ears
- Two buffs or neck gaiters
- Sunglasses, category 3 or 4. Snow glare at this altitude is strong
- Head torch and spare batteries
- Sunscreen SPF 50 and lip balm with sun protection

On your body

- Three or four merino or synthetic base layers, no cotton
- Two mid layers, one fleece and one light insulated layer
- Down jacket. We provide one; bring your own if you feel the cold at night

- A waterproof jacket and trousers that pack small
- Two pairs of trekking trousers, one lined
- Underwear for four or five days, washed along the way

Hands and feet

- Liner gloves and insulated outer gloves or mittens
- Trekking boots with ankle support, already broken in. This is essential
- Four pairs of wool trekking socks
- Camp shoes or trainers for the evenings
- Gaiters, if you are trekking in winter or early spring

Bags

- Duffel bag for the porter, 20 kg maximum. We provide one
- Daypack, 30 to 35 litres, with a rain cover
- Dry bags or thick liners. Rucksacks do not stay waterproof for long on a Himalayan trail

Sleeping

- Sleeping bag rated to minus 15°C. We provide one
- Silk or cotton liner, for warmth and hygiene
- Earplugs. Teahouse walls are thin plywood

Health

- Personal first aid: blister plasters, tape, painkillers, rehydration salts
- Diamox, if your doctor agrees, and any medication you take regularly
- Water purification: tablets, a filter, or a SteriPen
- Hand sanitiser and wet wipes
- Throat lozenges. Most people develop a dry cough at high altitude

Papers and money

- Passport valid for six months, plus two photocopies
- Four passport photographs for permits
- Travel insurance certificate showing helicopter cover to 6,000 m
- $250 to $400 in small notes. The last cash machine is in Manang, and it runs out of money in October

For the pass crossing

- A very warm hat, and mittens rather than gloves. You leave Thorong Phedi at three in the morning at about minus 15°C
- An insulated flask. The hose of a water bladder freezes on the day of the crossing, while a bottle in your pack does not
- Microspikes, if you are trekking in March or late November. Your guide will tell you in Manang whether to buy a pair there
- Trekking poles, especially for the 1,650 m descent to Muktinath
- Snacks you enjoy. Few people want breakfast at three in the morning, but everyone needs the energy

Altitude profile

Day	Place	Sleep at	Highest point
1	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-
2	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-
3	Besisahar	760 m	-
4	Chame	2,670 m	-
5	Pisang	3,300 m	-
6	Manang	3,540 m	-
7	Manang	3,540 m	4,000 m
8	Yak Kharka	4,050 m	-
9	Thorong Phedi	4,540 m	-
10	Muktinath	3,760 m	5,416 m
11	Jomsom	2,720 m	-
12	Pokhara	820 m	-
13	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-

Getting there and back

You drive in on a jeep track and fly out on a twenty-minute mountain flight. The flight is the part most likely to be delayed or cancelled.

By jeep to Chame

The journey takes two days: from Kathmandu to Besisahar on a surfaced road, then from Besisahar to Chame on a rough jeep track cut into the side of the Marsyangdi gorge. It is spectacular but uncomfortable, and slower than the distance suggests: five to six hours for about sixty kilometres. We use a private jeep rather than a shared local one, which makes the day considerably easier.

The Jomsom flight and the wind

The flight from Jomsom to Pokhara takes twenty minutes and must leave early. The Kali Gandaki is the deepest gorge in the world, and a strong valley wind rises there around nine or ten in the morning, after which the airstrip closes for the day. Flights therefore leave at first light or not at all. If your flight is cancelled, we take you to Pokhara by jeep, which takes eight to nine hours, and you arrive the same day.

Why this itinerary needs no spare day

A road runs the whole way below the Jomsom flight route. A cancelled Lukla flight can leave you waiting for three days, whereas a cancelled Jomsom flight means a long drive the same day. This is the practical reason this trek takes fourteen days and the Everest trek sixteen.

Leaving the trek from the far side of the pass

This is important to understand on a traverse. From Manang, returning the way you came takes two days to reach a jeep road. From Thorong Phedi there is no road, and the only ways out are back down to Manang or forward over the 5,416 m pass. This is why we assess your fitness in Manang and at Yak Kharka rather than at Thorong Phedi, and why the acclimatisation day is essential.

Accommodation

Teahouse accommodation

Every night on the trail is spent in a teahouse: a family-run lodge with one warm dining room, heated by a single stove, and simple twin rooms with foam mattresses and thin walls. Bring a sleeping bag. The Annapurna lodges are among the better ones in Nepal, and in the lower valley at Besisahar, Chame and Pisang most rooms have a private bathroom.

Facilities at higher altitude

Manang is the best stop on the route, with private bathrooms, hot showers for a fee and good food, which is useful for the two nights you spend there. Above Manang the lodges are simpler. Yak Kharka has shared bathrooms, and Thorong Phedi, the night before the pass, is basic, often full and the coldest night of the trek, with no shower. On the other side of the pass, Muktinath and Jomsom have private rooms with hot water.

Where	Nights	Type	Room	Bathroom
Kathmandu	3	Three-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Besisahar	1	Teahouse	Twin	Private
Chame	1	Teahouse	Twin	Private in most lodges
Pisang	1	Teahouse	Twin	Private in the better lodges
Manang	2	Teahouse, the best on the route	Twin	Private, hot shower for a fee
Yak Kharka	1	Teahouse	Twin, basic	Shared
Thorong Phedi	1	Teahouse, the coldest night of the trek	Twin, basic and often full	Shared, no shower
Muktinath	1	Teahouse	Twin	Private, hot water
Jomsom	1	Teahouse	Twin	Private, hot water
Pokhara	1	Three-star hotel, lakeside	Twin or double	Private, hot water

Heating

One stove in the dining room, lit at dusk. Bedrooms are not heated at any altitude.

Hot shower

Up to Manang, $3 to $6, heated by gas or solar. None above Yak Kharka.

Charging
$2 to $5 per device, in the dining room. Manang has mains electricity, and Thorong Phedi has a generator that runs for a few hours in the evening.

Wifi
Reasonable as far as Manang, which has an internet cafe and two cinemas. Unreliable at Yak Kharka and effectively unavailable at Thorong Phedi.

Phone signal
Ncell and NTC cover the valley up to Manang. There is no signal at Thorong Phedi, and it returns at Muktinath.

Water
Boiled water costs $1 to $4 a litre, depending on altitude. There are safe drinking water stations in several villages, and we encourage you to use them.

Sleeping bag
Provided, rated to minus 15°C. It is lent to you for the trek and returned 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 potato dishes
Dinner	18:30–19:30	Dal bhat, pasta, thukpa, curry and rice, soup to start
Tea	on arrival	Black, milk, lemon, ginger, or masala. Included at every stop.

Diet	How we manage it
Vegetarian	Easy throughout. Dal bhat is vegetarian and is the best dish on the menu.
Vegan	Manageable with notice. Tell us when you book so the guide can order in advance.
Gluten free	Rice, dal, potatoes and eggs are safe. Bread, noodles and momo are not, and cross-contamination in a teahouse kitchen cannot be ruled out.
Halal	There is no certified halal kitchen on the route. Vegetarian food is the practical option.
Meat	Available, but we advise against it above Manang, because the meat has been carried up for two days without refrigeration.

A typical day

Time	What happens
6:00	Tea in your room, and a bowl of warm water to wash in
6:30	Pack, and put the duffel outside your door for the porter
7:00	Breakfast together in the dining room

8:00	On the trail. The guide sets a steady, slow pace
12:00	Lunch at a teahouse on the route, about an hour
13:00	Two to four hours more, depending on the day
15:30	Arrive at the lodge, tea, check in, wash, and rest if you need to
17:00	Oxygen saturation and pulse taken, and written down
18:30	Dinner, and the guide briefs you on the next day
20:30	Bedtime. At 4,000 m most people are asleep by nine

Difficulty and preparation

Difficulty 4 of 5

Six moderate days and one very long day, crossing a pass at 5,416 m.

- Four to six hours of walking a day for six days, on good trails, with the road sections covered by jeep.
- Day 10 is the main challenge: you get up at three, walk four to five hours to the pass, then three to four hours down. That is eight to nine hours, all above 4,000 m.
- The Thorong La is a trek, not a climb. No ropes, no crampons in the trekking seasons, and no exposed sections.
- You sleep at 4,540 m the night before the pass, the highest and coldest night of the trek.
- The descent to Muktinath is 1,650 m in one afternoon on loose ground, which is hard on the knees.

Getting ready

10 weeks before: Build endurance
Three cardio sessions a week, 45 minutes each, at a pace where you can still hold a conversation. Choose an activity you will keep doing. If you do only one thing on this list, do this.

8 weeks before: Hill walking and strength
Replace one session with a one-hour hill walk with 300 m of ascent. Add a strength session: squats, step-ups, lunges and calf raises. The descent from the Thorong La is harder on the thigh muscles than the climb is on the lungs.

6 weeks before: One long day a week
Build up a weekend walk to six hours, with 700 m of ascent and the same in descent. This matches the demands of day 10, without the altitude, and is the most important thing to prepare for.

5 weeks before: Boots and pack
From now on, do every long walk in the boots you will trek in, with the daypack you will carry, loaded to 6 kg. Blisters on day 5 of a traverse are a serious problem, because there is nowhere to stop.

4 weeks before: Consecutive days
Take a long walk at the weekend and walk for two to three hours the next morning on tired legs. The trek consists of consecutive days of walking, which one long walk a week does not replicate.

3 weeks before: One early start
Do one walk that starts at four in the morning, in the cold. The day of the pass crossing begins at three, in the dark, at minus 15°C, and knowing that you can eat breakfast and walk at that hour is more useful than another gym session.

2 weeks before: Reduce training
Halve the amount of training but keep the frequency. Training at this stage will not improve your fitness and increases the risk of injury. Rest instead.

Altitude and safety

At 5,416 m, the Thorong La is one of the highest points reached on any teahouse trek in the world, and historically more trekkers have developed altitude sickness on the Annapurna Circuit than anywhere else in Nepal. There are two reasons for this. The trek climbs quickly in the middle section, from Chame at 2,670 m to Thorong Phedi at 4,540 m in five days. And the route leaves few options: from Thorong Phedi the only ways out are two days back down the valley or forward over the pass, so a trekker who is struggling may feel pressure to continue. We manage both risks by always including the acclimatisation day in Manang and by making the decision on whether to cross at Yak Kharka rather than at Thorong Phedi.

What to watch for

- A headache that does not improve with water and paracetamol
- Nausea, or complete loss of appetite
- Dizziness, or feeling drunk without having had alcohol
- Breathlessness at rest, not only while climbing
- Poor sleep at Yak Kharka or Thorong Phedi, or waking short of breath
- A dry cough that gets worse over a day
- Loss of coordination, which means you must descend immediately

How to prevent it

- Attend the Himalayan Rescue Association talk in Manang. It is free, it is given by a doctor, and it is very useful.
- Use the acclimatisation day well: walk up to Ice Lake or the Gangapurna viewpoint and come back down to sleep.
- Drink three to four litres of water a day, even if you do not feel thirsty.
- No alcohol above Manang, and no sleeping pills at any altitude. Save the local apple brandy from Manang until you reach Muktinath.
- Diamox is effective and worth discussing with your doctor before you travel. On this trek in particular it is a reasonable preventive measure.
- Sleep at Thorong Phedi rather than going on to High Camp, unless you are certain you are well acclimatised. The extra 300 m saves an hour in the morning but usually means a poor night's sleep.

What we do

1. Daily health checks
From Pisang onwards, your guide carries a pulse oximeter and records your oxygen saturation and pulse every evening, and again in the morning if you feel unwell. The readings are recorded, so any decline over the three days above Manang is clear.

2. Deciding at Yak Kharka
This part of our protocol differs from that of many operators. We decide whether you will cross the pass a day and a half before you reach it, not at Thorong Phedi at three in the morning, because descending from Yak Kharka is easy and descending from Thorong Phedi is not.

3. Mild symptoms
We descend 500 metres to Manang, at 3,540 m, and spend a night in a village with a doctor. Most cases resolve there, and there is usually time to go up again and still cross the pass.

4. Serious symptoms
You descend to Manang and leave by jeep, with a guide, while the group continues. Descent is the only effective treatment, and the decision to descend is made by the guide.

5. Helicopter evacuation
Helicopters can reach Manang, Yak Kharka and Muktinath and fly to Pokhara in about half an hour. Your insurance covers this: the cost is $3,000 to $5,000, and the helicopter will not fly without a payment guarantee.

6. Medical post on the route
The Himalayan Rescue Association post in Manang, at 3,540 m, is staffed by volunteer doctors in both trekking seasons, and our route spends two nights there.

Weather by month

The rating for each month refers to one thing: whether the Thorong La is passable. A December day in Manang can be pleasant while the pass above it is closed.

Month	Day at Manang	Night at Manang	Night at Thorong Phedi	Conditions	Note
January	8°C	-8°C	-18°C	We do not run it	The pass is usually closed by snow. We do not offer the crossing in January.
February	10°C	-6°C	-16°C	Hard	The pass opens in a year of light snowfall but not in a year of heavy snowfall. Ask us in December about February departures.
March	14°C	-3°C	-13°C	Good	The season begins. Cold on the pass, few trekkers, and snow underfoot on the crossing is likely.
April	17°C	1°C	-10°C	Best	The best spring month. Stable, clear weather, with blossom lower down in the Marsyangdi valley.
May	19°C	4°C	-7°C	Good	Warm, and increasingly hazy as the month goes on. The last reliable period before the monsoon.
June	20°C	6°C	-4°C	Hard	Monsoon on the eastern side. Manang and Mustang stay dry, but the access road becomes dangerous.
July	20°C	7°C	-3°C	We do not run it	We do not run the full circuit. The Besisahar road is at risk of landslides for weeks at a time.

August	20°C	7°C	-3°C	We do not run it	As in July. This is the season for Upper Mustang instead, which lies in the rain shadow behind the mountains.
September	18°C	4°C	-6°C	Good	The weather clears during the month. From about the 20th, conditions are excellent and the landscape is still green.
October	15°C	0°C	-11°C	Best	The most reliable month of the year and by far the busiest. Thorong Phedi fills up.
November	12°C	-4°C	-14°C	Best	Clear, cold and quieter. The best conditions on this trek, and the pass is still open.
December	9°C	-7°C	-17°C	Hard	Clear and beautiful below Manang. The pass closes at some point during the month, and the date cannot be predicted.

Averages from Nepal DHM station data for the Annapurna region. The rating column is about whether the Thorong La is passable, not whether the valley is pleasant.

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, so nobody is left alone at the back. Our guides come from the hill regions where they work.

Porters and luggage

Each porter carries a maximum of 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 on the trail. If your bag is overweight, the load is divided rather than added to. Porters carry the main luggage, not daypacks: you carry your own water, camera, jacket and snacks for the day.

Staff pay and insurance

Salary, insurance, food and lodging for every guide and porter are included in the price you pay, and are not collected separately on the trail. Every member of the team is insured for altitude and helicopter evacuation on the same terms we require of you. Paying fair wages and insurance through the trip price is how we ensure our porters are properly equipped and not overloaded.

Tipping

Tipping is customary but not compulsory, and it never replaces wages. For this trip, $130 to $200 per traveller for the whole team is usual, given together on the last evening rather than daily. Your guide will not ask for a tip, and would prefer that it is not given in front of the group.

Responsible travel

Drinking water

A traveller drinking bottled water uses around 30 plastic bottles on this trip, and every one has to be carried in and carried out again. Boiled water is available at every lodge for one or two dollars a litre, and we encourage you to use it. Bring purification tablets or a filter as a backup.

Waste

We carry out everything we bring in that is not food. The Annapurna Conservation Area has a waste problem, and we make sure we do not add to it.

Supporting local communities

The lodges are family businesses in the villages you pass through, and the guides and porters live in this district. The ACAP fee funds the conservation area, which is managed by a national trust rather than the government and returns a documented share of the fee to the village committees along the trail. Almost all of what you pay is spent within a few days' walk of the trail. This is one reason to book with a Nepali operator rather than a foreign one that subcontracts the trek locally.

Local customs

Ask before photographing anyone. When you meet a mule train, stand on the mountain side of the path, not the side with the drop, and let it pass. Monasteries welcome visitors, but they are places of worship: remove your hat and shoes, and if a service is taking place, wait.

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 been on this trip. Nothing is payable at this stage, and there is no obligation until you pay a deposit.

Deposit

A deposit of 30 per cent secures 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.

Payment

You can pay by bank transfer, or by card through a secure link. Card payments carry the bank's 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, 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 retained, because the permits, flights and crew have been booked by then. If we cancel for any reason other than weather, we refund everything you have paid.

Private and group departures

For a party of five or more, private and group departures cost the same. 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. Most travellers book privately, at no extra cost.

Late bookings

Outside October, two weeks' notice is enough, and seats on the Jomsom flight are the only thing that may be limited. For October we need six weeks' notice, because Thorong Phedi has a fixed number of beds and no alternative accommodation.

Optional extras

Tilicho Lake
from $290, +3 days
A lake at 4,919 m in a side valley near Manang, and one of the highest lakes of its size in the world. This is a demanding extension, with two nights above 4,000 m and a long, exposed traverse. It also provides very good acclimatisation for the pass.

Poon Hill on the way home
from $240, +3 days
Walk out through Ghorepani instead of flying from Jomsom, and end the trek with one of the best sunrises in Nepal. It costs less than the flight and takes three days longer.

Upper Mustang from Jomsom
from $1,600, +8 days
The trek ends in Jomsom, the gateway to Lo Manthang. Continuing into the walled former kingdom is the best extension in the Annapurna region, and requires a restricted area permit at $50 a day.

Paragliding over Pokhara
$95, 1 morning
A 30-minute flight from Sarangkot, with views across the valley of the range you have just trekked through. There is time for it on day 12.

Chitwan jungle safari
from $390, +3 days
A chance to see rhinos, and a relaxing change after crossing a 5,416 m pass. It fits between Pokhara and Kathmandu.

Single room
$140
A room to yourself for the four hotel nights. On the trail, lodges are twin-share only, especially at Thorong Phedi.

Frequently asked questions

Answers to the 23 questions travellers ask us most often. If your question is not here, contact us and we will answer it.

How has the road affected the Annapurna Circuit?

The road has changed the trek but not spoiled it. A jeep track now runs from Besisahar to Manang and from Muktinath to Beni, which has removed about a week of walking along the road. The best-known section of the circuit, from Manang over the Thorong La to Muktinath, has no road and cannot have one. You lose the long approach, and the trek takes fourteen days instead of twenty-one, with most of the time spent on the finest section. We drive the jeep tracks and use the marked NATT trails to stay off the road wherever a path exists.

How does it compare with Annapurna Base Camp?

They are very different treks in the same conservation area. Annapurna Base Camp is a return trek up a gorge that ends in a glacial basin, reaches 4,130 m and is graded moderate. The Circuit crosses a 5,416 m pass, from a green Hindu valley into a Tibetan desert landscape. Base Camp has the finest single view, while the Circuit offers the more varied journey. If you are concerned about altitude, choose Annapurna Base Camp.

How fit do I need to be?

You need to be fit enough for one day of eight to nine hours' walking at high altitude, because that is the main demand of this trek. The other six walking days are four to six hours on good trails, and most reasonably active people manage them comfortably. Train for day 10 and you will be well prepared for the rest.

Is there an age limit?

There is no upper age limit, and we have taken trekkers in their seventies over the Thorong La. The minimum age is twelve, with a parent. Your walking experience matters more than your age.

What is the day of the pass crossing like?

You wake at 2:30 am, eat breakfast at 3:00 am, and set off in the dark by head torch, in temperatures of about minus 15°C. The climb takes four to five hours at a steady pace; it is never steep, but the air is thin. The top of the pass is a saddle with prayer flags and a tea shop, and because of the wind you do not stay long. The descent to Muktinath then takes three to four hours and drops 1,650 m. In Muktinath there is hot water, a temple, and a well-earned drink.

What if I cannot cross the pass?

You descend to Manang and leave by jeep, with a guide, while the group continues. This is why we make the decision at Yak Kharka rather than at Thorong Phedi: from Yak Kharka the descent is easy, but from Thorong Phedi the only options are two days back down the valley or a 5,416 m pass. We prefer to turn a trekker around a day early rather than leave that decision until three in the morning.

Should I sleep at Thorong Phedi or High Camp?

Thorong Phedi, unless you have adapted to the altitude particularly well. High Camp is 300 m higher, which saves an hour on the morning of the crossing, but you sleep much less well at 4,850 m. For most people the hour is not worth it, and our guides will advise you at Yak Kharka.

Will there be snow on the pass?

In October and April there is usually little snow. In March and late November, expect some, and your guide will tell you in Manang whether you need to buy microspikes there. From December to February the pass is often closed, and we do not offer the crossing in January.

Which direction do you trek the circuit?

Anticlockwise, from Manang to Muktinath, as almost all trekkers do. The eastern side climbs gradually over five days, while the western side descends 1,650 m in an afternoon. Walking in the other direction would mean climbing those 1,650 m in one day to reach a 5,416 m pass on the second or third day of the trek, which carries a high risk of serious altitude sickness.

Why is altitude sickness a particular concern on this trek?

There are two reasons. The middle section climbs quickly, from Chame to Thorong Phedi in five days, and the layout of the route leaves few options: from Thorong Phedi, the only ways out are two days back down the valley or over the pass. Both risks are manageable, and we address them in the same way, with a rest day in Manang and an early decision about whether to continue. We include the free Himalayan Rescue Association altitude talk in Manang in the itinerary, and every trekker attends.

Should I take Diamox?

Discuss it with your own doctor before you travel. On this trek in particular it is a reasonable preventive measure, because of the speed of the middle section. It does not replace the rest day, and it does not make it safe to continue if you have symptoms.

Do I need insurance that covers helicopter rescue?

Yes, with cover up to 6,000 m, because the pass is at 5,416 m. It is a condition of booking and we ask to see your insurance certificate. A rescue from Thorong Phedi to Pokhara costs $3,000 to $5,000, and the helicopter will not fly without a payment guarantee.

What are the lodges like?

Manang is a large village with hot showers, a bakery, an internet cafe and two cinemas showing trekking films, and it is one of the more comfortable overnight stops on any trek in Nepal. Yak Kharka and Thorong Phedi are basic and cold, and Thorong Phedi is the coldest night of the trip. Muktinath and Jomsom have hot water and good rooms.

Is the Jomsom flight reliable?

The flight operates reliably in the early morning, but every day the Kali Gandaki wind rises around nine or ten o'clock and flights stop by mid-morning. The flight therefore leaves at first light or not at all. If it is cancelled, we drive you to Pokhara, which takes eight or nine hours, and you arrive the same day. This is why the itinerary does not need a spare day at the end.

How busy is the trail?

In October it is busy, and this is most noticeable at Thorong Phedi, where there is a fixed number of beds and no alternative. Late November and early April have almost equally good weather with far fewer trekkers, and both are good months to choose.

How cold does it get?

At Thorong Phedi, night temperatures range from minus 10°C to minus 18°C depending on the month, and bedrooms are not heated anywhere on the route. We provide a sleeping bag rated to minus 15°C. On the pass before dawn, expect around minus 15°C, with wind chill in addition, which is why mittens are on the packing list.

Which permits do I need?

You need two permits: the Annapurna Conservation Area permit, at NPR 3,000, and a TIMS card, at NPR 2,000. Both are included and we arrange them for you. If you add Tilicho Lake, no further permit is needed. If you continue from Jomsom into Upper Mustang, which is a restricted area, the permit costs $50 per person per day.

Do I have to use a guide?

Yes. A licensed guide has been legally required for foreign trekkers in Nepal's conservation areas since April 2023, and the checkpoint at Dharapani enforces it.

How much cash should I take?

Bring 250 to 400 US dollars' worth of Nepali rupees, in small notes. The last cash machine is in Manang, and it does run out of money in October, so do not rely on it.

Why does a circuit trek cost more than a return trek?

Because you finish 150 km from where you started. The private jeep in and the Jomsom flight out are both one-way, and the guide and porters have to travel home from the far end. This transport accounts for about $400 of the difference and is not related to the trekking itself.

When should I go?

October and November offer the most reliable weather, and April is best in spring. We particularly recommend late November: the pass is still open, the air is at its clearest, and there are far fewer trekkers than in October. Avoid January, when the pass is usually closed.

How far ahead should I book?

Outside October, two weeks' notice is enough. For an October departure we need six weeks' notice, because Thorong Phedi has a fixed number of beds and there is nowhere else to sleep.

Can I add Tilicho Lake?

Yes, and it is the extension we recommend most often on this trek. It adds three days, visits a lake at 4,919 m, and provides very good acclimatisation for the pass. It is a serious undertaking, however, with two nights above 4,000 m and an exposed traverse, so it should not be added lightly.

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