

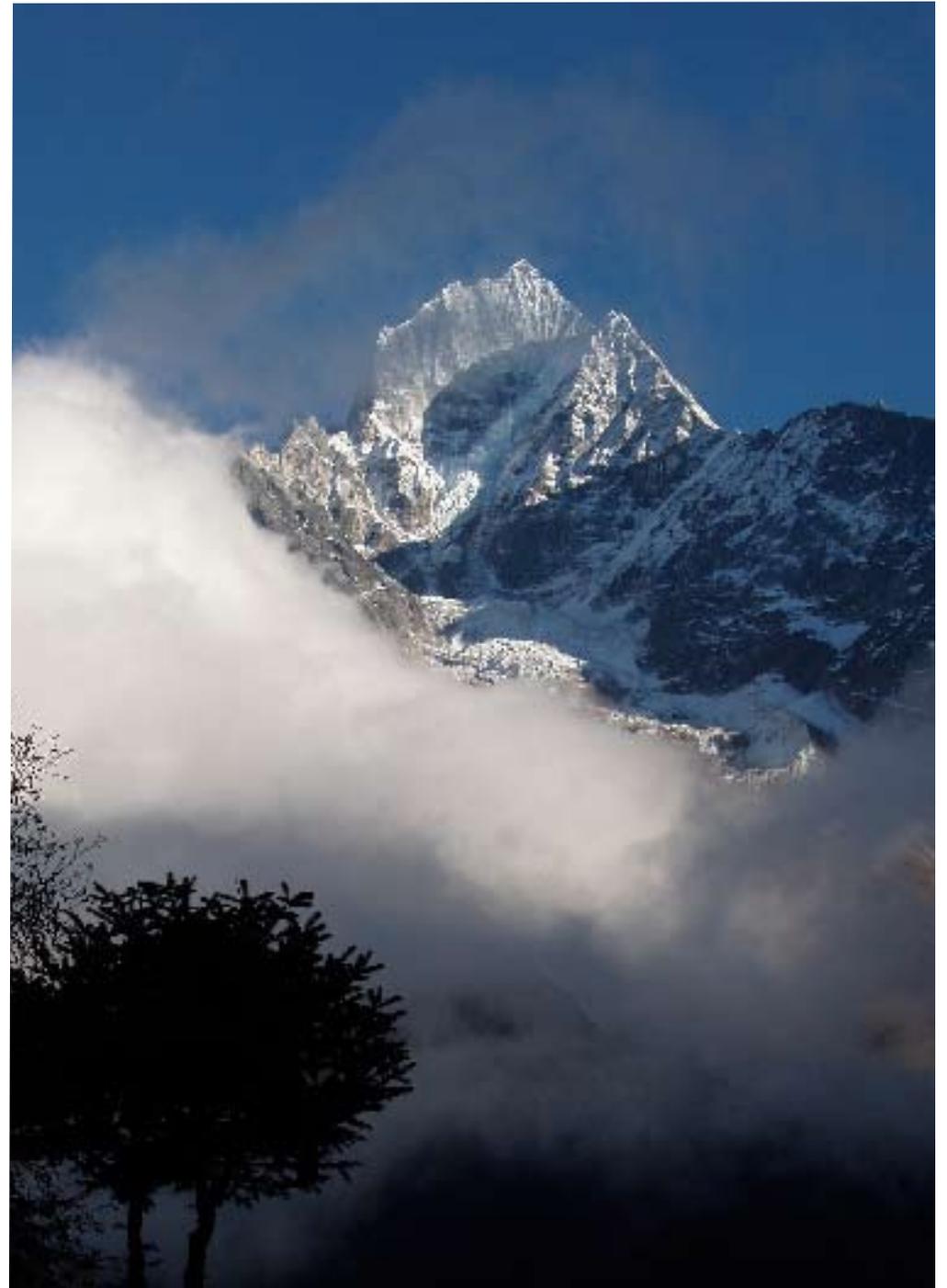
On Top of the World

Treking the Himalayas

With

Chris Walker

A guide for preparation



Why Visit Nepal?

Nepal is one of the most unique and diverse countries on earth. From land areas below sea level to 8 of the highest 13 mountains on earth, Nepal is truly a mirror of cultural diversity. As mountain people adapt to the altitudes, their religions, beliefs and lifestyles are vastly different to those in the valleys who face different challenges.

But the most astonishing thing about Nepal is its quiet dominance of more sacred and spiritual sites than any other country on earth. From Buddas birth place, Shivas birth place, home of hundreds of budist monasteries, one of the most sacred hindu sites on earth and an array of sacred mountains respected by nearly all faiths, Nepal is a powerful spiritual source for the world.

As you trek her mountains, your life changes. Thousand year old mani walls of carved rock, chant "Om mani Padme Hum" a call for love and peace – prayer flags adorn every home, mountain, bridge or stupa along the way, each one embossed with those same words, and chanting them each time the wind flaps the flags. Tradition has it, that every prayer you pray, in some of these more sacred sights, is magnified by the thousand and in some special places, like Bodda, in Katmandu, millions.

It's not for the faint hearted. But for those who live life as an experience, and who choose to get past the intellectual blockades of western thinking, here in Nepal, the ego falls away with every step, and to your life there will be added a certain richness, an awareness, that will never fade.

Our Mission

Chris Walker's treks into the himalaya of Nepal, have three core objectives.

- 1/ To experience the magnificence of the highest place on earth, a heart opening, transforming experience.
- 2/ To enjoy the physical challenge of trekking up to nearly 6,000 meters above sea level while maintaining high levels of safety and personal comfort.
- 3/ To experience and learn from the sacred cultures, places and people of the Himalaya home to Sherpa and Tibetan Bhudist nuns and monks alike.

Respect

We are committed to the deepest respect for the cultures, environments and traditions of the Sherpa communities that inhabit these mountains. We are mindful about our trekking methods, our impact on the sustainability of the resources and the significance of places of prayer and ritual.

This said, the form of Buddhism practiced by Sherpa people in this area of the Himalaya is an open hearted, fun and welcoming religion. Under most circumstances photography is welcomed.

This respect also extends to the way we dress. Huge amounts of bare skin can be embarrassing for the monks and nuns.

Seasons

There are two main trekking seasons in Nepal. March/April and September/October with shoulder months either side of these. During these months many tourists enter the national parks. At that time, accommodation can be scarce and local people are flat out keeping up with demands.

Our trips are usually off season. November, December are colder seasons but the views are spectacular. May, June and July are the rainy seasons but there are such an array of wild flowers and festivals, we rarely see the rain.

Weather and fitness determine the trails we follow, but we love to get off the main trails as often as possible. We visit secret and sacred places, monasteries, caves and viewpoints including several of the mountaineering base camps to hear a few amazing stories. Our favorite spots are caves where Monks have become enlightened, retreat houses where nuns have remained for over 45 years, hidden from the outside world. We'll take you to places that aren't on the map and you will meet those people in truly authentic spiritual hidaways.

Accommodation

We don't enjoy tents or roughing it too much. We are never too far from a good coffee machine and warm shelter. Our lodges have been hand picked over the years because of good food, great people and warm comfortable lounges. These purpose built lodges are attached to the family home so we are really guests of families and this is a great opportunity to laugh and share with Sherpa people.

Weather

In the Himalayas the temperature goes from hot to cold around nearly every bend in the path. Himalayan weather is unpredictable and variable. At 4,000 meters, clouds travel at over 100 km per hour. So predicting weather is often a visual issue. "Look, here comes rain". Mountain climbers use satellites and computer based weather maps to predict storms and winds, but us, trekkers, use our eyes. "wow, it's snowing"

You will need to be ready for snow and sunshine. Suncream in the morning, mittens in the afternoon. We provide wonderful warm down jackets and sleeping bags so hot or cold, you are comfortable. This is a part of the beauty of Nepal, and when we dress properly, it's all wonderful.

Flights

Because the weather can change, we have a few variables in our journey. The first is the light plane flight from Katmandu to the mountains and back. This flight can be delayed by fog in Katmandu, and fog in the mountains. Because of this we allow two days for delays in our schedule and always come down two days before international flights, just in case we are delayed.

This said, there have been times when flights down from the mountains have been delayed up to a week. In those circumstances international ticket conditions become important. Just in case there is a change.



Altitude

One of the most significant challenges of the Nepal Trek experience is altitude. As we ascend higher in the mountains, oxygen is reduced in the atmosphere making the lungs work harder to extract the necessary nutrition for our body to do the work required. This, of course, builds enormous fitness, but takes a little getting used to.

Altitude sickness comes about when the body, can't cope with the changes brought about by decreasing pressure and decreasing oxygen. The decreased pressure allows the brain to expand and press against the skull causing headaches. There are numerous other side effects too.

Good hydration (drinking plenty of water), steady daily ascent limits, rest and close monitoring prevent serious problems. However, altitude sickness is a major consideration and we take this seriously until we acclimatize. There is much about this on the web, including our favorite precaution, Diamox pills. There are many safety warnings before the onset of altitude sickness and we monitor these regularly.

The Sacred lakes of the Himalaya are the highest altitude of our trek. We will summit a trekking peak (5400 meters) and witness either a soul awakening sunset or be sitting, in paradise as the sun rises. Either way, the achievement in itself, is a memory that can last forever. From this one place you can reach out and almost touch Sagamatha, Mount Everest, and her peak, 8846 meters above sea level.

However, we do not sleep at this altitude, descending after our peak, we sleep at around 4900 meters.

Physical

You will need to prepare for the physical journey in Nepal.

Imagine tomorrow, stepping out of your normal lifestyle and jogging 25 miles. Now, you can stop anytime, you can eat and drink as you choose, but you must finish that marathon, rain, snow, sunshine and dust, you simply keep going until you are done.

Now add the fact that most of it might be downhill. So your poor old knees are going to have to take the strain. Then tomorrow, you have to do the whole thing, all over again, and the next day and the next.

This is a fair description of how the experience of trekking in Nepal feels to some people. Most days we walk for no more than five hours, with lots of breaks. But because the trails are always going up some hill or down another, at altitude, we certainly get challenged from time to time.

Many people lose significant weight on the journey, and return home very much fitter than when they arrived. Deep breathing, fresh air and fun days make this a great health program.

Altitude changes your oxygen absorption rates, so you are often left breathless within a few meters of your bed. Adaptation is a powerful and wonderful deepening of your own physical health and done mindfully, can provide huge health benefits back at home. Eventually, you learn to walk under your breathing, smell the roses, and enjoy the day.

We are in no hurry. We have plenty of places to stop if needed and, in fact slow walking helps acclimatize, so at the most, it's just a change of pace.

Training

There are many levels of training that you would be advised to undertake for Nepal.

Aerobic... Undertake some exercise where you are slightly out of breath, (jogging etc) to improve cardio-vascular fitness.

Anaerobic ... Undertake some exercise where you are not out of breath but feel challenged on a strength level. Say, walking up hills or in sand with a pack on.

Flexibility ... Stiff joints are vulnerable joints so some stretch before and after exercise is good for hips, knees and ankles.

Hydration ... Keeping the water up to your system is important. Most of our water loss during exercise is through evaporation from breathing. So even if you don't sweat, you can be getting dehydrated. Using either water camel pak, or bottles, you'll need to get used to carrying and using them regularly.

Walking/jogging... Most people land on their heels when they walk or jog and as a consequence challenge their bone structure as well as deplete their energy reserves. Try walking lightly, and softly, and see what a difference meditative walking can make.

Pack ... In Nepal you will be carrying some form of back pack with water, chocolate (or something) sun cream, camera, hat, warm jacket and whatever else (toilet paper doesn't weigh much) -- get used to carrying that extra few kg..



Water

Over the years, I seen people carry pumps, iodine, chlorine, plastic bottles, boiled water, nothing, beer, and some, just drink straight from the taps. Each of those groups have had mixed success. Those little pumps are a great idea, but such a nuicance. The advantage is - no waiting.

For me, the little pills (micropure) work perfectly. I suspect that the little iodine and chlorine pills, would not be healthy if taken for 3 years continuously, but 3 weeks, I still haven't grown a second head so this is what I use.

Boiled water is available. But the environmental cost of boiling and the uncertainty of how long it boiled makes it impractical. Bottled water is always available. The plastic bottles are a problem after use, but the water is good.

We provide the little pills. If you prefer another form, please feel free to bring it along.

Endura is an electrolyte replacement powder that can replace the goodies lost from sweat and even diahreah. It also kills the tast, if any, of the water. We recommend this product but you would be wise to experiment with different varieties before you arrive to find out which is best for you and if neccessary, bring your own rehydration powder.

Food

Dahl Bhart. Get used to those two words. Dahl, a high protein vegetable source of nutrition and Bhart (as in Simpson) the Nepali name for rice. Throw in a few vegetables, depending on what is in the garden and in season, and you have the Nepali staple meal. You won't believe the volume some local people consume and thrifty tourists get the message that it's a bottomless plate and eat until they drop. But, taken wisely, this is a wonderful daily support for the physical and emotional exertion that high mountain trekking demands.

The environmentally sound way to eat in a group is to try to order the same meal as each other. That way, on those wood fired stoves the cook is not making bacon and eggs for one person and chicken a la mode for another. This just takes a few minutes to scan the menu which is identical in all National Park lodges throughout this area.

Meat is eaten, even by monks and nuns, throughout the mountains. This meat is usually dried and cooked in stews. (sherpa stew). Chicken is most often fresh, and you can buy meat in the market and have it cooked in front of your own eyes.

Some cooks are better than others but they all put so much love and care into the food. It's delightful. Lunch time on the trail requires that we consider the time to prepare the meal (I have waited more than 2 hours in damp clothes) so, we normally opt for the traditional packet of Ra Ra noodles.

Most important is that you eat well, enjoy hearty meals and be mindful of food that is not fresh..

The trots

(trots means --- trot to the toilet)

One wise volunteer doctor at the high altitude hospital at Phereche once told my group. "there are only two types of people in Nepal. Those with the trots, and those about to get them" and after 35 trips here, I concur. Frankly, a clean out like this is quite healthy. As long as it isn't something serious. The "trots" usually lasts 24 hours and requires one or two extra stops along the way. Rapid plug medication is carried for anything more worrisome so within a few hours, we can arrest anything that's more serious. (may require a change of underwear)

Two cases of more serious stomock problems act as teachers for us all. One couple ecided to walk the streets of Katmandu (which I highly remommend) and sample deep fried samosas from a pot of probably rancid oil from a side street stall (which I don't recommend). The result was immeditate. Another case was a lady from Canada. She bought so many anti bacterial homeopathics, I think they made her ill. Really we'll never know but we needed to apply significant rememdy to help her "stem the tide". What is clear is that with hygenic hands, normal eating common sense and good food choices, there is nothing to fear, but fear itself.

Uncooked food, like fruit and salads are probably the most vulnerable sources of trots causing germs. They can carry bacteria on the skin. In all good café's these foods are soaked in iodine water. I stick to cooked food, and certainly, avoid meat where I am not sure. There is no refrigeration and you'll only need to look once at butchers shop to know that things aren't like they are at home.

Immunization

There is a never ending list of advice on this topic. And we are not experts in this field. But... speaking from experience, in the high himalaya, most valley born diseases like hepatitis, malaria, and others, aren't seen frequently.

My main worry is catching things from tourists who have spent the last 6 months hitch hiking in some unforgivable swamp on 10c a day.

Medical advice is a personal choice. I personally don't have immune shots.

Hygiene

We provide you with a small bottle of herbal personal hand cleaner which we suggest you carry in your pocket and use it frequently before meals and after bathroom visits. The rest, with precautions, does not benefit from the paranoia we see so often. Many people worry themselves into sickness. Really, there's no need to worry.

Keep the lid of your drink bottle away from your lips. Don't wipe your eyes with your hands.

In Nepal, most traditional people do not use toilet paper - ever. They use their left hand and water to clean the equipment. So, traditionally, the left hand is not used for much at all. This is a really good habit to develop. (I don't mean not using toilet paper) - I mean not communicating, passing money, eating food, picking things up, handing anything to anyone, or receiving anything, in your left (poo) hand.

Namaste

This is the most used word in Nepal. The way it's pronounced depends on where you are. High up in the mountains where you'll be bumping into Tibetan nomads, it sounds more like Na Ma STTTTTEEEEE.. Down lower, it's Na, Ma, Stay...

The meaning changes too

In Thamel, a district of Katmandu, where tourist stay for the few nights before and after their treks, Namaste is mostly an attention grabbing call from a street hawker, "Namastee, you want hash?" or "Namastee, look in my shop" or "Namastee, please give me some rupies" -

Once you get inside the door of a hotel or lodge you'll be greeted sincerely by that same word and higher in the mountain, where people really leave you to find your path, it's a passing greeting and always means, hello I salute you....

To stop a tourist on a trek path is almost impossible. Western people steam along those paths like they are freeways and they, like a truck, have places to go and people to see. But the children break that nexus. Babies, parked along the way, some as young as 2 play in the mud, and always salute with, Namaste. Some are welcoming you to stop and stay, others for a sweet, but the sight of one of these runny nosed children, hands in prayer, saying Namaste, is really a heart stopper.

Katmandu

We fly into Katmandu, and out to Lukla the next day. That is not ideal, but there are several reasons for it. First is that we must fly down early at the end of our trek to ensure international connections are met. Lukla airport in the Himalaya is a visual only take off and landing so there are regular delays (sometimes 3 days) – given that we may be back earlier than necessary (if all goes well) then Katmandu sight seeing can take place then.

The second reason that we fly out the next day, is that Katmandu can be polluted and disty. Depending on weather, like Los angeles, Katmandu is in a valley and temperature inversion can hold car fumes, dust and pollution in the city at very high levels. We get out as quickly as possible to avoid lung challenges.

This city is, however, awesome. So many monasteries, sacred sights, suddus, temples, ritual and festivals. Shopping is fun and markets are spectacular. The old city at Durbar Square is a work of wonder and, provided you can deal with the harassment of ever interested hawkers, “guides” and beggars, you’ll be stunned at the beauty.

Hotels range from \$1 a night to five star. WE choose to stay in Thamel, the pub filled, shopping mecca of Katmandu and in spite of all it’s problems, Thamel is a real hoot.

Once in Katmandu, we’ll get you a map and guide you to some amazing places. Bring a few dollars (ATM is available as well as many money changers from all currencies, US\$ being the preferred cash conversion) Currency is Nepal Rupies, About US\$1.00 is 70 Rupies. A\$1.00 is Rp50.

Religion

Nepal has one of the most unique blends of religion on earth.

A meeting place between Tibet and India, and suffering numerous invasions from all sides over the years, Nepal boasts a proliferation of Buddhist, Hindu and Moslem temples. Often they are on the one site, in the same compound.

We’ll visit sacred sights for both Hindu and buddhists and may even be lucky enough to witness a festival or two. Street sadus will paint a tikka on your forehead or welcome a photo, but don’t expect it for free.

Higher in the mountains, Buddhist has it’s Tibetan origins.. Here, monasteries and meditation retreats, proliferate just over the board from Chinese occupied Tibet where those same monasteries were banned. These highland residents are known as the Sherpa people, and they play host to low landers of Nepali and Hindu faiths, and Tibetans who cross the high passes to trade with them.

The forms of Buddhism are numerous but up in Sherpa land, they practice an easy going, laid back, humor filled form of bhudism. You can take photos in most places, laugh with monks and really relax in this very humane, but highly devotional form of religious living.



Trek agenda

Please take this as a rough guide. We can be delayed, and sometimes we are required to make the trip a day or so shorter to meet client flight plans... This is only a guide.

Day 1. Arrive Katmandu.

If you don't have a visa, fill out the visa on arrival, run from the plane overtake everyone, get to the front of the que for Visa on arrival. Pay your US\$35 or so (have US\$ in tens and twenties) and your passport photo... Then move to the next booth where they take the issued visa and stamp you in. Proceed to baggage claim downstairs after going through the xray that never works, go left, collect a trolley, then go back past the non working xray to the baggage carosell. Get your bag, walk past the other non working xray, and out to the bustling crowd. Stop before you hit the mess of people and look straight ahead, you'll see a man with a sign, Sherpa adventure or a sign with your name. Say no, to 100 bidding taxi drivers and head for that sign. From there, you are in the safe hands of our Nepal Agents.

You will be collected from the airport by representatives of our travel Agent in Nepal, Sherpa Adventure. This company, headed by Pasang Dawa Sherpa, is the main contact point for you, your family, emergency or anything else on your whole Nepal journey. They are a wonderful, experienced and highly professional company who can arrange ongoing support for you, change flights, etc

Friends can contact you in Nepal through that company at tel 977 1 4422656 fax 977 1 4427067 email sat@wlink.com.np web site www.sherpaadventure.com

After settling into the hotel, Tibet Guest House, we meet for lunch around 1.00pm at the hotel lobby. From here, after a short briefing, we go shopping for your trekking needs and head straight to Shona's trekking shop to collect sleeping bags, down jackets and buy accessories that are missing from your list.

Back to the hotel to pack your porter bags, check your supplies, visit the pharmacy and goodies shop and then, from 4.00pm it's free time until tomorrow morning.

Please note that we may have to spend a second day in Katmandu depending on circumstances.

Day 2. Katmandu to Mountains

4.30 am wake up call. In lobby breakfast by 5.00 and to airport 5.30am. Flights depart (weather permitting) from 6.00am. Weather permitting, you will be in Lukla, at 2600 meters, by 7.00am and ready for a real breakfast. For the flight, you need to pack your walking poles, knife, etc into the porter bag and keep matches, lighters, knives, etc out of your day pack. Once in Lukla, the beginning of the trek, you'll have loads of time to reorganize your day bag. Please also remember that if weather is bad, we may be stuck in Katmandu for many hours. So if you have a book to read, this should be in your day pack, along with toilet paper, and hand cleaner. A coffee shop in the airport makes great coffee, sells biscuits and water.

Once in Lukla, we acclimatize for 2 hours or more before heading off to begin our journey. In those two hours we encourage you to relax, walk about and maybe even visit the local Thangka Painting School which is five minutes walk from our breakfast stop.

Our destination is Phakding (careful how you pronounce it) and this is a 3 hour, mostly downhill stretch. Views are awesome and as an introduction to the "well beaten path" this is a great first day..

We'll stop for tea along the way, take photos and generally let the altitude find us. (and the attitude) – This is a time for learning how to walk the rocky paths, stepping around the mani walls (always keep them to your right) and communicating when you want to stop for conveniences and photos. On my treks my guide always walks at the front of the group and I at the back. We can be separated by up to a kilometer, so you don't always feel that you are in a group... (but we know where you are)

On arrival at Phakding, we'll settle for our first lodge night. Then, with small day packs we can visit our first Buddhist monastery. One of the oldest in the whole valley and a steep climb up from our hotel. (along a path). This depends on your energy and how your body is coping with altitude adjustment.

By 7.00pm you'll be tucked away, warm as toast in your five season sleeping bag, too hot for down at this altitude, but totally ready for what is ahead.

Day 3. Phakding to Namche Bazaar (3400 meters)

After waking at 6.00 or so, we take a porridge breakfast and walk the 2 hours mostly flat walk, along the river bank to our real breakfast lodge. My friends at this Kailash lodge will make you so welcome you won't want to leave. And sitting in that warm sunroom looking out on the valley, you can be forgiven for wanting to stay forever.

But we must, and not far from this lodge we pay the entry

fee to the Sagamatha National Park. You'll need a photocopy of your passport. Fees are paid by us as part of your package, but the passport copy, is yours to carry. (Sherpa adventure hold your passport, air ticket and valuables for your convenience)

Today you face the Namche Hill. All that preparation, all those morning walks, all that training is tested today. After only one day in the mountains you are going to face one of the longest climbs of the trip. I love this hill. It changes people. There are those whose normal mode of facing life is to attack challenges, (but you can't beat the mountain) there are those who feel defeated by life and want to give up before they begin, but there is a way, and I will share it, about half way up this long 4 hour uphill stroll, that makes the whole journey, simple.

We'll arrive in Namche around 2.00pm hungry, tired and maybe feeling a little headached from dehydration, exertion and altitude. We have pills. But by drinking adequate water on the way, frequent stops, slow pace and relaxed breathing, this should not be difficult. After showers and some well earned lunch, a sleep and about 1000 "oh my goodness" you have one other obligation left for the day.

Trek high, sleep low. We sadly, have this motto to follow, so, in our relaxed gear, trekking shoes and warm jackets we stroll slowly to the top of Namche village and down again – total time 1 hour. Trek high sleep low, means the highest place we achieve each day, is not our bed.

You'll love Namche. The German Bakery with real apple strudel, the shops, Tibetan traders (Tashi Deli instead of Namaste) and more... including a wonderful monastery where we get spectacular views...

Day 4. Namche Bazaar – Rest day

Rest in Nepal, is like flat in Nepal. Flat means you end up at the same altitude you started, but might climb mount everest on the way... Rest means a day acclimatizing by walking around. We'll stroll out a few hours and enjoy some potatoe pancakes (my favorite meal) and meet some amazing Nuns, including, if possible an American nun ex punk rocker.. who graduated from Harvard as a physicist.

We'll also have the opportunity to meet with Sherab. A Bhutanese, Anji, (Tibetan doctor) who runs a clinic in Namche. Have your health checked, pulse taken, astrology reviewed and ask him about anything you choose. These consultations are by donation. And the clinic is right next door to our beautiful hotel, with hot showers in every room.... Wow...

Day 5. Namche to Tenboche

In every trip we have one day built into the program as a "spare day" that is a weather day, an altitude day, a sore knee day. Today, day 4 we can use up that day if fitness is not catching up to demand, but if all is well, we head to Tengboche. Here one of the most important monasteries in the Himalayas exist and the high righpoche of tengboche monastery may, depending on his schedule, give us an audience.

This day involves the last of the "big hills" we climb from Namche, flat for 2 hours, and then another "Namche Hill" up to the monastery. Here, we'll choose one of the poorly lodges in and around the monastery and enjoy a game of volleyball with the monks. Or sit down to a cold beer..... depending on our health..

You'll get a chance to sit with the monks while they chant the darma and watch them meditate. Here is a significant spiritual shock as you contrast the joyful, playful informal atmosphere of monks achieving enlightenment to our conventional western way of thinking, pious and rigid religions.

Day 6. Dingboche

Now we are above 4,000 meters and all bets are off. Altitude is our guru up here and if we are not feeling great, then plans adjust to suit. This is where experience takes the place of bravery. Today, our aim is Dingboche, but there are three alternatives along the way. Each provides an brilliant alternative to the 4400 altitude climb to Dingboche.

It's a long flat and gradual ascent to the chukung valley where Dingboche sits and we take the whole day. Great views of the mountains and wonderful people make this day a total treat.

Day 7. Dingboche – Phortse

WE now backtrack down from Dingboche, and from under the shadow of the magnificent Ama Dablam mountain peak, to Pangboche. Here we visit caves and a high monastery before completing the journey to Phortse.

The track from Pangboche to Phortse is not for the faint hearted. At least a meter or two wide this rock trail cuts across a vertical cliff face. It is an amazing trail and often here we find wild mountain goats, deer and of course, grazing yaks.

Day 8. Phortse – Dole or Machermo

At 6.00am we rise, take a wonderful breakfast with my friends and 4 times Everest Summitter, Pa Nuru, and then head off down into the valley to begin the journey to Gokyo. From the

bottom of the valley we have a two day journey to the lakes and this is probably the prettiest valley of all. Our destination today is Machermo, but again, we have many options so that health and acclimatization remain our priority.

In this valley, temperatures drop as we come out of the forests and onto exposed pastures. Wind can sweep down from the surrounding peaks. Our down jackets are always at the ready along with gloves, beanie, and mouth guard. (Cold air entering the mouth under exercise conditions can chill the lungs and cause fluid build up, and eventually a chest cold) therefore, people wear medical face masks, bandana's and all manner of ideas to simply filter air into the mouth through at least one layer of cotton.

Machermo valley is delicious. A new medical center, wonderful surrounding cliffs, a view to the other side of the mountains and sunsets that behold make this my favorite photo stop. There are other benefits of this valley but you'll see these only once you get there..

Day 9. Gokyo

On most trips, we take our spare day here. In Machermo. Tiredness, the beauty of the spot, altitude and sometimes weather all add to make this a rest day. However, if the decision is to continue, we are only a few short hours from the sacred lakes of Gokyo, and our last altitude climb, Gokyo Re.

We stroll past these high altitude aqua blue green lakes, build a few stone statues, photograph the magnificence of it all and arrive at our highest sleeping destination for the journey. Here, the rest of the day is spent relaxing, and looking down on the longest moraine, glacier on earth. Mountains surround us, and you can be forgiven for comparing this to Switzerland

chocolate wrapper scenery (except we are higher than any mountain peak in Europe)

Early to bed,

Day 10. Gokyo – Machermo

Freezing, we rise at 4.00am (it is all voluntary) and begin the slow ascent of Gokyo re. Our down jackets soon come off as the heat of hard work fuels us with energy. 3 -4 hours later, we summit, usually shout with unbelievable excitement, raise some prayer flags we have carried up and say a few prayers for friends. Here we are and the sun begins to light the Mountains, Mt Everest comes alive in Red, yellow, blue and crimson sunrise... After snacks, photos and some deeply amazing revelations, we come down slowly, it still takes 2 hours to descend the winding path and when we again reach the lake, there is a release of emotion that can only be lived to be described.

After breakfast, a rest and some last minute snaps, we descend to Machermo again in the afternoon. It takes only a few hours now, to recover our tracks.

Day 11 Machermo to Namche

This is a long day, descending through altitude makes it easy, but the hours are long, at least 8, and this makes the longest day trekking we achieve on the trail

Back down past Phortse, with Tengboche on the other side of the valley, we climb Mong la, then slowly and easily, walk home.

Day 12. Namche.

We deserve a day in town. And we gladly take it. Beer, hot chips and chocolate cake .. just this once...

Day 13 Namche Lukla –

We are on our way home... down the Namche hill we feel sorry for those heading up, back to our breakfast home at Monjo, say farewell, lunch on Phakding (at least now you can pronounce it) and then up, up, to Lukla where Dawa and his wife are always waiting with a smile, many reassurances that flights should leave on time in the morning and an understanding awareness of our experience.

Day 14 Lukla To Katmandu

You'll wake at 5.00am pack and be ready for the flight. We check our bags in then go back to the hotel and wait. We wait for a siren, a magical siren that signals that one plane has left Katmandu's fog, and is on its way to Lukla with a new load of tourist, and to evacuate us, back to Katmandu

All being well we'll be in Katmandu by 8.00am. But, this is Nepal, this is the Himalaya, we are high in the clouds. And it's better to be safe than sorry. Pilots here quote "in Nepal, clouds have mountains in them"

Day 15

Sight seeing Katmandu

The air is thick with oxygen, you feel wonderful. There's stupas, and hindu temples, sacred rivers, the monkey temple and a living Goddess. There's cashmere shawls, tibetan artifacts, tee shirts, pirate DVD's and more....

Day 16

?????? Maybe flight out or more magnificent Katmandu

There are also Safari parks, rafting trips, mountain bikes and many other adventures to fill the time in Nepal...



Here's what you need to bring with you on this trek

Kitchen sink

Gas barbeque

Encyclopedia britanica

Ball gown

Black tie suit

Hi fi system

10 Spare books

Bed

Potable Toilet

Trekking Equipment

Item	Recommendation
Day Pack	Needs to be suitable for the rigors of a sustained trek, have a spine, waist belt and be at least 50 litres in volume. The size should be appropriate for your body shape (travel pack is not suitable). recommend lightweight durable.
Bum Bag	For those people with shoulder or chest problems a bum bag can be used with a volume of less than 20 litres. Provision for water bottles is essential.
Rain Jacket	This is very important. The raincoat should be made from a breathable fabric (goretex is an example). This jacket will also provide wind protection.
Boots	These need to be waterproof, light with a stiff sole. There are now trekking shoes on the market and these are fine if your ankles are strong. (we do not recommend trekking shoes). Sole should be Vibram or similar. Make 100% sure that these boots have adequate toe room for downhill walking. They must be worn for at least 1 month in high use before beginning the trek. (listers are a kill joy)
Down Jacket	This item we provide from a rental service in Katmandu. If you choose to buy one in Katmandu, and keep it after, they are incredibly good value and it's nice to wear a new item. US\$50/
Sleeping Bag	This item we provide from a hire facility in Katmandu. Again they are for sale at around US\$80 which is incredible value. This bag needs to be 5 season for women and 4 season for men.
Water Camel Pak	An insulated camel pak is recommended. 2 litres is the ideal size with insulated hose. The larger top opening pack is the better model
Water Bottles	Alternative to a Camel Pak are special unbreakable water bottles. These are available in Katmandu. With a camel pak we recommend a spare 1 litre bottle for storage.
Sleeping mat	None required
Head -torche	These days there are a huge range of head torches available. Black diamond LED /Halogen is one of the better ones. There are others. You will not be trekking at night, so it will be used to go to the toilet, and maybe a stroll. These are available in Katmandu at a good price but limited range. Smaller, more powerful is better.

Item	Recommendation
Knife	No knife is needed. Nail clippers might be handy.
Map	Map is provided on arrival. For pre reference, look up Khumbu - Nepal on the web.
Water Treatment Kit	Nalgene and Katidyn make pumps that filter boogies from water. We don't recommend it because they are a bit of a nuisance. But, if you prefer these to Micropur pills, then it's a personal choice.
Whistle/ Compass	Good toys. Whistles are nice in case we play soccer.
Porter Pack liner.	Waterproof pack liners are available. Larger is easier. This will contain all your spare clothes and will be packed inside a duffle bag provided by us, and carried by your porter. You will not be able to access the porter bag once packed until arrival at the new lodge destination for the night.
Pack Liner	Your day pack can either be covered by a waterproof pack cover or contain a smaller pack liner. Sea to Summit is one brand.
Camera	Highly recommended. Strong suggestions that you check the battery life under cold conditions. Digital cameras can be recharged at around US\$6.00 - A waterproof camera bag is often handy. I use Seal Line "see 5"
First aid kit	We carry a complete first aid kit. However, we strongly recommend a small self made kit. These are available from government travel agencies, make your own. This would include: small blister pack, head ache pills, some antiseptic cream, small arnica for sore muscles and something for a rash or chafe. (Available in Katmandu) If you have any medical condition at all that requires special medication, please bring this. Also, feminine hygiene products are available in Katmandu but limited range.
Sun Cream	A small tube of cream with screw top and no flip top is essential. (Available in Katmandu)
Anti Bacterial Hand gel	We provide this
Fleece thick	Either a 300 weight fleece or a woollen jumper will keep you warm when wet. (Available in Katmandu for a song)
Fleece thin (2 off)	A 100 weight trekking fleece. Long sleeve. Available in Katmandu for a song.
Long sleeved trekking shirt	A light cotton shirt is ideal for hot days. An old business shirt can do. There are more advanced materials too. (Available in Katmandu)

Item	Recommendation
Trekking Pants 2 Off	Synthetic trekking pants. one lighter, one heavier. No jeans, chords, Armani - Sport tights are also good provided they don't cling to the
1 pr Shorts	Can be the top part of two part trekking pants
2 Thermal Tops	Must be long sleeve, polypropelene. medium or thin. Note some of the more expensive ones have anti bacteria in the thread. Hence they don't smell with sweat (please) - not available in Katmandu...
2 thermal pants	Polypropelene. See thermal tops for details. (not available in Katmandu)
Fleece Pants	300 weight fleece pants. Available in Katmandu for a song.
Beanie	If trekking in December this can include a sun visor, and ear covers. Otherwise available in Katmandu
3 Thick sox	Necessary to avoid bisters. Many options and expensives. Be careful. I use Kmart work sox.
3 thin sox	The ideal walking arrangement is a silk thin pair of sox against the skin and the thicker ones over the top. Train in these to get used to them. On hot days, it is possible just to wear the thin ones. (practice this, Himalayas is no place for experiments with boots and sox)
5 Underpants etc	My preference here is thin cotton throw away one size too large. As laundry is unpredictable better too many. There are also disposable paper underwear and these are also good.
Insect repellent	Not required - November to May
Towel	Treking towel is essential. Available at trekking shops.
Inner Gloves	Thin inner gloves required
Outer Gloves	Thicker outer gloves required. December trekking requires extra protection. (available Katmandu)
Head band	A head band that covers forehead and ears is a good prtecton against wind. (available Katmandu)
Sun Hat	Needs to cover neck and face and stay on in the wind.
Water proof pants	Cheap ones in Katmandu (US\$5.00) can be useful as wind breakers.
Lip cream	A few spare are essential
Strepsils	Gold for the cold.

Item	Recommendation
Movie Camera	Yes, very good. Waterproof bag is good
Thin Cotton sheet	Although you use the sleeping bag, the pillows and mattress provided can be dusty. A cover for the pillow can prevent hay fever and allergies.
Trekking poles	Walking poles are my absolute passion. I think they take huge weight off knees and also stead the trekker on rough ground. Some people use a stick (US\$1.00) some buy the poles in Trekking shops (US\$100) and others buy them in Katmandu (US\$30) or we can rent them for about US\$1.00 a day.
Soap	A boidegradable soap is good. Small cake
Shampoo etc	At least every second day there is a good hot shower, but a freezing exit and no hair dryer. We think many people catch colds from wet hair. So, shampoo yes, but, not allot. Namche has a great shower and shampoo can be bought in town.
Toilet paper.	Kleenex make small packets of tissues. at least one needs to be with you always. A roll of toilet paper can be carried in your porter bag or day pack. It can be purchased everywhere.
Medical Mask	A medical mask is a good dust shield if the day is windy and dry. Because we huf and puf and the air is cold sometimes sore throats are caused by the dry dusty air. (Available in Katmandu)
Book	Try not to choose the encclopedia britanica. A good book however, is a great friend. And then swap.
Note pad and pens	Essential to have a journal for inspirations and a little pad for memory jolts along the way
Watch	Useless
Money	Depending on your trek arrangement with Chris, you will need to carry a certain amount of nepalese Rupees up the mountain. You can cash US\$ on the mountain as well. You can get the rupies from any number of ATM cash dispensers, banks and money changers. It is wise to get a spread of denominations from 50RP, 100RP (most common) and 500 RP. There is a 1000rp note worth around US\$15.00 and this is about an average days spending on food and room and a beer. We recommend you carry around 2,000 rp times the number of days you are trekking. This will cover tips. Also pack \$200US in a secret spot in your gear for emergency or in case you see that carpet you always dreamed of, passing on the back of a yak.



Packing

Your Porter Carries your load. So a 35 -65 liter back pack will carry all you need for daily needs. A porter pack is provided for the porter to carry. There is a 20 KG limit for each porter and 2 people share one porter. For a dedicated porter costs are US\$10 per day – plus 2 days bonus.. But this would be unnecessary.

Your day pack should have a frame internally to take weight to hips, those packs that hang off your shoulders and do not have an internal frame are not ok for longer treks.

Please do some practice walks. The main challenge is where to put things. Imagine. It's 6.30am cold --you have gloves or mittens on, a beanie, scarf and pack. You have water in your pack and you carry ski poles. Now after 5 minutes you are hot, you put down the poles take off the gloves, remove the beanie and then remove the jacket, Now you put it all back on and where do you put your jacket, and then you pick up your poles and you are thirsty but your water is in your pack under your jacket, and then the wind blows because you reach a small rise top. and you want to take a photo and your camera is in the bottom side pocket of your pack and then you have to take it all off, Then the sun shines and your hat and sunglasses are in the bottom pocket of your jacket – now multiply this by 10 and you have the trek leaders nightmare.....

Think it through and practice in the real world pockets are worth their weight in gold and pouches are great too.

Beggars and Touts

Dealing with beggars is a part of traveling in Nepal as in most under developed countries. The pathos will probably get to you, as well it should but eventually you'll adjust. A thornier dilemma which will challenge you as long as you are in Nepal is how to cope with panhandling kids and pushy touts

A small number of bone fide beggars make a living from begging in Nepal. Hindu's and Buddhists alike have a long and honorable tradition of giving in this way. Destitute women make up a large contingent of the begging population. It's terrifyingly easy for a woman to find herself destitute after being widowed or divorced. Perhaps even failing to bear a son or because of a dowry dispute. There are no unemployment benefits in Nepal and the state pension is rs100 per year.

\$3.00

Giving is of course a personal decision. You might give a lot to one, or the most needy or the oldest or the most children or you may choose to give nothing and not encourage the dependency. You may choose to give food or gifts rather than money –at any rate –it's worthy of thought.

In the hills –as you walk –you may be approached for medicine by older needy people. It's probably best to make a policy of not giving this unless you are qualified to diagnose the symptoms and prescribe. Before leaving Nepal you can always donate your excess medicine to the Kathmandu hospital or other worthy distributors.

Children

Throughout Nepal, especially on the trail kids will hound you for sweets and pens and stuff., Don't give to them –they're not orphans or beggars, they're just ordinary kids with a bad idea of the west. The street children of Kathmandu are another question.....





Swayambhu – the Monkey temple

Katmandu Sights

We walk to this temple for Thamel and celebrate an amazing experience. The temple – on a site with sacred tradition over 2,000 years old, is a sacred power point in the Kathmandu valley. An act of worship here carries 13 billion times more merit than anywhere else. To call it the monkey temple is truly to trivialize it.

The area around the temple is home to many refugee Tibetans who have fled Tibet since the Chinese invasion in 1959. You'll see pilgrims from all over the Himalayan cuing to spin the prayer wheels and twirl their won hand held ones. The apparently simple structure of the stupa belies an immensely complex physical representation of Buddhist cosmology and the purpose of walking around it is to meditate upon this. The solid white washed dome symbolizes the womb of creation. The statues symbolize the four elements of earth, water, fire and air. And a fifth, sky, space or ether.

Each represents a different aspect of Buddha hood. Like the colors of a rainbow they are the fragments of the whole. At each sub cardinal point female counterparts, who in tantric Buddhism, correspond to the wisdom aspect that must be united figuratively speaking, with the compassionate male force to achieve enlightenment.

The gilded cube surmounting the dome surrounds a thick wooden pillar which may be considered to be the male counterpart of the female dome. There are shrines surrounding the stupa as well and these are awesome to tour. Shantipur, Agnipur and Manjushri, bijeshawari, are all temples of powerful mystical tradition.

Pahupatinath and around (we visit this)

Katmandu Sights

Likened to Varanasi in India, PASHUPATINATH The magnificent temple of Lord Pashupatinath about 5 km. (approx. 2.5 miles) north of Kathmandu, is situated amidst many other temples on the right bank of the river Bagmati. Pashupatinath is the guardian spirit and the holiest of all Shiva shrines in Nepal.

Lord Shiva is known by many different names; and pashupati is one. Pashu means living beings, and Pati means master. In other words Pashupati is the master of the all living beings of the universe. This is how Lord Pashupati is eulogized in the Vedas, Upanishad and other religious books.

Legends are numerous as to how the temple of Lord Pashupatinath came to existence here. Himawatkhand and Nepal Mahatmya of Skanda Purana (a religious treatise) describe that Lord Shiva was very fond of Sleshmantaka Jungle (to the immediate east of Pashupatinath temple); and so, he came down with his consort, Parvati, to roam around in this Jungle in the guise of a mriga (deer). When Lord Shiva was found missing among the devagana (gods) for a long period, they became unhappy and went around looking for him. After long search they found Lord Shiva in Slesmantaka Jungle in the form of a single horned triple eyed deer.

Brahma, Vishnu and Indra recognized him at once and tried get control over him holding his horn. The deer, hopped across the river Bagmati, but his horn broke into three pieces, falling into the hands of Brahma, Vishnu, and Indra. Later, as commanded by Lord Shiva himself, the pieces of horns in the hands of Brahma, Vishnu, and Indra were respectively established in the south, Gokarneswor Linga on Saran (India) in the south, Gokarneswor Linga on the north Bank

of Bagmati and as Sarvakaneswara Linga at Amaravati. After this Lord Shiva established himself on the western bank of Bagmati (the present side of Pashupatinath temple).

In the sanctum of the temple there is a very attractive, about three-feet high Shivalinga with four faces. All these faces have different names and significance. The face facing to the east is known as Tatpurusha and the one facing to the south is known as Aghora. Similarly, the faces looking west and north are known by the name of Sadhyojata and Vamadeva respectively. These faces are also defined as the symbol of Dharmas (the most famous places of pilgrimages for Hindus) and Vedas (the sacred books of Hindus). The images of Vishnu, Surya, Devi, and Ganesh are also placed in the sanctum of the temple.

The temple of Lord Pashupatinath stands in the middle of an open courtyard. It is a square shaped pagoda temple built on a single-tier platform measuring 23.6 meters from the ground. There are gilt doors on the all four sides of the temple. Inside the temple there is a narrow walk engulfing the sanctum from where one can have closer view of Shivalinga.

In the 7th century, a Sanyasi priest of Pashupati named Bhagavata Pranandan Prana Kausika established Chandeswor along with inscription; and around the same period Vasuki and Kirtimukha Bhairaba were also established. The temple of Brahma was built in the 9th century. The temples of Unmatta Bhairava, Kotilingeswor, Muktimandap, Radhakrishna, Parthiveswara were also built around Pashupatinath temple in the period between 1470 AD and 1678 AD A few stone of Gumbaja temple were also erected in the courtyard of Pashupatinath.

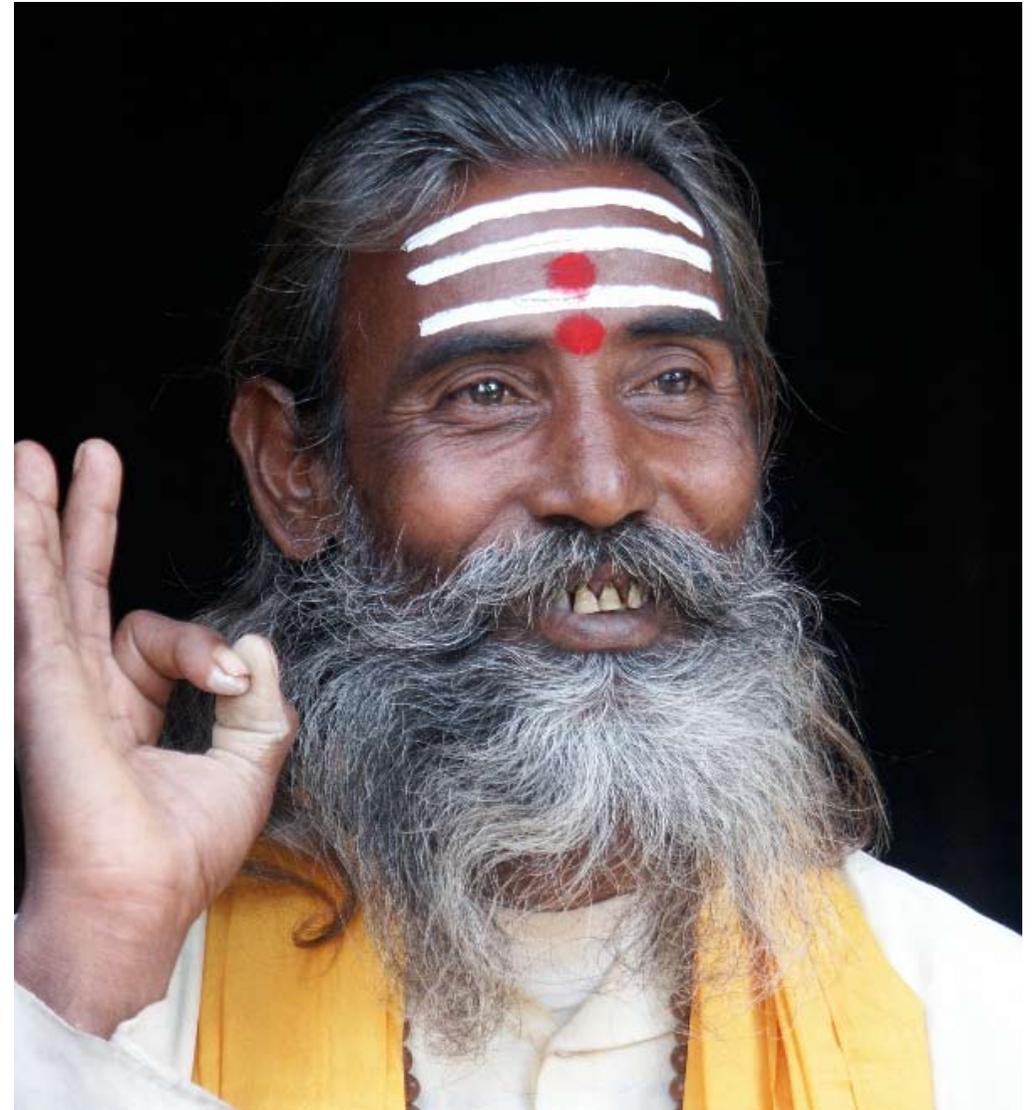
As stated in the chronicles, the image of Lord Shiva in the form of Jyotirlinga was covered with earth over the years, and

soft green grass sprouted over it. Further, as the legend goes, a cow used come here mysteriously everyday and offer milk to this holy but hidden linga of Lord Shiva. when the Gwala (owner) saw that the cow had stopped giving milk since the 1st few days he started keeping eye on her; and finally came across the place where the cow used to offer her milk. With a natural curiosity to know about the importance of the place, the Gwala dug the place and found the Jyotirlinga of the Lord Shiva. After this, a number of Gwalas gathered to worship this linga, according to religious conformity, starting the tradition of worshipping this linga.

The rulers of Nepal, over the centuries made contributions in enriching and beautifying this holy temple. According to Gopalraj Vamsavali, the oldest ever chronicle in Nepal, this temple was built by Supus Padeva, a Lichchhavi King who according to the stone inscription erected by Jayadeva II in the courtyard of Pashupatinath in 753 A.D., happened to be the ruler 39 generation before Manadeva (464-505 A.D.). Yet, there is another chronicle which states that this temple was in the form of linga shaped Devalaya before Supus Padeva constructed a five-story temple of Pashupatinath in this place.

As described in the history, this temple was badly destroyed by Sultan Samsuddin of Bengal in the mid 14th century. This plunder caused so much damage to the temple that it needed total reconstructon. The present architectural nature of Pashupatinath temple came to existance as a result of renovation by queen Gangadevi during the reign of Shivasimha Malla (1578-1620 A.D.). Before this, as stated in the chronicle, this temple had three-tiered roofs. it was renovated by Nipendra Malla in 1674 A. D. and in 1697 A. D. There is no evidence of major reconstruction after thereafter. Nevertheless, manu devoted patrons, over the years, have contributed a lot of glory and beautify the temple.

Thousands of devotees from within and out side the country come to pay homage to Pashupatinath every day. And on special occasions like Ekadasi, Rakshabandhan, Grahana, Poornima people congregate here in far greater number. <http://www.citytreasurer.com/fistick/nepal2.html> a great web link here.



RELIGIOUS OBJECTS and PRACTICE

Tibetan Buddhism contains many unique practices: the use of prayer beads and prayer wheels as elements of daily devotions; the creation of elaborate tapestries depicting scenes from Buddha's life; the creation of cloth paintings (thankas) depicting Buddha's teachings, realms of existence, the Wheel of Life and other elements of Dharma (teaching, ie buddhist theology); the creation of elaborate yak butter sculptures for festivals as well as elaborate mandalas (wheel of life), using coloured sand that take more than 3 days to create.

The following is a brief description of some of the objects to watch out for on the travels.

The Eight Auspicious Symbols

The Precious Parasol is placed over Buddha images to protect them from evil influences. This is a common Buddhist motive and can be seen in many countries.

The White Conch Shell is blown in celebration fo Sakyamuni's enlightenment.

The Banner of Victory heralds the triumph of Buddhist wisdom over ignorance.

The Two Golden Fishes are shown leaping from the waters fo captivity, thus they represent liberation from the wheel of life.

The Vase of Great Treasures is a repository of the jewels of enlightenment.

The Knot of Eternity is a commonly seen Tibetan motif, representing the entwined never ending passage of harmony and love.

The Eight Spoked Golden Wheel represents the Noble Eightfold Path and is also referred to as the wheel of Dharma.

The Lotus Flower stands for Sakyamuni's purity and his compassion.

Guas -

Gau is the Tibetan word for a unique type of ornamental charm, frame or box that almost every Tibetan uses. Usually pieces of prayer scarves, pictures of deities or other precious items are kept inside. We supply a small picture of H.H. The Dalai Lama and a fragment of a prayer scarf with each charm. The frames below come with a picture of a deity and the back opens up if you want to change the picture.

Prayer Wheels -

both the hand held and the larger ones lining the walls of shrines and temples, are filled with rolls of paper printed with mantras and prayers. As one turns the wheel you recite the Om mani padme hum mantra. Turning is also symbolic of the constant turning of the wheel of life.

Prayer Flags -

The color of a prayer flag and the symbols printed on it create a prayer or offering that the wind distributes to the world each time it brushes against the flag. The Tibetan word for a horizontal prayer flag is Lung ta, which translates literally as "wind horse." Traditionally, prayer flags are used to promote peace, compassion, strength, and wisdom. They are also

said to bring happiness and good health for all who hang the flags as well as for their families, loved ones, neighbors, nearby strangers, and enemies. The prayers of a flag become a permanent part of the universe as the images fade from wind and sun. Just as life moves on and is replaced by new life, Tibetans renew their hopes for the world by continually mounting new flags alongside of the old. This act symbolizes a welcoming of life's changes and an acknowledgment that all beings are part of a greater, on-going circle of life.

Mala Beads -

Beads counted during prayer and recitation of mantras.

Mantras -

Chants to align your spine with the divine, the most famous of these is OM MANI PADME HUM. This chant symbolizes enlightend compassion by monks as they count their beads. The following ideas are direct from the Tibetan Government in exile web site at: <http://www.tibet.com/Buddhism/om-mantra.html>

It is very good to recite the mantra Om mani padme hum, but while you are doing it, you should be thinking on its meaning, for the meaning of the six syllables is great and vast. The first, Om is composed of three letters, A, U, and M. These symbolize the practitioner's impure body, speech, and mind; they also symbolize the pure exalted body, speech, and mind of a Buddha.

Can impure body, speech, and mind be transformed into pure body, speech, and mind, or are they entirely separate? All Buddhas are cases of beings who were like ourselves and then in dependence on the path became enlightened; Buddhism does not assert that there is anyone who from the

beginning is free from faults and possesses all good qualities. The development of pure body, speech, and mind comes from gradually leaving the impure states and their being transformed into the pure.

How is this done? The path is indicated by the next four syllables. Mani, meaning jewel, symbolizes the factors of method-the altruistic intention to become enlightened, compassion, and love. Just as a jewel is capable of removing poverty, so the altruistic mind of enlightenment is capable of removing the poverty, or difficulties, of cyclic existence and of solitary peace. Similarly, just as a jewel fulfills the wishes of sentient beings, so the altruistic intention to become enlightened fulfills the wishes of sentient beings.

The two syllables, padme, meaning lotus, symbolize wisdom. Just as a lotus grows forth from mud but is not sullied by the faults of mud, so wisdom is capable of putting you in a situation of non-contradiction whereas there would be contradiction if you did not have wisdom. There is wisdom realizing impermanence, wisdom realizing that persons are empty, of being self-sufficient or substantially existent, wisdom that realizes the emptiness of duality-that is to say, of difference of entity between subject and object-and wisdom that realizes the emptiness of inherent existence. Though there are many different types of wisdom, the main of all these is the wisdom realizing emptiness.

Purity must be achieved by an indivisible unity of method and wisdom, symbolized by the final syllable hum, which indicates indivisibility. According to the sutra system, this indivisibility of method and wisdom refers to wisdom affected by method and method affected by wisdom. In the mantra, or tantric, vehicle, it refers to one consciousness in which there is the full form of both wisdom and method as one undifferentiable entity. In terms of the seed syllables of the five Conqueror

Buddhas, hum is the seed syllable of Akshobhya - the immovable, the unfluctuating, that which cannot be disturbed by anything.

Thus the six syllables, om mani padme hum, mean that in dependence on the practice of a path which is an indivisible union of method and wisdom, you can transform your impure body, speech, and mind into the pure exalted body, speech, and mind of a Buddha. It is said that you should not seek for Buddhahood outside of yourself; the substances for the achievement of Buddhahood are within.

Mandalas -

The Tibetan word for mandala is "kilkhor" which means "centre of the circle with exterior walls and surrounding environment." Mandalas may be created with precious jewels, flowers, dyed rice, coloured stones, or coloured sand.

Each mandala is a sacred mansion, the home of particular meditational deity, who represent and embodies enlightened qualities ranging from compassion to heightened consciousness and bliss. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, mandalas are created for rituals of initiation in which a highly qualified teacher grants permission to advanced disciples to engage in the tantric meditation practices. Both the deity, which resides at the centre of the mandala, and the mandala itself are recognised as pure expressions of the Buddha's fully enlightened mind. Symbolically the deity confers the initiations and the mandala is where the initiations takes place. Through the initiations ceremony the seed of enlightenment in each person's mind is nourished by the dynamic process of visualising and contemplating a mandala.

Sand Mandalas -

Sand, traditionally made from crushed precious stones, is considered the most efficacious materials because of the precious substances involved and the great skill required to create the mandalas' exquisite details. Since each grain of sand is charged with the blessings of the ritual process, the entire sand mandala embodies a vast store of spiritual energy. Monks destroy the sculptures and mandalas after the festivals, signifying the impermanence of existence.

Singing Bowls -

Many people use singing bowls for meditation by simply tapping the bowl with the striker and letting the bowl ring. The clear tone of the bowl can aid in concentration. Hand hammered bowls sing and 'gong' with different tones, the bowl may sing with many different tones and harmonics.

Stupas -

Shrines containing physical relics, usually skulls and bones, of respected lamas. One ritual is the circling of the stupas by monks and devotees. You may see monks and devotees CircumAmbulation (walking around) while chanting.

Tingshas -

Cymbals made of thick brass or metal connected by leather chord often imprinted with religious symbols.

Prayer Altar -

In every Tibetan home, a place is reserved to make offerings to the Three Jewels, the Buddha, Dharma and Spiritual Community.

The Three Jewels are often represented by a statue or thanka painting, a scripture and a stupa or a reliquary object. Before them is space to set up a set of standard offerings, represented by bowls of water, and the occasional tormo ritual cake or other offerings of food. The water in the bowls would be changed every morning. For a practitioner, such offerings provide a basis for transformation into unsurpassable offerings.

According to the Buddhist scriptures, all the faults in the universe are the result of sentient beings' disturbing emotions. Instead of dwelling on the faults to be seen in our offerings, but imagining them as pure and faultless, we create an imprint for purifying our minds of obstruction and defilement. Therefore they are imagined as pure and beautiful as possible, incorporating the best of everything existing in the past, present and future and the ten directions of the universe.

The exalted beings to whom we make offerings do not apparently consume the physical substances before us. Nevertheless, as a basis for acquiring merit, such physical offerings should be clean, made of the best substances, attractive to ourselves and acquired through honest means.

Consequently, they will form a better basis for imagining perfect offerings. When preparing to make offerings, we should begin by meditating on the wisdom of great bliss and emptiness, imagining it has taken the form of the offering. When making the offering, we should think of it as empty

of intrinsic existence. In this way, we purify the offering of its ordinary aspects and also purify our minds. We should abandon any thought of immediate benefit, especially in relation to ourselves in this life. It is also important not to entertain doubts about the quality of our offering and whether or not it pleased the exalted being to whom we presented it. Instead think that the deity' rejoiced at the offering and generated great bliss from partaking of it.

Water-bowl Offerings

The traditional set of offerings, commonly represented by bowls of water, derives from the customary offerings presented to an honoured guest in ancient India.

The first bowl contains clear water for the newly arrived guests to drink. The water should be imagined as pure as nectar and offered in vessels made of precious substances.

In the second bowl is water for the guest to wash his or her feet; a reminder that in India people walked barefoot.

In the third bowl are flowers, reminiscent of the crowns of flowers offered to women and the garlands offered to men. Masses of fragrant, beautiful flowers can be called up in the imagination.

In the fourth bowl is incense, an offering to please the sense of smell. In the imagination billowing clouds of fragrant incense are offered.

The fifth offering, pleasing to sight, is bright light commonly in the form of a lamp, which like the sun and the moon illuminates darkness. This light is imagined to be so clear that you can see even the smallest atoms without obstruction.

Sometimes coloured lights are offered and imagined to be emanating from nectar. In Tibetan tradition different colours are believed to have various healing properties. Coloured or not, the light offered should be very clear. Light is imagined as dispelling the darkness of ignorance. Shariputra, the Buddha's main disciple renowned for his intelligence, had, in a previous life, offered a bright light before a stupa. As a result he was reborn with great intelligence.

The sixth offering consists of a bowl of scented water. Intended to soothe the mind, it is applied at the heart.

Seventh is an offering of food, commonly in the form of a torma or ritual cake. In India, this offering traditionally contained three sweet substances: molasses, honey and sugar and three white substances: curd, butter and milk. In Tibet, these would be mixed with tsampa or parched barley flour to make an offering cake. The result is like ambrosia, pleasing in colour, form, smell, and taste.

Eighth is an offering of sound. It is not represented on the altar, but can simply be imagined as beautiful music. Thangas - Wall hangings depicting the life of Buddha other dieties and other great teachers.

Vajra and Bell -

Vajra is a thunderbolt shaped object used by the monks for devotions. Vajras may have nine, five or three spokes. The spokes of a peaceful Vajra meet at the tip whereas those of a wrathful vajra are slightly splayed at the end. When paired with a bell their length can vary from four finger-widths to twenty-eight finger widths.

The upper sets of spokes of a five-spoked vajra symbolize the five wisdoms, which are:

The mirror like wisdom-that which reflects all sense perceptions is purified when one attains enlightenment and becomes the mirror like wisdom.

The wisdom of equality-arises after all the feelings of pleasantness, unpleasantness and indifference have been purified.

The wisdom of individual analysis-arises when the factor of discrimination, which distinguishes one object from another is purified. It enables one to benefit each sentient being according to his or her needs and disposition.

The wisdom of accomplishing activity-arises when the basic ability to perform acts according to particular circumstances is purified.

The wisdom of the sphere of reality-arises when consciousness is purified and becomes the mind that is the seed of the wisdom truth body of a Buddha. The five lower spokes symbolize have five mothers.

A bell's base must be round, above which is a vase surmounted by the face of the goddess Prajnaparamita. Above these are a lotus, a moon disc and finally a vajra. The hollow of the bell symbolizes the wisdom cognizing emptiness. The clapper represents the sound of emptiness. The eight lotus petals are the four mothers and four goddesses and the vase represents the vase containing the nectar of accomplishment.

Paired with the vajra the bell represents wisdom, and as wisdom and method are an undivided unity so the vajra and bell are never parted or employed separately.

Wheel of Life -

Often seen in entrances to temples. At the hub are the pig, snake and cock representing, respectively, the ignorance, hatred and desire that motivate our actions that keep us in an endless cycle of birth death and pain. In the circle around the hub are depicted beings rising to divine heights and falling to hellish agony. Around this circle are the 6 realms of existence into which beings are propelled then ejected. The outer rim contains the images of the 12 sequences that lead from ignorance to life to death. The entire circle is held in the mouth of Yama, the personification of death, who is ready to bite at any moment. Outside the wheel stand Buddha pointing to a moon, symbolizing the completeness of spiritual liberation.

Other things to Consider

Change. Lots of it. Change in time, schedules, route and mindsets. Nepal is a land of change. Life for a Nepali is a life of constant flux. You will need to adapt to this in order to enjoy your experience. Always change -brought about by the most obscure situation -adaptability is learnt in Nepal.

What Others Say

"The world is full of beauty. I experienced this in absolute awe when sitting in monasteries upon Himalayan skies. To observe the simple practices by Buddhist monks filling up and emptying golden bowls of precious water against the morning and evening sun revealed to me the real purpose of my own life. Grace, Integrity and Beauty. This simple act performed at the same time every day demonstrated to me such mindfulness and respect for our creation. Coming from a world where sacred rituals and practices are not as elegant, I was confronted by it's absolute beauty. Although in my heart since birth, the purpose for my existence was crystallized at Namche Bazaar. For those of you who are considering this trek with Chris, take a risk and step outside your comfort zone and do it.

Nepal is truly one of the most magnificent places on this earth. Trekking through it's mountains will take you to a place deep within that will make your spirit soar and cry and laugh. Thank you Christopher Walker for reaching out to me and inspiring me to climb. I am forever grateful for you and the beauty in this world. Namaste."

- Judy Chapman

What Others Say

Thank you Dad, for refreshing my focus, for cleaning out my confusion. Nepal made me realise all the small insignificant things that I would waste energy on causing me to lose focus from my main goal. I returned with a sense of focus with my next step already planned. I was instantly crowded by insignificant distractions upon my return, instead of getting worked up by them I deal with them and step back onto my path. I hope that the work that I do for the group will show this as well as showing my appreciation for their companionship and love. I can now say I am Richard Walker, an animator, trying to heal people through humour, letting them see the lighter side to themselves. With the cartoons done (for the group) I have already seen the results of my passion, people laughing at themselves. Nepal was the perfect setting, when you are up in that mountain, nothing really matters. The insignificance of those small things is highlighted and though you know it is important not to forget them, you learn not to dwell on them. You simply let go of your last step in order to take the next, this is the best way to get to the top of your mountain.

Inspired by the sleeping giants of the Himalayas who's greatness pushes you to your limits,

Love

Ricky.

Richard Walker - Artist, Animator and Humorist (Chris's Son).

A close-up portrait of Chris Walker, a man with brown hair and a beard, wearing a blue jacket. He is looking slightly to the right. The background is a clear blue sky with snow-capped mountain peaks.

*Spirit
of the
Mountains*
[chris walker]

