

Earthbound Expeditions

Gokyo Lakes and Everest Base Camp Trek via Cho La Pass

18 days, from US$2,290 per person

Duration
18 days

Grade
Strenuous

Max altitude
5,545 m

Start and end
Kathmandu

On the trail
4 to 7 hours a day

Best season
Mar to May, Sep to Nov

Accommodation
Teahouses

Meals
All meals on the trek

Group size
Up to 8

Getting there
Fly to Lukla

Gokyo Lakes and Everest Base Camp Trek via Cho La Pass Overview

Both Khumbu valleys joined into one circuit: the six Gokyo lakes and the view from Gokyo Ri, a crossing of the Cho La at 5,420 m, then Everest Base Camp and sunrise from Kala Patthar.

Trek overview

This trek links the two main valleys of the Khumbu. You fly to Lukla, walk to Namche, and then take the left branch of the trail to Gokyo rather than the right branch to Base Camp. You spend five days walking up the quiet valley to the lakes, climb Gokyo Ri at dawn, and then cross east over the Cho La at 5,420 m into the Khumbu valley for Everest Base Camp and Kala Patthar. The trek spends fourteen days on the trail and is walked as a circuit rather than there and back.

The Cho La

Without the pass, these would be two separate trips. With it, one trek includes both the best view in the Khumbu and its most famous destination, and no section of trail is repeated between leaving Namche and returning to it. The crossing involves a 4 am start, a boulder gully up to the ice, a short, flat glacier crossed in microspikes, and a steep, loose descent on the eastern side. It is not climbing and there are no ropes, but on this one morning the terrain is as important as the altitude.

Who this trip is for

This trek suits people who are comfortable walking six hours a day for two weeks and want to see more than one valley. You do not need previous experience of altitude, but you should consider carefully how you feel about ice. If forty minutes on a glacier in microspikes, holding a fixed rope for part of the way, would make you uncomfortable, the classic Base Camp trek reaches the same Base Camp without any of this. If you are more interested in the lakes and the view than in Base Camp, the Gokyo Lakes trek is shorter, cheaper and easier.

Why the lakes come first

We walk this route anticlockwise, visiting Gokyo first and Base Camp second, for good reason. This puts the pass on day 10, after a week of acclimatisation, rather than on day 5 with none. It also means you cross the Cho La from west to east, climbing the steeper side and descending the gentler one. Finally, it leaves Base Camp and Kala Patthar until the end, so the trek builds to the destination most people come for.

Key highlights of the Gokyo Lakes and Everest Base Camp Trek via Cho La Pass

- Cho La (5,420 m), the glacier pass that links the two valleys
- Gokyo Ri (5,357 m), with views of Everest, Lhotse, Makalu and Cho Oyu
- The six Gokyo lakes and the crossing of the Ngozumpa Glacier
- Everest Base Camp (5,364 m) and sunrise on Kala Patthar (5,545 m)
- A circuit rather than a return route, with almost no repeated trail

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu, kit check	-	-	1,400 m
2	Fly to Lukla, walk to Phakding	3–4 hrs	8 km	2,651 m
3	Phakding to Namche Bazaar	6–7 hrs	11 km	3,440 m
4	Namche, acclimatisation day	2–4 hrs	-	3,440 m
5	Namche to Dole, over Mong La	5–6 hrs	12 km	4,040 m
6	Dole to Machhermo	4–5 hrs	7 km	4,470 m
7	Machhermo to Gokyo, past three lakes	4–5 hrs	9 km	4,790 m
8	Gokyo Ri at dawn, second night at Gokyo	4–5 hrs	5 km	5,357 m
9	Across the Ngozumpa glacier to Thagnak	2–3 hrs	4 km	4,700 m
10	Over the Cho La to Dzongla	7–9 hrs	14 km	5,420 m
11	Dzongla to Lobuche	3–4 hrs	6 km	4,940 m
12	Lobuche to Base Camp, sleep Gorak Shep	7–8 hrs	13 km	5,364 m
13	Kala Patthar at dawn, down to Pheriche	8–9 hrs	15 km	5,545 m
14	Pheriche to Namche, via Tengboche	6–7 hrs	15 km	3,440 m
15	Namche to Lukla	6–7 hrs	13 km	2,840 m
16	Fly to Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
17	Spare day in Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
18	Fly home	-	-	-

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

We meet you at the airport and take you to your hotel. Later, your guide checks your equipment with you. This is more important on this trek than on most, because the Cho La requires microspikes, gaiters and gloves you can use on rock. Anything missing can be bought or hired in Thamel that afternoon. In the evening, we have dinner together and go through the route.

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

Day 2

Fly to Lukla and trek to Phakding

An early flight to Lukla, from Kathmandu or Manthali depending on the month, followed by an easy half day down the Dudh Koshi valley to Phakding. You lose height rather than gain it, which is a gentle start, and the walking is level beside the river, through Ghat and past its mani walls.

Altitude: 2,651 m On foot: 8 km, 3–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Phakding Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3

Trek to Namche Bazaar

The trail crosses the river several times on suspension bridges, enters the national park at Monjo, and then climbs steadily for two and a half hours to Namche. Near the top, weather permitting, you have your first view of Everest behind you. Namche is the last town on the route, with the last cash machine.

Altitude: 3,440 m On foot: 11 km, 6–7 hrs Night: Teahouse, Namche Bazaar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4

Acclimatisation day in Namche Bazaar

A day at the same overnight altitude, which is not a rest day. You walk up past the airstrip at Syangboche to the viewpoint at 3,880 m for views of Everest, Lhotse and Ama Dablam, then return to sleep lower than the height you reached. The rest of the afternoon is free for the bakeries and equipment shops, or for resting.

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

Day 5

Trek to Dole via Mong La

Above Kyangjuma, the trail divides and you take the left branch, away from the Base Camp route, climbing to the chorten on the saddle at Mong La at 3,975 m, with the valley falling away on both sides. A steep descent follows to the river at Phortse Thanga, then a long climb through rhododendron and juniper forest to Dole.

Altitude: 4,040 m On foot: 12 km, 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Dole Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6

Trek to Machhermo

A deliberately short day after the previous day's climb. The trail follows the side of the valley through scrub and the summer grazing settlements of Lhabarma and Luza, with Cho Oyu ahead and the river far below. Machhermo has a Himalayan Rescue Association aid post, which gives a talk on altitude most afternoons. It is worth attending.

Altitude: 4,470 m On foot: 7 km, 4–5 hrs Night: Teahouse, Machhermo Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

Trek to Gokyo

Walk up past Pangka, then climb onto the terminal moraine of the Ngozumpa Glacier. The first lake appears below you, then the second, and Gokyo village stands on the shore of the third, at 4,790 m. The walk takes four or five hours, and the afternoon is free to relax by the lake.

Altitude: 4,790 m On foot: 9 km, 4–5 hrs Night: Teahouse, Gokyo Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

Hike to Gokyo Ri

Set off in the dark to climb the hill behind the village: 560 metres of steep zigzags to 5,357 m. From the top, Everest, Lhotse, Makalu and Cho Oyu stand in one line, four of the six highest mountains in the world, with the lakes below and the glacier stretching north out of sight. Return to the village for lunch, then rest.

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

Day 9

Cross the Ngozumpa Glacier to Thagnak

A walk of two or three hours, and one of the most unusual in Nepal. You cross the Ngozumpa, the longest glacier in the country: a kilometre of grey rubble, meltwater pools and small ice cliffs, with the route marked by cairns that are rebuilt every season. Thagnak, on the far side, has three lodges below the pass. You go to bed early.

Altitude: 4,700 m On foot: 4 km, 2–3 hrs Night: Teahouse, Thagnak Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10

Cross the Cho La and trek to Dzongla

The hardest day and the main feature of the trek. You set off at 4 am with headtorches, walk for an hour on rough ground, then climb a steep boulder gully to the snow line and cross a short glacier in microspikes. The pass, at 5,420 m, is hung with prayer flags and is windy. On the east side, there are two hours of loose moraine before the trail eases down to Dzongla.

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

Day 11

Trek to Lobuche

An easy walk of three or four hours, which is welcome after the pass. The path follows a grassy shelf above the Chola Tsho lake, with Cholatse behind you and Ama Dablam to the south, then joins the main Base Camp trail at Lobuche. From here to Kala Patthar, you share the valley with trekkers on the classic route.

Altitude: 4,940 m On foot: 6 km, 3–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Lobuche Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 12

Trek to Everest Base Camp

Follow the lateral moraine of the Khumbu Glacier to Gorak Shep for lunch, then cross the rubble to Base Camp at 5,364 m, directly below the Khumbu Icefall. In spring, it is filled with yellow expedition tents and generators. You walk back to Gorak Shep to sleep at 5,164 m, the highest and coldest night of the trek.

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

Day 13

Hike to Kala Patthar and trek to Pheriche

Another early start in the dark to climb Kala Patthar at 5,545 m, for a view that Base Camp does not have: the whole south-west face of Everest at sunrise. Then a long descent past Lobuche and the climbers' memorials at Thukla to Pheriche, where breathing is noticeably easier and the clinic is beside the trail.

Altitude: 5,545 m at Kala Patthar On foot: 15 km, 8–9 hrs Night: Teahouse, Pheriche Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 14

Trek to Namche Bazaar via Tengboche

A long day, mostly downhill, through Pangboche and up the last climb of the trek to the monastery at Tengboche, followed by the steep descent to the river at Phunki Tenga and a level walk back to Namche. You return to forest, birdsong, warmth and a hot shower. Most people have a very good appetite by the evening.

Altitude: 3,440 m On foot: 15 km, 6–7 hrs Night: Teahouse, Namche Bazaar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 15

Trek to Lukla

The last day on the trail: the long descent to the river, back over the bridges through Monjo and Phakding, and a final climb to Lukla. The descent is hard on the knees, and the day is longer than the map suggests. In the evening, we have dinner with the guides and porters to mark the end of the trek.

Altitude: 2,840 m On foot: 13 km, 6–7 hrs Night: Teahouse, Lukla Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 16

Fly to Kathmandu

A short morning flight back to Kathmandu, or a flight to Manthali followed by a drive, depending on the season. The rest of the day is free for a bath, a long lunch and collecting the equipment you left at our office eighteen days earlier. We have dinner together in the evening.

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

Day 17

Spare day in Kathmandu

This day is kept in reserve in case of weather delays, because Lukla flights are delayed often enough that an itinerary without a spare day puts your flight home at risk. If everything has run to schedule, the day is free: you can visit Bhaktapur, Patan or the stupa at Boudhanath, or simply relax.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: Optional 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast

Day 18

Departure

We take you to the airport for your flight. If you are travelling on elsewhere in Nepal, such as Chitwan or Pokhara, we can arrange this for you. We recommend keeping 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
- Microspikes for the Cho La crossing

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. The Gokyo valley and the Cho La are both within the park, so one permit covers the whole circuit.	NPR 3,390, about $25	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, in Kathmandu or at the Monjo gate
Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality permit. Covers your first four weeks in the municipality. Some checkpoints have started charging NPR 3,000 for non-SAARC trekkers. Whichever amount is charged on your dates is included in your price.	NPR 2,000, about $15	The rural municipality, checked at Lukla and again at Monjo
TIMS card. No longer required in the Khumbu since 2018, when it was replaced by the municipality permit. You do not need one for any part of this route.	Not required	Not applicable

Other cost	Amount	Note
Lukla flight, both ways	$420–520	about $200 a leg from Manthali, more from Kathmandu
Sagarmatha National Park permit	$25	NPR 3,390
Khumbu Pasang Lhamu permit	$15–22	NPR 2,000, though some checkpoints now charge 3,000
Teahouse bed	$5–25 a night	Thagnak and Dzongla are the most expensive and the most basic
Food on the trail	$28–38 a day	three meals a day and tea, more expensive than on the Base Camp trail
Licensed guide, pass trained	$35–45 a day	including their accommodation and meals
Porter, one per two trekkers	$22–28 a day	including their accommodation and meals
Microspikes and a trekking pole pair	$15–30	hired in Namche or Gokyo, or bring your own
Kathmandu hotel	$40–70 a night	three-star, three nights
Travel insurance to 6,000 m	$140–230	must cover helicopter rescue and glacier travel
Hot shower, charging, wifi	$3–10 each, each time	more expensive in Gokyo than in Namche, paid in cash
Tips, guide and porter	$180–300	per trekker, handed over on the last evening

Packing list

Baggage weight limits and microspikes

Your porter carries a maximum of 20 kg, shared between two trekkers, and the Lukla flight allows 15 kg in total, 10 kg checked and 5 kg as hand luggage. The flight limit is the stricter of the two. The one item on this list that a Base Camp trekker does not need is microspikes. We provide a pair, which you return at Dzongla after the pass. We also lend the duffel bag, the sleeping bag and the down jacket, so you do not need to bring these, and you can store anything else at our office in Kathmandu.

Head and eyes

- Sun hat with a brim, and a warm hat that covers your ears
- Two buffs or neck gaiters
- Category 4 sunglasses if possible. The glare on the Cho La glacier is stronger than anywhere on the Base Camp trail
- Headtorch and spare batteries. The pass crossing and the climb to Kala Patthar both start in the dark
- SPF 50 sunscreen and lip balm with sun protection

Clothing

- Four merino or synthetic base layers, not cotton
- Two mid layers: a fleece and a light insulated jacket
- Down jacket. We lend 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 five days, washed along the way

Hands and feet

- Liner gloves and insulated outer gloves or mittens. Do not handle the rock on the pass with bare hands
- Broken-in boots with ankle support and a sole stiff enough to hold microspikes
- Microspikes for the Cho La. We provide them, and you are welcome to bring your own
- Gaiters, essential in March and late November
- Four pairs of wool trekking socks, and camp shoes for the evenings

Bags

- Duffel bag for the porter, 20 kg maximum. We provide one
- Daypack of 30 to 35 litres with a rain cover, which on the day of the pass holds lunch and water for nine hours
- Dry bags or heavy liners, as rain and snow will eventually soak through ordinary bags

Sleeping

- Sleeping bag rated to -15°C, which we provide
- Silk or cotton liner, for warmth and hygiene

- Earplugs. The lodges at Thagnak and Dzongla have thin plywood walls and are busy

Health

- Personal first aid kit: blister plasters, tape, painkillers and rehydration salts
- Acetazolamide, if your doctor agrees, and any regular medication
- Water purification: tablets, a filter or a SteriPen
- Hand sanitiser and wet wipes, for the four days without showers
- Throat lozenges. Most people develop the Khumbu cough around day 9

Documents and money

- Passport valid for six months, and two photocopies
- Four passport photographs for the permits
- Insurance certificate showing helicopter cover and trekking to 6,000 m
- $350 to $550 in small notes. The last cash machine is in Namche, and it often runs out of money

Altitude profile

Day	Place	Sleep at	Highest point
1	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-
2	Phakding	2,651 m	2,840 m
3	Namche Bazaar	3,440 m	-
4	Namche Bazaar	3,440 m	3,880 m
5	Dole	4,040 m	-
6	Machhermo	4,470 m	-
7	Gokyo	4,790 m	-
8	Gokyo	4,790 m	5,357 m
9	Thagnak	4,700 m	-
10	Dzongla	4,830 m	5,420 m
11	Lobuche	4,940 m	-
12	Gorak Shep	5,164 m	5,364 m
13	Pheriche	4,371 m	5,545 m
14	Namche Bazaar	3,440 m	-
15	Lukla	2,840 m	-
16	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-
17	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-

Lukla flights

Flight delays at Lukla are the most likely cause of disruption on this trek. This section explains how they are handled.

Flights from Kathmandu or Manthali

Outside the two busy periods, the flight leaves from Kathmandu and takes about thirty-five minutes. From about mid-March to mid-May, and from late September to the end of November, the aviation authority moves Lukla flights to Manthali airport at Ramechhap to reduce congestion at Kathmandu. This means a four to five-hour drive starting at about 2 am, followed by a twenty-minute flight. We tell you which applies to your dates before you book.

Baggage allowance of 15 kg

The allowance is 10 kg of checked baggage and 5 kg of hand luggage, and bags are weighed at the desk. Excess baggage costs about $1.50 per kilo. The aircraft is a nineteen-seat Twin Otter or Dornier landing on a 527-metre runway built on a slope, so the limit is a safety requirement. Anything you do not take on the trek is stored free at our Kathmandu office until you return.

Flight delays and the spare day

Cloud closes Lukla airport several times a month in every season. A delay of one day is normal and two days is not unusual, which is why day 17 is a spare day and why we do not offer this trek without it. If the airport stays closed for more than three days, we move you to a lower-altitude trek of the same quality at no extra cost, or you can fly out by helicopter for around $500 a seat, which we can usually arrange the same morning.

Book your flight home with a spare day

Even with the spare day on day 17, 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. An extra day in Kathmandu is far better than a tight connection after a delayed Lukla flight.

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

Facilities at higher altitude

At Gokyo, you spend two nights in a lodge on the third lake, with a hot shower for a fee. On either side of the Cho La, the lodges are at their most basic. Thagnak has three basic lodges with twin rooms or a dormitory, and Dzongla is small and often fully booked. Neither has a shower. Gorak Shep, below Kala Patthar, is the highest night of the trek.

Where	Nights	Type	Room	Bathroom
Kathmandu	3	Three-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Phakding	1	Teahouse	Twin	Private in most lodges

Namche Bazaar	3	Teahouse	Twin	Private, hot shower for a fee
Dole	1	Teahouse	Twin	Shared
Machhermo	1	Teahouse	Twin	Shared
Gokyo	2	Teahouse on the third lake	Twin	Shared, hot shower for a fee
Thagnak	1	Teahouse, one of three, all basic	Twin or dormitory	Shared, no shower
Dzongla	1	Teahouse, small and often fully booked	Twin, basic	Shared, no shower
Lobuche	1	Teahouse	Twin	Shared
Gorak Shep	1	Teahouse, the highest on the route	Twin, basic	Shared, no shower
Pheriche	1	Teahouse	Twin	Shared
Lukla	1	Teahouse	Twin	Private

Heating
A dung or kerosene stove in the dining room, lit at dusk. No bedroom is heated anywhere on this route.

Hot shower
As far as Gokyo, $5 to $10, usually heated by gas. None at Thagnak or Dzongla, and none above Lobuche.

Charging
$3 to $6 per device in the dining room. Thagnak has solar power only, so expect charging to be unavailable there.

Wifi
Everest Link cards cost about $20 for 10 GB. Coverage reaches Gokyo and Gorak Shep, but the connection is slow at both.

Phone signal
Ncell and NTC cover Namche, the Gokyo valley and most of the Khumbu side. There is no signal on the pass.

Water
Boiled water costs $1 to $4 a litre. We ask you to buy this or purify your own water rather than buying bottled water.

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 at every lodge. Use your sleeping bag on top of these.

Microspikes
Provided for the Cho La and returned at Dzongla. Bring your own if you prefer a pair you know fits well.

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, thukpa, pasta, or curry and rice
Tea	on arrival	Black, milk, lemon, ginger or masala tea, included at every stop
Pass day breakfast	3:30	Porridge and tea before dawn, with lunch carried in your pack

Diet	How we manage it
Vegetarian	Easy throughout the trek. Dal bhat is vegetarian and is the best dish on any teahouse menu.
Vegan	Manageable with advance notice, though harder at Thagnak and Dzongla, where the kitchens are small and the menus short.
Gluten free	Rice, dal, potatoes and eggs are safe. Noodles, bread and momo are not, and a teahouse kitchen cannot rule out cross-contamination.
Halal	There is no certified halal kitchen on this route. A vegetarian diet is the practical option.
Meat	Meat is on the menu, but we advise against eating it above Namche, as it is carried up for two days or more 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 leave the duffel outside the door for the porter
7:00	Breakfast together in the dining room
8:00	On the trail, at 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. On the night before the pass, bedtime is 8 pm, with an alarm at 3:30 am

Difficulty and preparation

Difficulty 4 of 5

Harder than the Base Camp trek, with one pass and four extra days.

- Fourteen days on the trail, with four to seven hours of walking on most days and seven to nine hours on the Cho La.
- Nine consecutive nights above 4,000 m, including one at 5,164 m.
- One morning on ice: a short glacier crossing in microspikes, with a fixed rope on the steepest section in some years.
- Loose moraine on both sides of the pass, and a glacier crossing at Ngozumpa where the trail changes every season.
- No rope work, no crampon technique to learn and no climbing experience needed.
- People who turn back do so because of altitude or because snow has closed the pass, and very rarely because of fitness.

Getting ready

14 weeks before: Build endurance
Do three cardio sessions a week of forty-five minutes, at a pace at which you can still talk. Walking, cycling, rowing or swimming are all suitable. This is the most important part of your preparation, so start earlier than you think you need to.

12 weeks before: Add hills
Replace one session with an hour of hill walking, with 300 m of ascent, and add a strength session of squats, step-ups, lunges and calf raises. Your thigh muscles work harder on the descent from the Cho La than on any climb.

10 weeks before: Train with a pack
Walk with the daypack you will use, loaded to 6 kg, in the boots you will trek in. On the lower half of this route, blisters end more days than altitude does, and they can be prevented by training at home.

8 weeks before: Train on rough ground
Walk off paths, on scree, boulders, stream beds or any ground where you have to place your feet carefully. The Ngozumpa crossing and both sides of the pass are like this for hours, and walking on smooth trails does not prepare your ankles for it.

6 weeks before: Walk on consecutive days
Do one long walk of four to five hours at the weekend, followed by a second walk of two to three hours the next morning. This is the most useful training session, because a fourteen-day trek involves walking on consecutive days.

4 weeks before: Longest walk
Walk for seven hours with 900 m of ascent and the same descent, carrying your daypack. If you can finish this, eat a proper meal and sleep normally, you are as ready for the Cho La as training at home can make you.

2 weeks before: Rest
Halve the amount of training and keep the same number of sessions. Training in the last two weeks will not make you fitter and may cause an injury. Rest well and prepare your equipment instead.

Altitude and safety

On this trek, you sleep nine consecutive nights above 4,000 m, three more than on the classic Base Camp route. The highest is at Gorak Shep, at 5,164 m, where each breath contains about half the oxygen it would at sea level. The itinerary is designed to prepare you for this. Two stages on this route exceed the maximum daily gain of 500 m recommended by the Himalayan Rescue Association above 3,000 m: the climb to Namche and the climb to Dole. Both are followed by a short or level day rather than another long climb. Fitness has little to do with how well you tolerate altitude, so the most important things are to walk slowly and to report symptoms early.

What to watch for

- A headache that does not improve with water, food and paracetamol
- Nausea, or no appetite after a full day of walking
- Dizziness, or feeling drunk without having had any alcohol
- Breathlessness at rest, not only when climbing
- Broken sleep, waking gasping for breath, or pauses in breathing during sleep
- A wet cough, or a rattling in the chest that gets worse over a day
- Stumbling, or being unable to walk heel to toe in a straight line, which means you must descend that night

How to prevent it

- Walk more slowly than feels natural. On the Gokyo side, there is no need to hurry.
- Drink three to four litres of water a day, even if you do not feel thirsty.
- Eat at every meal, even when you do not feel like it. Appetite is the first thing to decline at altitude, and strength follows.
- Avoid alcohol above Namche, and do not take sleeping pills at any altitude on this route.
- The Gokyo Ri climb and the walk to the Namche viewpoint both follow the principle of climbing high and sleeping low.
- Acetazolamide is effective. The Himalayan Rescue Association clinic uses 125 mg twice a day, and it should be prescribed by your own doctor.

What we do

1. Daily health checks

Your guide carries a pulse oximeter and records your oxygen saturation and pulse every evening, and again on any morning when you seem unwell. Because the readings are recorded, a decline over three days is clearly visible.

2. Clinics on the route

The Himalayan Rescue Association runs an aid post at Machhermo, at 4,470 m, which you reach on day 6, and its long-established clinic at Pheriche, at 4,371 m, which you reach on day 13. Both are staffed by volunteer doctors in the spring and autumn seasons.

3. Mild symptoms

We spend an extra day at the same altitude, or make a short descent to the previous village and climb back up in the morning. Most cases resolve at this stage, and the trek continues using a day from the spare time.

4. Serious symptoms
Descent is the only reliably effective treatment, and a descent of 500 m is usually enough. This decision is not put to the group. The one place where descent is difficult is Thagnak, where going down means crossing back over the glacier.

5. Helicopter evacuation
Helicopter evacuation is possible from Gokyo, Dzongla, Lobuche and Gorak Shep, usually within an hour in daylight. It is not possible from the pass itself. A rescue costs $3,000 to $5,000, and the helicopter will not fly without a payment guarantee, which is why we check your insurance before you fly to Lukla.

Weather by month

The suitable months for crossing the Cho La are fewer than for Base Camp, and this table shows which months those are.

Month	Daytime on the trail	Night-time on the trail	Night at Gokyo or Gorak Shep	Conditions	Note
January	3°C	-11°C	-21°C	We do not run it	We do not run this route in this month. The Cho La has deep snow and the lodges at Thagnak are closed.
February	5°C	-9°C	-19°C	Hard	Clear and bitterly cold, and the pass is a full winter crossing. Only suitable for an experienced group with a flexible plan.
March	9°C	-6°C	-16°C	Good	The season begins in mid-month. In early March, the pass can still be blocked by snow, so our spring departures start on the 21st.
April	12°C	-3°C	-13°C	Best	The best month of the year for this circuit, with stable weather, a well-established route over the ice, and rhododendrons in flower below Namche.
May	15°C	0°C	-10°C	Best	Warm walking and the busiest time of year at Base Camp. Haze builds after mid-month.
June	16°C	4°C	-7°C	Hard	The monsoon arrives. Wet rock on the pass, cloud on Gokyo Ri, and Lukla 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 would hide the views throughout, including on the pass.
August	16°C	5°C	-5°C	We do not run it	Similar to July, with more rain. The lakes are full, but cloud hides them.

September	13°C	2°C	-9°C	Good	The monsoon clears during the month, and the last week is excellent. For this reason, our autumn departures start on the 27th.
October	11°C	-3°C	-14°C	Best	The most reliable and busiest month. Dzongla and Thagnak run out of beds, so book several months ahead.
November	8°C	-8°C	-18°C	Good	Excellent until about the 15th. After that, the pass becomes icy overnight and the lodges beyond Gokyo begin to close.
December	5°C	-10°C	-20°C	Hard	Very quiet, clear and very cold. Suitable for a Gokyo or Base Camp trek, but the pass can rarely be crossed.

Averages built from Nepal DHM station records for the Khumbu and from our own guides' logs on the pass. Any given week runs ten degrees either side of these, and the wind on the Cho La at first light makes minus fifteen feel a great deal colder.

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. On this route, we only send guides who have crossed the Cho La within the last two seasons, because the route across the glacier changes as the ice retreats. A second guide joins from nine trekkers.

The day of the pass

The crew leaves the lodge ahead of you to find the route in the dark and fix a rope on the steep section if conditions require it. You walk in microspikes in single file, with a guide at the front and one at the back, and nobody overtakes. If the group is moving too slowly to be off the ice by mid-morning, we turn back, and the guide alone makes that decision.

Staff pay and insurance

Wages, insurance, food and accommodation for every guide and porter are included in the price you pay, and are not collected 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. For a trek of this length, $180 to $300 per trekker 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 everyone.

Responsible travel

Drinking water

A trekker drinking bottled water uses around fifty plastic bottles on an eighteen-day trip, each one flown or carried into a national park and each needing to be carried out again. Boiled water is sold 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, on both sides of the pass. The Gokyo valley receives far fewer visitors than the Khumbu side, and its lodges have very limited facilities for dealing with waste, so anything dropped there tends to remain. We leave nothing at Thagnak or Dzongla.

Respecting the lakes

The Gokyo lakes are a Ramsar wetland site and are sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists. Do not wash, swim or use soap in them, walk clockwise around the shrines, and keep to the path on the moraine rather than making your own. The shoreline is fragile and recovers very slowly at 4,790 m.

Supporting local communities

The lodges are family businesses in the villages where you stay, the guides and porters live in this district, and permit fees fund the national park and the rural municipality. Nearly everything you pay for this trek is spent within thirty miles 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.

Booking and payment

How to book

Write to us or send a WhatsApp message with your approximate travel dates. You will receive a reply from someone who has crossed the Cho La, and we will ask about your walking experience and whether you have walked on ice before. Nothing is payable until you pay a deposit.

Deposit

A 30% deposit secures your dates, and the balance is due on arrival in Kathmandu, in cash or by card. At the same time, we ask for a copy of your passport, your insurance certificate and any dietary or medical information, because permits and Lukla flight seats are booked in your name months ahead on this route.

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 trek we run, with no time limit. If you cancel within 30 days, the deposit is kept, because permits, flights and the crew have been committed 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 above, with a maximum of eight people. On this route, most travellers book privately, because the pass day is easier for a group that walks at the same speed.

Late bookings

Two weeks' notice is enough if Lukla flight seats are available, but in April and October they often are not. Beds at Dzongla and Thagnak are also limited, as there are only a few lodges at each and they fill up early in the day. If you are already in Kathmandu, visit our office and we will check availability.

Optional extras

Fourth and fifth lakes from Gokyo
$180, +1 day
An extra day at Gokyo to visit the upper lakes and Scoundrel's Viewpoint, which looks up the Ngozumpa Glacier towards Everest. It also gives you another night at 4,790 m before the pass, which helps your acclimatisation.

Return over the Renjo La
from $420, +3 days
Instead of descending the Gokyo valley, you return west over a 5,340 m pass to Thame, making this a two-pass circuit. This is only advisable after the Cho La, not before it.

Helicopter from Gorak Shep
from $500 a seat, saves 3 days
Fly from Gorak Shep or Pheriche to Lukla or directly to Kathmandu. Travellers choose this to save time, and also to avoid the long descent.

Everest scenic flight
$220, 1 morning
A one-hour flight along the Himalaya from Kathmandu, with a guaranteed window seat. A good alternative to keep in reserve if bad weather stops you reaching Lukla.

Chitwan or Bardia, three days
from $390, +3 days
Travel down to the lowland jungle to see rhinos and, if you are fortunate at Bardia, a tiger. A welcome contrast after two weeks above 3,000 m.

Single room in Kathmandu
$135
A room to yourself for all three hotel nights. On the trail, the lodges only have twin rooms, especially at Thagnak.

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

What is the Cho La crossing like?

You leave Thagnak at about 4 am, walk for an hour on rough ground, then climb a steep boulder gully to the snow line. The last section to the top is a short glacier, flat but slippery, which you cross in microspikes, in some years with a fixed rope. The pass is at 5,420 m, covered in prayer flags and usually windy. The descent on the east side is loose moraine that requires care for two hours, and then the trail becomes easier all the way to Dzongla.

Do I need crampons or climbing experience?

You do not need climbing experience or technical crampons. Microspikes are sufficient in the normal seasons, and we provide them, along with a trekking pole for each person. In February, early March or after heavy snow, full crampons and a rope would be needed, and on those dates we would advise you not to attempt the crossing.

What happens if the pass is closed?

This happens in most seasons, usually after heavy snowfall, and the guide decides on the morning. If we cannot cross, you walk back down the Gokyo valley and up the Khumbu valley to Base Camp instead. This takes two days longer, which is why the itinerary includes spare time. You will still reach Base Camp and Kala Patthar, but you will miss the pass.

Can I turn back during the pass crossing?

Not once you have started up the gully. Thagnak has three basic lodges and Dzongla a few more, and between them there is nothing: no teahouse, no village and no helicopter landing site at the top. This is why we start early, why we turn back a group that is moving too slowly, and why you pack your equipment for the day the night before.

How is this different from the classic Base Camp trek?

It is four days longer, it costs more, and it covers two valleys rather than one. You see the Gokyo lakes and the view from Gokyo Ri, which is the better view, as well as Base Camp and Kala Patthar, the more famous destinations. You also cross a 5,420 m pass on ice. If you only want to reach Base Camp, the classic route is the better choice, and we will advise you of this.

Should I do this or the Gokyo Lakes trek?

Choose the Gokyo Lakes trek if you want to see the lakes and the view from Gokyo Ri over fifteen easier days, with no ice. Choose this trek if you also want to reach Base Camp and are prepared for the pass crossing that links the two valleys. A useful question to ask yourself: if the pass were closed and you had to walk down one valley and up the other, would you still be glad you came? If so, this is the right trek for you.

How fit do I need to be?

You need to be able to walk four to seven hours a day for fourteen days, with one day of seven to nine hours on rough and icy ground. This is a step above the classic Base Camp trek, and the difference is stamina rather than technical skill. The training plan on this page is what we recommend for a reasonably active person, starting fourteen weeks before departure.

Is there an age limit?

There is no upper age limit, and trekkers in their late sixties have crossed the Cho La with us. The minimum age on this route is sixteen, higher than for the classic trek, because of the pass. Experience of walking on rough ground matters more than age.

Can I trek on my own?

Yes, for $2,790 rather than $2,290, because the guide and porter are paid for one person rather than shared. Since 2023, a licensed guide has been compulsory for foreign trekkers in Nepal's national parks, and on this route a guide is essential in any case.

Is the acclimatisation good enough for the pass?

Yes. By the time you cross the Cho La, you will have slept six nights above 3,400 m, climbed Gokyo Ri at 5,357 m and spent two nights at 4,790 m. This is better preparation for 5,420 m than the classic route gives for Base Camp. The direction is important: if we walked the route the other way, you would reach the pass on day 5, which would make it a much harder trek.

How cold does it get?

At Gorak Shep, the highest overnight stop, expect -10°C to -20°C after dark, depending on the month. On th e pass at dawn, -15°C with wind is normal in April, and it is colder in November. During the trekking seasons, da ytime temperatures on the trail are 8°C to 15°C and pleasant in the sun. No bedroom on this route is heated.

What happens if I get altitude sickness?

Your guide measures your oxygen saturation every evening and records it, so any decline is noticed early. Mild cases usually improve with a rest day or a short descent. If they do not, we descend. There are Himalayan Rescue Association clinics at Machhermo on day 6 and Pheriche on day 13, and helicopter evacuation is possible from every village on this route, though not from the pass itself.

What insurance do I need?

You need a policy covering trekking to 6,000 m, helicopter evacuation and repatriation, which does not exclude glacier travel or the use of microspikes. Some policies exclude these, so check carefully. We ask to see your insurance certificate before you fly to Lukla. A rescue costs $3,000 to $5,000, and the helicopter will not fly without a guarantee of payment.

What are the lodges like at Thagnak and Dzongla?

They are basic, and these are the simplest nights of the trek. Thagnak has three lodges and Dzongla has a few, with plywood walls, no shower, solar power that may not be enough to charge your phone, and a short menu. They exist to serve the pass, they are fully booked early in October, and you spend only one night at each.

Is there wifi and phone signal?

Everest Link cards work at Namche, Gokyo and Gorak Shep, for about $20 for 10 GB, though the connection is slow. Ncell and NTC cover most of both valleys. There is no signal on the pass and very little at Thagnak, so let people at home know that you will be out of contact for about two days around day 10.

Are showers available?

Showers are available as far as Gokyo, for $5 to $10, usually heated by gas. After that, there are no showers until you return to Pheriche on day 13, four nights later. Wet wipes are the practical alternative, and the shower at Namche on day 14 is very welcome.

How heavy is my bag, and who carries it?

Your duffel bag is carried by a porter shared with one other trekker, with a maximum of 20 kg between you. You carry a daypack of 6 to 8 kg with water, a warm layer, a camera and snacks. On the day of the pass, your daypack also holds your lunch and an extra litre of water, because there is nowhere to buy anything between Thagnak and Dzongla.

What permits do I need?

You need two permits, and both are included in your price: the Sagarmatha National Park entry permit at NPR 3,390, issued by the national parks department, and the Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality permit at NPR 2,000, checked at Lukla and Monjo. There is no separate permit for the Cho La or the Gokyo valley. A TIMS card is not required here.

How much cash should I carry?

Bring $350 to $550 in small notes, changed into rupees in Kathmandu. This covers showers, charging, wifi, drinks, snacks and tips over eighteen days. The highest cash machine is in Namche, and it often runs out of money. Beyond Namche, nobody accepts cards, including the two lodges on either side of the pass.

What if my Lukla flight is cancelled?

Day 17 is kept in reserve for this, because cloud closes Lukla airport several times a month in every season. If the airport stays closed for more than three days, we move you to a lower-altitude trek of the same quality at no extra cost, or you can fly out by helicopter for around $500 a seat. Book your flight home with at least one clear day after day 18.

When should I book?

For April and October, book four to six months ahead. Lukla flight seats and beds in the small lodges at Dzongla and Thagnak are the first to sell out on this route, well before anything else. For other months, eight weeks is enough, and two weeks is possible.

Can you change the itinerary?

Yes, and most travellers make some changes. You can add a day at Gokyo for the fourth and fifth lakes, walk out over the Renjo La instead of returning down the valley, spend the extra night at Dzongla rather than Lobuche, or fly back from Gorak Shep by helicopter. For a group of five or more, a private trek on your own dates costs the same as joining a group departure.

What is the most useful advice for this trek?

Treat the days before the pass as preparation for it rather than as the easy part. Walk slowly up the Gokyo valley, drink more than you feel like drinking, eat at Thagnak even if you do not want to, and go to bed at 8 pm the night before. Trekkers who struggle on the Cho La have usually not followed at least two of these points.

Photos, videos and reviews of this trip: earthbound.rajansimkhada.com/gokyo-everest-base-camp-trek