



Earthbound Expeditions

Dhaulagiri Circuit Trek

18 days, from US\$2,687 per person

Duration

18 days

Start and end

Kathmandu

Accommodation

Camping

Getting there

Via Pokhara

Grade

Strenuous

On the trail

4 to 9 hours a day

Meals

All meals on the trek

Max altitude

5,360 m

Best season

Apr to May, Oct

Group size

4 to 12

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Dhaulagiri Circuit Trek Overview

A full circuit of the seventh-highest mountain in the world, camping from the roadhead to Marpha, over two passes above 5,000 m with no lodges or phone signal in between.

Trek overview

A complete circuit of Dhaulagiri I, at 8,167 m the seventh-highest mountain in the world, from the farmland of the Myagdi Khola over the French Pass and the Dhampus Pass into the Kali Gandaki valley. It was first walked as a trekking route in the 1990s and has never become popular, because there is no accommodation along the way. Everything you need is carried in.

Why the route is quiet

Nepal's best-known treks are popular partly because lodges have been built along them. There are no lodges here. Between Dobang and Marpha, eight days apart, there is no permanent settlement, so the only way to complete the route is with a camping crew. This keeps the cost higher and the numbers low, which is the main appeal of the trek.

Who this trip is for

Trekkers who have already completed a Himalayan trek, are comfortable at altitude and want a quiet route. It is not suitable as a first trek in Nepal, but it is a very good second or third.

Who this trip is not for

Anyone who needs a shower, a bed or a phone signal, and anyone who is not confident of walking eight hours on rough ground on the fourteenth consecutive day. There is no quick way out from the middle of this route, and this affects every decision we make on it.

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	–	–	1,400 m
2	Kathmandu to Pokhara	25 min	–	820 m
3	Drive to Darbang, walk to Dharapani	4 to 5	8 km	1,470 m
4	Dharapani to Muri	5 to 6	13 km	1,850 m
5	Muri to Boghara	6 to 7	15 km	2,080 m
6	Boghara to Dobang	5 to 6	12 km	2,520 m
7	Dobang to Sallaghari	4 to 5	9 km	2,820 m
8	Sallaghari to Italian Base Camp	4	8 km	3,660 m
9	Italian Base Camp, acclimatisation	2 to 3	–	3,660 m
10	Italian Base Camp to Glacier Camp	5 to 6	9 km	4,200 m
11	Glacier Camp to Dhaulagiri Base Camp	4 to 5	7 km	4,740 m
12	Dhaulagiri Base Camp, crampon practice	3 to 4	–	4,740 m

13	French Pass to Hidden Valley	6 to 7	11 km	5,050 m
14	Hidden Valley, day in hand	0 to 5	-	5,050 m
15	Dhampus Pass to Yak Kharka	8 to 9	16 km	3,680 m
16	Yak Kharka to Marpha and Jomsom	5 to 6	14 km	2,720 m
17	Jomsom to Pokhara to Kathmandu	20 min	-	1,400 m
18	Fly home	-	-	1,400 m

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

We meet you at the airport and take you to your hotel. The afternoon is free. In the evening we go through the route in detail, because this is not a teahouse trek and your equipment and training are more important than usual. We check your equipment against the list and hire anything that is missing.

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

Day 2

Travel from Kathmandu to Pokhara

The flight takes twenty-five minutes, or the drive six to seven hours along the Trishuli if the weather prevents flying. The afternoon is for final shopping and for dividing your luggage between what the porters carry and what you carry. There are no shops after tomorrow.

Altitude: 820 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Pokhara Meals: Breakfast, dinner

Day 3

Drive to Darbang and trek to Dharapani

A long morning by jeep up the Myagdi Khola to Darbang, on a road that soon becomes unpaved and further on becomes unreliable. From the roadhead we walk for two to three hours through terraced fields to Dharapani and set up the first camp. The area is subtropical, green and warm.

Altitude: 1,470 m On foot: 4 to 5 hours Night: Camp, Dharapani Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 4

Trek from Dharapani to Muri

You climb through Magar villages of stone and slate houses, which see very few trekkers. A long climb leads to the ridge at Naura, followed by a traverse to Muri. This is still farmland, and villagers often offer cucumber to passing walkers.

Altitude: 1,850 m On foot: 5 to 6 hours Night: Camp, Muri Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 5

Trek from Muri to Boghara

Today the valley narrows. The trail descends to the Myagdi Khola and follows the north bank along exposed sections that have been rebuilt several times after landslides. The day takes seven hours, with a good deal of ascent and descent, and ends at Boghara, the last village in the valley.

Altitude: 2,080 m On foot: 6 to 7 hours Night: Camp, Boghara Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 6

Trek from Boghara to Dobang

You pass Lipshe, the last permanent settlement, and enter forest of oak, then bamboo, then rhododendron. The path crosses the river on log bridges, which the crew often rebuild as needed. Dobang is a forest clearing rather than a village, and beyond this point the valley is uninhabited.

Altitude: 2,520 m On foot: 5 to 6 hours Night: Camp, Dobang Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 7

Trek from Dobang to Sallaghari

The morning is spent in deep forest, wet underfoot, with the river loud below and occasional views of Dhaulagiri through the trees. Sallaghari is a clearing in pine forest at the upper edge of the tree line. It is the last camp with firewood and the last sheltered camp.

Altitude: 2,820 m On foot: 4 to 5 hours Night: Camp, Sallaghari Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 8

Trek from Sallaghari to Italian Base Camp

You leave the forest and enter the moraine. The day is deliberately short, four hours, because both the terrain and the altitude change significantly today. Italian Base Camp is in a meadow below the west face, with the mountain filling the head of the valley. Most people spend the evening outside watching the mountain at dusk.

Altitude: 3,660 m On foot: 4 hours Night: Camp, Italian Base Camp Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 9

Acclimatisation day at Italian Base Camp

This is an active rest day. We walk for two to three hours up the side of the valley and return to sleep lower, which helps acclimatisation. From today your guide measures everyone's oxygen saturation morning and evening and records it, so that any decline is clearly identified.

Altitude: 3,660 m On foot: 2 to 3 hours Night: Camp, Italian Base Camp Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 10

Trek from Italian Base Camp to Glacier Camp through the Chonbarden gorge

This is the narrowest part of the route. The trail follows the Chonbarden gorge on scree and rock slabs below loose ground, and helmets are worn for the whole section. You reach the glacier in the afternoon. Glacier Camp is on moraine at 4,200 m, and the ice can be heard moving through the night.

Altitude: 4,200 m On foot: 5 to 6 hours Night: Camp, Glacier Camp Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 11

Trek from Glacier Camp to Dhaulagiri Base Camp

A four-hour climb up the Chonbarden glacier, roped where the crew consider it necessary, to the shelf below the north face. Dhaulagiri Base Camp, at 4,740 m, lies between Tukuche Peak on one side and the north face of an 8,000 m mountain on the other, in a bowl of ice that is constantly active.

Altitude: 4,740 m On foot: 4 to 5 hours Night: Camp, Dhaulagiri Base Camp Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 12

Acclimatisation day at Dhaulagiri Base Camp with crampon training

The second acclimatisation day. Part of the day is spent on the ice learning to use crampons and hold an ice axe, whether or not you have done so before. In the afternoon there is a short walk up towards the icefall. Tomorrow is the hardest day of the trek, and this preparation is important.

Altitude: 4,740 m On foot: 3 to 4 hours Night: Camp, Dhaulagiri Base Camp Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 13

Cross the French Pass to Hidden Valley

You set off before dawn. For most of the morning you climb snow slopes at a moderate angle to the cairns and prayer flags of the French Pass at 5,360 m, which has views of Dhaulagiri I and II, Tukuche and Sita Chuchura. The descent is on snow into Hidden Valley, a flat, enclosed and very quiet valley.

Altitude: 5,050 m On foot: 6 to 7 hours Night: Camp, Hidden Valley Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 14

Reserve day in Hidden Valley

This day is held in reserve. If snow has closed the French Pass, someone needs an extra day, or the weather has changed while we were at base camp, this day absorbs the delay. If it is not needed, those who are fit and willing can walk up towards Dhampus Peak for the morning, and the rest of the group rests at 5,050 m.

Altitude: 5,050 m On foot: 0 to 5 hours Night: Camp, Hidden Valley Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 15

Cross the Dhampus Pass to Yak Kharka

This is the longest and hardest day of the trek, and you will be briefed on it in advance. A four-hour traverse on snow and rock leads to the Dhampus Pass at 5,240 m, with Nilgiri and the western end of the Annapurna range ahead. You then descend more than 1,500 m on scree, which is hard on the knees. The day takes nine hours in total and ends at the grazing ground of Yak Kharka.

Altitude: 3,680 m On foot: 8 to 9 hours Night: Camp, Yak Kharka Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 16

Trek from Yak Kharka to Marpha and on to Jomsom

You descend through juniper and then apple orchards to Marpha, a village of whitewashed houses and flagstone streets. There is time to visit the distillery and have a full lunch before a short walk or drive to Jomsom. Tonight you stay in a lodge with a bed, a hot shower and a private room.

Altitude: 2,720 m On foot: 5 to 6 hours Night: Lodge, Jomsom Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 17

Fly to Pokhara and on to Kathmandu

The Jomsom flight leaves at first light, because the Kali Gandaki wind closes the airstrip by mid-morning. The twenty-minute flight follows the deepest gorge in the world down to Pokhara, and you continue to Kathmandu by air or by road. In the evening there is a group dinner.

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

Day 18

Departure

You have a free morning and are transferred to the airport three hours before your flight. If bad weather at Jomsom has delayed us by a day, this day makes up for it, and we will already have contacted your airline if needed.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, departure day Night: No overnight Meals: Breakfast

What's included

- Airport transfers, and hotels in Kathmandu and Pokhara on a twin-sharing basis
- Flights from Kathmandu to Pokhara and from Jomsom to Pokhara to Kathmandu, with road transport as the alternative
- The jeep to the Darbang roadhead
- Annapurna Conservation Area permit and the Dhaulagiri rural municipality fee
- Full camping support: two-person tents, dining and toilet tents, mattresses, kitchen and crew
- All meals from lunch on day 3 to breakfast on day 17, cooked by our own kitchen
- A licensed leader, an assistant guide for groups of six or more, a cook and kitchen staff, and porters
- Group climbing equipment: rope, snow stakes and a helmet for each trekker for the gorge and the passes
- Oxygen cylinder, pulse oximeter and a comprehensive first aid kit carried by the leader
- All crew wages, insurance, equipment and food
- A duffel bag and a trekking map to keep

Not included

- International flights and the Nepal visa
- Travel insurance, which must cover helicopter evacuation above 5,500 m
- Personal climbing equipment: boots, crampons and an ice axe, all available for hire in Kathmandu
- A sleeping bag rated to minus 20 Celsius, available for hire in Kathmandu for about \$2 a day
- Lunch and dinner in Kathmandu and Pokhara
- Drinks, snacks, hot showers where available, and laundry
- Costs resulting from a flight cancellation: extra nights, meals and changes of route
- Tips for the crew, which on a camping trek are a significant part of their income

Packing list

There is no shop after day 3

On a teahouse trek, you can replace a forgotten item at the next village. On this trek there are no villages to buy from. Everything you need for fourteen days is carried in from day 3, and Pokhara is the last place to buy anything. We check your equipment carefully on the evening of day 1, because it is easy to hire a down jacket in Thamel and very difficult to manage without one at 5,050 m.

Headwear and eye protection

- A warm hat that covers your ears, and a spare in case one blows away on a pass
- A sun hat with a brim for the glacier, where the reflected light is very strong
- Category 4 glacier glasses, not ordinary sunglasses, plus a spare pair
- A buff or neck gaiter to cover your face on the passes
- A head torch with fresh batteries and a spare set, for the pre-dawn starts

Clothing

- A down jacket rated for minus 20 Celsius, not a lightweight one
- A waterproof jacket and trousers that you have tested in rain
- Two thermal base layers, and one or two fleeces
- Trekking trousers and one pair of comfortable trousers for camp
- Boots worn in over at least 60 km and stiff enough to take a crampon

Gloves and footwear

- Both liner gloves and insulated mitts. Mitts alone make it hard to use your hands
- Five pairs of trekking socks and two thick pairs for camp
- Knee-high gaiters, which are essential on the passes
- Two trekking poles with snow baskets fitted
- Light camp shoes for the time between arriving at camp and dinner

Sleeping

- A sleeping bag rated to minus 20 Celsius, which can be hired in Kathmandu if you prefer not to bring one
- A silk or fleece liner, which adds about five degrees of warmth
- An inflatable mat to use on top of the foam mattress we provide
- A pee bottle
- Two power banks, and a solar panel if you take a lot of photographs

Health

- Diamox, prescribed by and discussed with your own doctor before you travel
- A blister kit; treat hot spots before they become blisters
- High-factor sun cream and lip balm, reapplied every two hours on the glacier
- Rehydration salts and your usual remedy for an upset stomach
- Your own prescription medicines in their original packaging, carried in your daypack rather than your duffel

Bags

- One duffel of up to 15 kg for the porter, lined with a dry bag
- A 30 to 35 litre daypack with a rain cover
- Dry bags for items that must stay dry, as the duffel will sometimes be put down on wet ground
- A small padlock for the duffel and for the bag you leave in Kathmandu

Documents and money

- Passport valid for at least six months, and four passport photographs
- Travel insurance with helicopter rescue to 6,000 m, with the policy number and assistance phone number written on paper
- Your emergency contact details, on paper, given to the leader on day 1
- Cash in US dollars and rupees. There is no cash machine after Pokhara

Route map

Dhaulagiri Circuit Trek

18 days | Highest point 5,360 m | Strenuous



- Main trekking route
- Flight
- Drive
- Trek starts
- Mountain pass
- Overnight on day
- Highest points



Altitude by day



Optional extras

Dhampus Peak, 6,012 m

\$690, uses day 14

A non-technical 6,000 m summit from Hidden Valley, climbed on the reserve day if the weather and the group allow. It requires a climbing permit, a climbing guide and mountaineering boots, and adds a summit to the trek. Please tell us when you book, not at base camp.

Two nights in Marpha instead of one at Jomsom

\$110, 1 extra day

Marpha is the most attractive village in the Kali Gandaki valley and a good place to rest after eleven nights in a tent. You can visit the distillery and the gumpa above the village, and relax at 2,670 m.

Helicopter from Jomsom to Pokhara

\$550, same day

Per person on a shared charter, for use when the scheduled flights are grounded and you have a flight to catch. We keep this in reserve rather than selling it in advance, and it is the quickest solution when the Jomsom wind prevents flights.

Pokhara, three nights by the lake

\$260, 3 extra days

Added at the end of the trek. A lakeside hotel, a boat trip, a massage and free time.

Private departure on your own dates

from \$420 extra, same length

Your own group, on your own dates within the two seasons, with the same crew. For groups of eight or more there is no supplement.

Everest scenic flight from Kathmandu

\$220, 1 morning

A one-hour flight along the range with a guaranteed window seat. It can be added on day 18 if your international flight is in the evening.

Photos, videos and reviews of this trip: enepaltrekking.com/dhaulagiri-trek