

Earthbound Expeditions

Everest Three High Passes Trek

22 days, from US$2,387 per person

Duration **22 days**	Grade **Very strenuous**	Max altitude **5,545 m**
Start and end **Kathmandu**	On the trail **5 to 7 hours a day**	Best season **Apr to May, Oct to Nov**
Accommodation **Teahouses**	Meals **All meals on the trek**	Group size **Up to 8**
Getting there **Fly to Lukla**		

Everest Three High Passes Trek Overview

Every valley in the Khumbu, three passes above 5,300 m, the Gokyo lakes and Everest Base Camp. The complete circuit of the Everest region, and the hardest trek we offer.

Trek overview

This trek links the whole of the Khumbu: four valleys, three passes over 5,300 m, the Gokyo lakes, Everest Base Camp and Kala Patthar, walked as a single anticlockwise circuit over eighteen days on the trail. The Base Camp trek goes up one valley and back; this trek crosses every ridge between the valleys. It is the most complete route in this region that can be walked without ropes.

The three passes

The Renjo La, at 5,340 m, is the easiest: a steady climb from the Bhote Koshi valley to a saddle with Everest ahead and the Gokyo lakes below. The Cho La, at 5,420 m, is the most technical, with a short, flat glacier crossing at the top where you wear microspikes, and a steep, loose descent on the east side. The Kongma La, at 5,535 m, is the highest and by far the hardest: eight to ten hours, with a glacier crossing at the start and a long, continuous climb after it, on day 17 after two weeks of trekking.

Who this trip is for

This is the hardest trek we offer, and the one for which we most often decline bookings. It is for people who have already completed a Himalayan trek of two weeks or more, who were comfortable at 5,000 m rather than simply completing it, and who are genuinely fit. It is not suitable as a first Himalayan trek or as the next step after a week in the Alps. Enthusiasm is no substitute for previous experience at altitude.

Direction of the route

We walk the route anticlockwise, from west to east, for good reason. This puts the easiest pass first, when you are least acclimatised, and the hardest pass last, after two weeks above 4,000 m. It also means every pass is crossed from its lower side, so each involves a climb followed by a descent rather than the reverse. Itineraries in the other direction exist, but they place the Kongma La after only eight days in the mountains.

Key highlights of the Everest Three High Passes Trek

- Renjo La (5,340 m), Cho La (5,420 m) and Kongma La (5,535 m)
- Gokyo Ri, the Gokyo lakes and the Ngozumpa glacier
- Everest Base Camp and Kala Patthar
- Thame and the Bhote Koshi valley, which Base Camp trekkers do not visit

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
2	Kathmandu valley sites, kit check	-	-	1,400 m
3	Fly to Lukla, walk to Monjo	4–5 hrs	12 km	2,560 m
4	Monjo to Namche Bazaar	5–6 hrs	8 km	3,440 m

5	Namche, acclimatisation day	2–4 hrs	-	3,440 m
6	Namche to Thame	5–6 hrs	10 km	3,845 m
7	Thame to Marlung	4–5 hrs	8 km	4,135 m
8	Marlung to Lungden	3–4 hrs	6 km	4,600 m
9	Up towards the Renjo La	2–3 hrs	5 km	4,890 m
10	Over the Renjo La to Gokyo	7–8 hrs	12 km	5,340 m
11	Gokyo Ri, rest day	4–5 hrs	5 km	5,357 m
12	Across the Ngozumpa to Thangnak	2–3 hrs	4 km	4,695 m
13	Over the Cho La to Dzongla	7–9 hrs	14 km	5,420 m
14	Dzongla to Lobuche	3–4 hrs	6 km	4,925 m
15	Lobuche to Base Camp, sleep Gorak Shep	7–8 hrs	13 km	5,364 m
16	Kala Patthar at dawn, down to Lobuche	6–7 hrs	10 km	5,545 m
17	Over the Kongma La to Chhukung	8–10 hrs	12 km	5,535 m
18	Chhukung to Tengboche	6–7 hrs	18 km	3,867 m
19	Tengboche to Namche	5–6 hrs	10 km	3,440 m
20	Namche to Lukla	6–7 hrs	13 km	2,860 m
21	Fly to Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
22	Fly home	-	-	-

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

We meet you at the airport and take you to your hotel. In the evening, we go through the trek in detail, because it has more elements than most: three passes, four valleys and a decision point at each pass.

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

Day 2

Kathmandu Valley sightseeing

Visit the hilltop stupa at Swayambhunath, the riverside temples at Pashupatinath, the great dome of Boudhanath and the carved squares of Patan. In the afternoon, we check your equipment, paying particular attention to your boots on this trek.

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

Day 3

Fly to Lukla and trek to Monjo

After the mountain flight, trek down the Dudh Koshi past Phakding to Monjo at the national park gate. This is a little further than the usual first day, which makes the climb to Namche tomorrow shorter.

Altitude: 2,560 m On foot: 12 km, 4–5 hrs Night: Teahouse, Monjo Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4

Trek to Namche Bazaar

Pass through the park gate, cross the high Hillary bridge, and make the long climb through pine forest to Namche. On a clear day, you have your first view of Everest on the way up.

Altitude: 3,440 m On foot: 8 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Namche Bazaar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5

Acclimatisation day in Namche Bazaar

The first acclimatisation day. Walk up to the viewpoint above the town for views of Everest, Lhotse and Ama Dablam, then return to Namche to sleep. Buy anything you have forgotten here, as it is the last well-stocked shop for two weeks.

Altitude: 3,440 m On foot: Optional 2–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Namche Bazaar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6

Trek to Thame

From here, the trek leaves the Base Camp route. You turn west up the Bhote Koshi into a valley that Base Camp trekkers do not visit. This is the old salt-trading route to Tibet. Thame is a village that has produced a remarkable number of Everest summiteers, including members of Tenzing Norgay's family and Apa Sherpa.

Altitude: 3,845 m On foot: 10 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Thame Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

Trek to Marlung

Continue up the Bhote Koshi valley, which becomes narrower and quieter. You pass yak pastures and a few stone houses, with Tibet beyond the ridge ahead. The day is kept short on purpose, because the altitude is now rising steadily.

Altitude: 4,135 m On foot: 8 km, 4–5 hrs Night: Teahouse, Marlung Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

Trek to Lungden

Another short day at altitude to the last settlement in the valley. Lungden has two or three buildings and wide open views, and from here the trek becomes truly remote.

Altitude: 4,600 m On foot: 6 km, 3–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Lungden Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 9

Trek to the Renjo La high camp

A short walk up to a high camp below the first pass, which divides the crossing into two manageable stages. The afternoon is for resting and drinking plenty of water, and the guide checks your oxygen readings before dinner.

Altitude: 4,890 m On foot: 5 km, 2–3 hrs Night: Teahouse, below the Renjo La Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10

Cross the Renjo La and trek to Gokyo

The first pass, at 5,340 m, is the easiest of the three. A steady climb leads to a saddle hung with prayer flags, with views of Everest, Lhotse and Makalu straight ahead and the Gokyo lakes directly below. A steep stone staircase descends to the third lake and the village.

Altitude: 5,340 m at the Renjo La On foot: 12 km, 7–8 hrs Night: Teahouse, Gokyo Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 11

Hike to Gokyo Ri and rest day

Climb the hill behind the village at dawn to 5,357 m for views of Everest, Lhotse, Makalu and Cho Oyu, four of the six highest mountains in the world. The rest of the day is a full rest day, which you will need after the first pass.

Altitude: 5,357 m at Gokyo Ri On foot: 5 km, 4–5 hrs Night: Teahouse, Gokyo Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 12

Cross the Ngozumpa Glacier to Thangnak

A short day that crosses the Ngozumpa Glacier, the longest glacier in Nepal, which looks like a field of rubble with ice beneath it. On the far side there are a few buildings at Thangnak. The walk takes two or three hours, and the guide chooses the route across the glacier.

Altitude: 4,695 m On foot: 4 km, 2–3 hrs Night: Teahouse, Thangnak Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 13

Cross the Cho La and trek to Dzongla

The most technical pass. After an early start, a steep climb leads to the pass at 5,420 m, followed by a short glacier crossing at the top that is flat but icy, where the guide will fit you with microspikes. The descent on the east side is steep and loose. This is a long and demanding day with outstanding scenery.

Altitude: 5,420 m at the Cho La On foot: 14 km, 7–9 hrs Night: Teahouse, Dzongla Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 14

Trek to Lobuche

A short, easy and scenic day, traversing above the Khumbu glacier with Ama Dablam behind you and Pumori ahead. You join the Base Camp trail at Lobuche, where you meet larger numbers of trekkers for the first time in a week.

Altitude: 4,925 m On foot: 6 km, 3–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Lobuche Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 15

Trek to Everest Base Camp

Follow the glacier to Gorak Shep for lunch, then cross the moraine to Base Camp below the Khumbu Icefall. In spring, it is filled with the tents of climbing expeditions. Return to Gorak Shep to sleep.

Altitude: 5,364 m at Base Camp On foot: 13 km, 7–8 hrs Night: Teahouse, Gorak Shep Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 16

Hike to Kala Patthar and trek to Lobuche

An early start in the cold and dark to climb Kala Patthar for the best view of Everest at sunrise, then descend to Lobuche to prepare for the last pass. This is the highest point of the trek, but not the hardest day.

Altitude: 5,545 m at Kala Patthar On foot: 10 km, 6–7 hrs Night: Teahouse, Lobuche Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 17

Cross the Kongma La and trek to Chhukung

The hardest day of the trek and the highest pass, at 5,535 m. You first cross the Khumbu Glacier, then climb steadily for a long time to a saddle with frozen lakes and prayer flags, followed by a long descent into the Imja valley. The day takes eight to ten hours, and the whole trek has been preparing you for it.

Altitude: 5,535 m at the Kongma La On foot: 12 km, 8–10 hrs Night: Teahouse, Chhukung Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 18

Trek to Tengboche

Descend the Imja valley through Dingboche and Pangboche, losing height all day and breathing more easily, to the monastery at Tengboche on its ridge with Ama Dablam behind. The hardest part of the trek is now over.

Altitude: 3,867 m On foot: 18 km, 6–7 hrs Night: Teahouse, Tengboche Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 19

Trek to Namche Bazaar

Descend to the river at Phunki Tenga and climb back up to Namche, through forest with birdsong, to a hot shower. The rest of the trek is relatively easy.

Altitude: 3,440 m On foot: 10 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Namche Bazaar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 20

Trek to Lukla

The last full day on the trail, back across the bridges and through the villages to Lukla. In the evening, we have dinner with the guides and porters, which is a special occasion at the end of this trek.

Altitude: 2,860 m On foot: 13 km, 6–7 hrs Night: Teahouse, Lukla Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 21

Fly to Kathmandu

A short morning flight back to Kathmandu, with the rest of the day free. A farewell dinner in the evening, and a comfortable hotel bed.

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

Day 22

Departure

We take you to the airport, or on to any extension you have booked. As on any Khumbu trek, allow a spare day in your wider plans in case of weather delays at Lukla.

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
Sagarmatha National Park entry permit. SAARC nationals pay NPR 1,500. Children under ten are free.	NPR 3,390, about $25	Kathmandu, or at Monjo on the way in
Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality permit. Covers the first four weeks, then NPR 2,500 after that.	NPR 2,000, about $15	Lukla, on arrival
TIMS card. No longer required in the Khumbu since 2018. It was replaced by the municipality permit above. You do not need to buy one for this trek.	Not required	-

Other cost	Amount	Note
Lukla flight, both ways	$350–420	about $500 via Manthali in peak season
Sagarmatha National Park permit	$25	NPR 3,390
Khumbu Pasang Lhamu permit	$15	NPR 2,000, the local municipality permit
Teahouse bed, 18 nights	$5–25 a night	More expensive at higher altitude, and you sleep high for two weeks
Food on the trail	$25–35 a day	Three meals a day and tea, no alcohol, for eighteen days
Licensed guide	$35–45 a day	A senior guide with experience on the passes, which requires different experience from a Base Camp guide
Second guide, from 5 trekkers	$30–40 a day	On the passes, we require two guides so that nobody is ever alone on a descent
Porter, one per two trekkers	$22–28 a day	Including their accommodation and meals
Microspikes and a rope	$40–70	Carried by the guide for the Cho La. Included, and used on most crossings
Kathmandu hotel	$40–70 a night	Three-star, three nights
Travel insurance to 6,000 m	$140–220	Must cover helicopter rescue. More expensive for a trek of this length
Tips, guide and porter	$250–400	Per trekker, at the end. This is a long and demanding trip for the crew

Packing list

Baggage weight limits

Your porter carries a maximum of 20 kg, shared between two trekkers. The Lukla flight allows 15 kg in total, 10 kg checked and 5 kg as hand luggage, and all baggage is weighed. On a trek this long, it is tempting to pack more, but the flight limit does not allow it. We provide the duffel bag, the sleeping bag and the down jacket.

Head and eyes

- Sun hat with a brim, and a warm hat that covers your ears
- Two buffs or neck gaiters
- Category 3 or 4 sunglasses. Snow glare at this altitude is severe
- Headtorch and spare batteries
- SPF 50 sunscreen and lip balm with sun protection

Clothing

- Three or four merino or synthetic base layers, not cotton
- Two mid layers: one fleece and one light insulated jacket
- Down jacket. We provide one, but bring your own if you tend to feel the cold
- Waterproof jacket and trousers that pack small
- Two pairs of trekking trousers, one of them 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, which must be broken in before the trek
- Four pairs of wool trekking socks
- Camp shoes or trainers for the evenings
- Gaiters, if you are travelling 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, as rain and snow will eventually soak through ordinary bags

Sleeping

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

Health

- Personal first aid kit: blister plasters, tape, painkillers and rehydration salts
- Diamox, if your doctor agrees, and any regular medication
- Water purification: tablets, a filter or a SteriPen
- Hand sanitiser and wet wipes
- Throat lozenges. Almost everyone develops a dry cough at high altitude

Documents and money

- Passport valid for six months, and two photocopies
- Four passport photographs for permits
- Travel insurance certificate showing helicopter cover to 6,000 m
- $450 to $700 in small notes. The last cash machine is at Namche Bazaar, eighteen days before the end of the trek

For the three passes

- Microspikes. We carry a set for the Cho La, and you are welcome to bring your own if you have a reliable pair
- Warm mittens rather than gloves, and a spare pair of liners. On all three passes, the day starts in the dark at about -15°C
- Gaiters, in all seasons on this trek. The Cho La and the Kongma La both have snow in most seasons
- Two power banks. Charging at Lungden, Thangnak and Dzongla is solar-powered and limited, and there are three-day stretches with almost no charging
- An insulated flask, because hydration bladder hoses freeze on all three passes
- More cash than you think you need. There are eighteen days of tea, charging and showers with no cash machine after Namche
- Two blister kits. Cuts and blisters stop healing above 4,600 m, and you spend nine nights at that altitude

Altitude profile

Day	Place	Sleep at	Highest point
1	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-
2	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-
3	Monjo	2,560 m	2,840 m
4	Namche Bazaar	3,440 m	-
5	Namche Bazaar	3,440 m	3,880 m
6	Thame	3,845 m	-
7	Marlung	4,135 m	-
8	Lungden	4,600 m	-
9	Below the Renjo La	4,890 m	-
10	Gokyo	4,775 m	5,340 m

11	Gokyo	4,775 m	5,357 m
12	Thangnak	4,695 m	-
13	Dzongla	4,840 m	5,420 m
14	Lobuche	4,925 m	-
15	Gorak Shep	5,164 m	5,364 m
16	Lobuche	4,925 m	5,545 m
17	Chhukung	4,730 m	5,535 m
18	Tengboche	3,867 m	-
19	Namche Bazaar	3,440 m	-
20	Lukla	2,860 m	-
21	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-

Lukla flights

Flight delays at Lukla affect every Everest trek. On a twenty-two-day itinerary, a lost day has less impact than on a twelve-day one. This section explains how delays are handled.

Flights from Kathmandu or Ramechhap

Outside the two busiest periods of the year, the flight leaves from Kathmandu and takes about 35 minutes. During most of March to May and late September to November, air traffic control moves Lukla departures to Manthali airport at Ramechhap to reduce congestion at Kathmandu. This means a four to five-hour drive leaving Kathmandu at around 2 am, followed by a twenty-minute flight. The trek is the same, but the night before is much shorter. We tell you which applies to your dates before you book.

Baggage allowance of 15 kg

The allowance is 15 kg in total: 10 kg of checked baggage and 5 kg of hand luggage. Excess baggage costs about $1.50 per kilo, and the limit is enforced, because the aircraft is a nineteen-seat Twin Otter or Dornier and the runway is 527 metres long and built on a slope. Anything you do not take on the trek is stored free at our office in Kathmandu.

Flight delays

Cloud closes Lukla airport several times a month in every season. A delay of one day is common and two days is not unusual. Days 18 and 19 can be walked as one very long day to make up for this. If flights are cancelled for more than three days, we change the itinerary to an equally good trek at lower altitude rather than shorten this one, at no extra charge. If you prefer to fly out by helicopter on the day, a seat costs around $500, and we can usually arrange one within a few hours.

Book your flight home with a spare day

Whatever your itinerary says, book an international flight that leaves at least one clear day after your scheduled return to Kathmandu. This is the least expensive precaution you can take on this trip, and our most important advice.

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. At Monjo, Namche and Lukla, most rooms have a private bathroom. Above Namche, bathrooms are shared, and hot showers, charging and wifi are paid for separately.

Lodges between the passes

West of Thame, there are fewer lodges. Marlung is basic, Lungden has two or three buildings, and the night below the Renjo La is in a seasonal lodge with no shower. Gokyo, on the lake shore, is the comfortable stop in the middle of the trek. Thangnak and Dzongla, on either side of the Cho La, are small and basic, and Gorak Shep is the highest night. On pass days, you eat early and go to bed early.

Where	Nights	Type	Room	Bathroom
Kathmandu	3	Three-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Monjo	1	Teahouse	Twin	Private in most rooms
Namche Bazaar	3	Teahouse	Twin	Private, hot shower for a fee
Thame	1	Teahouse	Twin	Shared
Marlung	1	Teahouse, basic	Twin	Shared
Lungden	1	Teahouse, in a settlement of two or three buildings	Twin, basic	Shared, no shower
Below the Renjo La	1	Teahouse, seasonal	Twin, basic	Shared, no shower
Gokyo	2	Teahouse on the lake shore	Twin	Shared, hot shower for a fee
Thangnak	1	Teahouse, two buildings on the far side of the glacier	Twin, basic	Shared, no shower
Dzongla	1	Teahouse, basic	Twin	Shared, no shower
Lobuche	2	Teahouse	Twin	Shared
Gorak Shep	1	Teahouse, the highest on the route	Twin, basic	Shared, no shower
Chhukung	1	Teahouse	Twin	Shared
Tengboche	1	Teahouse	Twin	Shared
Lukla	1	Teahouse	Twin	Private

Heating

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

Hot shower
Up to Gokyo, $5 to $8, heated by gas or solar. None above Gokyo.

Charging
$3 to $5 per device, the main limitation on this route. Charging at Lungden, Thangnak and Dzongla is solar and limited, with three-day stretches of almost none. Bring two power banks and keep them in your sleeping bag at night.

Wifi
Everest Link cards cost about $20 for 10 GB, with patchy coverage. Between Thame and Gokyo, there is no reliable connection.

Phone signal
Ncell and NTC cover Namche, Thame, the Base Camp valley and Chhukung. There is no signal in the Bhote Koshi valley above Marlung, at Thangnak or at Dzongla.

Water
Boiled water costs $1 to $4 a litre depending on altitude. Do not take water from the Gokyo lakes: they are a Ramsar site and a sacred site.

Sleeping bag
Provided, rated to -15°C, for use during 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 potatoes cooked in many ways
Dinner	18:30–19:30	Soup to start, then dal bhat, pasta, thukpa, or curry and rice
Tea	on arrival	Black, milk, lemon, ginger or masala tea. Included at every stop.

Diet	How we manage it
Vegetarian	Easy throughout the trek. Dal bhat is vegetarian and is the best dish on the menu.
Vegan	Manageable with advance notice. Tell us when you book so the guide can order ahead.
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. A vegetarian diet is the practical option.
Meat	Available, but we advise against eating meat above Namche, as it is 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 slow, steady pace
12:00	Lunch at a teahouse on the route, for about an hour
13:00	Two to four more hours of walking, depending on the day
15:30	Arrive at the teahouse for tea, choose a bed, wash, and rest if you need to
17:00	Oxygen saturation and pulse measured and recorded
18:30	Dinner, and a briefing from the guide on the next day
20:30	Bed. At 4,000 m, most people are asleep by 9 pm

Difficulty and preparation

Difficulty 5 of 5

The hardest trek we run: three passes and eighteen days, with no rope work.

- Eighteen days on the trail with one rest day, including three days of seven to ten hours above 5,300 m.
- Nine consecutive nights above 4,600 m, from day 8 to day 17. None of our other treks requires this.
- The Cho La has a short glacier crossing at the top. It is flat but icy, and you will wear microspikes, with a rope available.
- The Kongma La, at 5,535 m on day 17, takes eight to ten hours and comes after two weeks of trekking.
- There is no rope work, no crampons other than microspikes, and no exposure that would concern a hillwalker. It is a walk, but a very long, very high and very cold one.

Getting ready

Before you book: Previous experience required

You need to have completed a Himalayan trek of two weeks or more on which you were comfortable at 5,000 m, not one you simply got through. This is the only trip for which we decline bookings on this basis, and we prefer to do this when you enquire rather than at Lungden. If you have not done such a trek, complete the Base Camp or Gokyo trek first. You will enjoy this trek far more in a couple of years.

16 weeks before: Build endurance

Do four cardio sessions a week of 45 to 60 minutes, mostly at a conversational pace, with one harder session. Eighteen days on the trail is above all a test of endurance, and this base fitness is what carries you through the third week.

14 weeks before: Strength training
Do two strength sessions a week: squats, step-ups, lunges, calf raises and single-leg exercises. The descents are the hardest part of this trek for most people. The east side of the Cho La and the descent from the Kongma La are both long and loose and come late in the day.

12 weeks before: Long hill days with a pack
Every week from now on, spend one weekend day walking for five to six hours with 800 m of ascent, carrying the daypack you will use, loaded to 7 kg, in the boots you will wear on the trek.

9 weeks before: Three consecutive days
This is the most important training for this trek. Once a month from now on, walk on three consecutive days: one long day followed by two medium days. Eighteen days with one rest day has a cumulative effect, and a single long walk does not prepare you for that.

6 weeks before: Longest training day
Walk for eight hours with 1,000 m of ascent and 1,000 m of descent, carrying your pack. This is equivalent to the Kongma La day without the altitude. If you can finish it and then eat and sleep normally, you are on track.

4 weeks before: Early starts in the cold
Do two walks that start before dawn, in whatever winter conditions you have. Three days on this trek start in the dark at around -15°C, and it is useful to know that you can function well at that time of day.

2 weeks before: Rest
Halve the amount of training, keep the same number of sessions, and do not break in any new equipment. Training now will not make you fitter and may cause an injury.

Altitude and safety

This is the most demanding altitude profile of any of our treks, because of the length of time at altitude rather than the maximum height. The highest point is 5,545 m, the same as on the Base Camp trek, but on this trek you spend nine consecutive nights above 4,600 m and five separate days above 5,300 m. Your body does not fully recover at these altitudes; at best it stays stable. Appetite and sleep decline, and small injuries stop healing. Everyone finishes this trek lighter than they started. The acclimatisation schedule is well designed, with the rest day in Namche, the gradual approach up the Bhote Koshi valley and a day at Gokyo between the first two passes, but you are still living at high altitude for two weeks.

What to watch for

- A headache that does not improve with water and paracetamol
- Nausea, or no appetite when you should be hungry
- Dizziness, or feeling drunk without having had any alcohol
- Breathlessness at rest, not only when climbing
- Poor sleep night after night, waking short of breath
- A dry cough that gets worse over a day, which almost everyone develops on this trek
- Loss of coordination, which means you must descend immediately
- Cuts and blisters that stop healing, which is not an emergency but is a warning sign

How to prevent it

- Eat well. On a trek this long, the biggest single risk is not altitude sickness but reaching the Kongma La on day 17 after two weeks of eating too little.
- Drink four litres of water a day, even if you do not feel thirsty.
- Use the day at Gokyo as a rest day, not as a second summit day, unless you are feeling very well.
- Avoid alcohol above Namche for the whole trek, and do not take sleeping pills at any altitude.
- Tell your guide on the day a symptom starts, not the day after. There are three places on this trek where descending is easy and many where it is not.
- Discuss Diamox with your doctor before you leave, particularly for this itinerary.

What we do

1. Daily health checks

Above Namche, your guide carries a pulse oximeter and records your oxygen saturation and pulse every evening, and on any morning when you feel unwell. Over eighteen days, this record is the most useful document on the trek, because a slow decline over two weeks is hard to notice from day to day but clear in the written figures.

2. Pass crossing decisions

Three times on this trek, we decide in the evening whether the group will cross the pass the next morning: at the Renjo La camp, at Thangnak and at Lobuche. Turning back is straightforward from each of these places, but each pass has a point beyond which it is not. The guide makes the decision, based on the readings.

3. Alternative routes

Any pass can be skipped without ending the trek. Most itineraries do not explain this. If the Cho La cannot be crossed, we go back over the Renjo La or around via Dole and rejoin the Base Camp route from Namche. If the Kongma La cannot be crossed, we walk out from Lobuche through Dingboche. You miss a pass, not the trip, and in most seasons this happens to someone.

4. Serious symptoms

Descent is the only effective treatment. From Gokyo, Lobuche and Chhukung, it is a straightforward walk of one or two days to lower altitude. From the top of a pass it is not, which is why the two steps above are so important.

5. Helicopter evacuation

Helicopters can reach Gokyo, Lobuche, Gorak Shep, Dingboche and Chhukung. They cannot reliably reach Thangnak or Dzongla, and they cannot land on a pass. This is why you need insurance: an evacuation costs $3,000 to $5,000, and the helicopter will not fly without a payment guarantee.

6. Hospital on the route

The Himalayan Rescue Association clinic at Pheriche, at 4,371 m, is staffed by volunteer doctors in both seasons and can be reached from Dzongla, Lobuche and Chhukung.

Weather by month

This is the Khumbu weather table, but on this trek the seasons are more limited than on the others. On a pass at 5,535 m, snow matters more than temperature, and the suitable period is shorter than the ratings below suggest.

Month	Daytime on the trail	Night-time on the trail	Night at Gorak Shep	Conditions	Note
January	4°C	-10°C	-20°C	Hard	Clear and extremely cold. Most lodges above Dingboche are closed.
February	6°C	-8°C	-18°C	Hard	Cold and quiet, with the clearest air of the year.
March	10°C	-5°C	-15°C	Good	The season begins. Cold at night, fewer trekkers, and rhododendrons starting to flower at lower altitudes.
April	13°C	-2°C	-12°C	Best	The best month. Warm days, stable weather, and the forests below Namche are in flower.
May	15°C	1°C	-10°C	Best	The warmest walking of the year. Hazier by late May as the monsoon approaches.
June	16°C	4°C	-6°C	Hard	The monsoon arrives. Cloud, leeches at lower altitudes, and flights are often cancelled.
July	16°C	5°C	-5°C	We do not run it	We do not run this trek in this month. Cloud hides the mountains and flights are unreliable.
August	16°C	5°C	-5°C	We do not run it	Similar to July. Cloud hides the mountains.
September	14°C	2°C	-8°C	Good	The monsoon clears during the month. Late September is green and clear.
October	12°C	-3°C	-14°C	Best	The busiest and most reliable month. Book several months ahead.
November	9°C	-7°C	-17°C	Best	Cold, very quiet by the end of the month, and the clearest skies of the autumn.
December	6°C	-9°C	-19°C	Hard	Clear and very cold. Possible with the right equipment, and there are few other trekkers.

Averages from Nepal DHM station data for the Khumbu. Read them strictly on this trek: a pass at 5,535 m is a snow question rather than a temperature one.

Guides and porters

Your guide

A senior government-licensed guide with wilderness first aid training and experience of all three passes leads the trek, and a second guide joins from five trekkers rather than from nine. This is the most important staffing difference on this trek: on a pass descent, the group spreads out, and one guide cannot be at both the front and the back. There is one porter for every two trekkers, and the guides carry microspikes and a rope for the Cho La.

Porters and luggage

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

Staff pay and insurance

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

Tipping

Tipping is customary but not compulsory, and it never replaces wages. On this trip, $250 to $400 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 50 plastic bottles on this trip, each of which was carried in and must be carried out again. Boiled water is available at every lodge for one or two dollars a litre, and we ask you to buy that instead. Bring water purification as a backup.

Waste

We carry out everything we bring in that is not food. The Khumbu has a waste problem that it did not create and cannot solve alone, and every operator should avoid adding to it.

Supporting local communities

The lodges are family businesses in the villages you pass through. The guides and porters live in this district. Permit fees fund Sagarmatha National Park and the Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality. Almost everything you pay is spent within a few days' walk of the trail, which is a good reason to book with a Nepali operator rather than a foreign one that subcontracts to a local company.

Local customs

Ask before photographing anyone. Stand on the mountain side of the trail, not the drop side, when a mule train passes. Monasteries welcome visitors but are places of worship: remove your hat and shoes, and if a service is taking place, wait.

Remote villages

Between Thame and Gokyo, you walk through villages that receive far fewer visitors than Namche, where a group of eight arriving without notice makes a big difference to a settlement of two buildings. Our guides book ahead where there is a phone and send word ahead where there is not. Please be patient with the meals that a place like Lungden can provide at 4,600 m. Patient visitors help these valleys keep their character.

Booking and payment

How to book

Write to us and tell us about your previous trekking experience. This is the only trip we offer with a firm requirement: a previous Himalayan trek of two weeks or more on which you were comfortable at 5,000 m. We will ask about it, and we do decline bookings. We would much rather do this when you enquire than at Lungden on day 8.

Deposit

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

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, your deposit can be transferred to any other date or trip we run, with no time limit. If you cancel within 30 days, the deposit is kept, because the permits, flights and crew have been booked by then. 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. Most travellers book privately, and many are surprised that it costs no more.

Late bookings

Book at least six weeks ahead, and preferably three months. The season for this trek is shorter than for Base Camp, there are fewer departures, and we want time to discuss your experience in detail before either of us commits.

Optional extras

Island Peak from Chhukung

from $1,100, +4 days

You descend from the Kongma La to Chhukung, which is the base for Island Peak at 6,189 m. Adding the climb is a natural next step and requires a day of rope and crampon training. Together, the trek and the climb take about a month.

An extra day at Gokyo

$140, +1 day

This allows you to visit Gokyo Ri and the fifth lake on separate days and gives you a full rest day between the Renjo La and the Cho La. On a trek with one rest day in eighteen, this is the extra we recommend most.

An extra day before the Kongma La

$140, +1 day

An extra night at Lobuche between Kala Patthar and the last pass. Day 17 is the hardest day of the trek and otherwise follows a dawn climb to 5,545 m. A rest day in between makes it considerably easier.

Helicopter from Gorak Shep

from $2,900 for the aircraft, saves 6 days

If the Kongma La cannot be crossed, or if you wish to finish after Base Camp, this is the way out. The helicopter is chartered as a whole rather than by the seat.

Everest scenic flight

$220, 1 morning

A one-hour flight along the Himalaya from Kathmandu, with a guaranteed window seat. It gives you a view of the whole circuit you have just walked.

Chitwan or Bardia

from $390, +3 days

Lowland jungle, rhinos and a bed at 150 m. After nine nights above 4,600 m, this is good for your recovery as well as enjoyable.

Luxury lodge upgrade in the lower Khumbu

Price on request

Where the route passes a premium lodge, we book it in place of the standard teahouse. Mountain Lodges of Nepal has lodges at Lukla, Phakding, Monjo, Namche and Deboche, and Everest Summit Lodges has lodges at Lukla, Monjo, Tashinga and Pangboche. Expect warmer rooms, better beds, attached bathrooms in most rooms and a quieter dining room.

There are no premium lodges above Pangboche, so the higher nights are in standard teahouses. We confirm which lodges have rooms on your dates before you book.

Frequently asked questions

Answers to the 19 questions travellers ask us most often. If your question is not here, contact us and we will answer it.

Can this be my first Himalayan trek?

No, and we will tell you so when you enquire rather than take a deposit. We require a previous Himalayan trek of two weeks or more on which you were comfortable at 5,000 m, not one you simply completed. You cannot prepare at home for nine consecutive nights above 4,600 m, and the only useful evidence is how you have managed altitude before. Complete the Base Camp or Gokyo trek first and then return for this one.

How much harder is it than Everest Base Camp?

It is much harder. The Base Camp trek has eleven walking days up one valley, with two rest days and a highest night at 5,164 m. This trek has eighteen walking days with one rest day, five separate climbs above 5,300 m, three passes and nine consecutive nights above 4,600 m. The individual days are not much longer, but there are many more of them and they are all at high altitude.

Is there any technical climbing?

There is no rope work and no full crampons. The Cho La has a short, flat glacier crossing at the top that is icy, where the guide will fit you with microspikes and will have a rope available. Otherwise it is walking: steep, loose, cold and very high, with no exposure that would concern an experienced hillwalker.

What happens if I cannot cross a pass?

You miss that pass, not the rest of the trek. Most itineraries do not explain this. If the Cho La cannot be crossed, we go back over the Renjo La or around via Dole and rejoin the Base Camp route. If the Kongma La cannot be crossed, we walk out from Lobuche through Dingboche. In most seasons, this happens to someone because of weather or altitude, and it is a normal outcome, not a failure.

Which pass is hardest?

The Kongma La, at 5,535 m on day 17, is by far the hardest. It takes eight to ten hours, with a glacier crossing at the start and then a long, continuous climb, after two weeks of trekking. The Cho La is the most technical and the Renjo La is the easiest, which is why we cross them in that order.

Why is the route anticlockwise?

This direction puts the easiest pass first, when you are least acclimatised, and the hardest pass last, after two weeks above 4,000 m. It also means each pass is crossed from its lower side. Itineraries in the other direction put the Kongma La early, after only a week in the mountains, which increases the risk considerably.

Will there be snow on the passes?

There is usually some snow on the Cho La and the Kongma La in every season. This is why microspikes are carried as standard and why gaiters are on the packing list for this trek in all seasons. Deep fresh snow closes a pass, and the decision is made on the evening before, on the spot.

How is the decision to cross each pass made?

The decision is made three times, each on the evening before a crossing: at the Renjo La camp, at Thangnak and at Lobuche. Turning back is straightforward from each of these places. The guide decides based on the oximeter readings, the weather and how the group walked that day. The decision is not made by a vote at 4 am halfway up the pass.

What is the effect of nine nights above 4,600 m?

This is the most important feature of this trek. Your body does not recover at that altitude; at best it stays stable. Appetite and sleep decline, cuts stop healing, and everyone finishes the trek lighter than they started. The acclimatisation schedule is well designed, but you are still living at high altitude for two weeks.

What is the biggest risk on this trek?

Not eating enough. On a trek this long, the most common problem is not acute altitude sickness on day 8, but reaching the Kongma La on day 17 after two weeks of eating too little. Appetite is the first thing to go at altitude, and making yourself eat anyway is the most useful habit on this trip.

Is there a doctor on the route?

The Himalayan Rescue Association clinic at Pheriche, staffed by volunteer doctors in both seasons, can be reached from Dzongla, Lobuche and Chhukung. Between Thame and Gokyo, during the first week, there is no medical facility, and this is where our safety procedures are strictest.

What are the lodges like?

The lodges at Namche and Gokyo are comfortable. Thame, Lobuche, Chhukung and Tengboche have standard teahouses. Lungden, Thangnak and Dzongla each have two or three buildings, which are basic and cold, with no shower and often no charging. This is the most basic accommodation of any of our treks, apart from Dharamsala on the Manaslu trek.

Can I charge my phone and camera?

Not reliably, and you need to plan for this. Charging at Lungden, Thangnak and Dzongla is solar-powered and limited, and there are three-day stretches with almost no charging. Bring two power banks, keep them in your sleeping bag overnight, and expect to limit your use.

How much cash do I need?

Bring $450 to $700 in Nepali rupees, in small notes. The last cash machine is at Namche on day 5, and after that there are eighteen days of tea, charging, showers and tips to pay for.

Is there a spare day for Lukla weather?

There is no formal spare day, but days 18 and 19 can be walked as one long day if a flight delay has cost you time. On a twenty-two-day itinerary, a lost day has less impact than on a twelve-day one. Even so, book your international flight home with a clear day after this trek.

When can I go?

From mid-April to mid-May, and from late September to early November. This is a narrower season than for Base Camp, which is why there are fewer departures for this trek than for others on this site. On a 5,535 m pass, snow matters more than temperature.

How far ahead should I book?

At least six weeks ahead, and preferably three months. This is partly because of the short season and small number of departures, and partly because we want time to discuss your previous trekking experience before either of us commits.

Why is it only $520 more than the Base Camp trek?

Most of the difference is the cost of six more days of guide, porter, accommodation and food. The other additional costs are a second guide from five trekkers rather than nine, a guide chosen for experience on the passes, and the microspikes and rope for the Cho La.

Can I extend the trek?

We recommend adding a day at Gokyo and a day at Lobuche, in that order. One rest day in eighteen walking days is very little, and an extra night before the Kongma La makes day 17 considerably easier. If you would like a bigger challenge, Island Peak at 6,189 m is climbed from Chhukung, which you reach on day 17.

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