

This itinerary can be modified and tailored to suit your timing, fitness and other considerations

Itinerary - Everest Circuit (Across the Cho La and Island Peak)

Day 1: To Monjo 2,850m

We transfer to the airport for the 45 minute flight to the STOL airstrip at Lukla. This was the airstrip built by Sir Edmund Hillary and his friends to service the Everest region when he began his work building schools and hospitals for the Sherpa people. It is a memorable flight with marvellous views of the Eastern Himalaya. At Lukla we are immediately impressed by the scale of the huge peaks that surround the village.

We walk approximately 6 hours, heading towards the glacial Dudh (milk) Khosi (river), a raging river that flows from the highest peaks. The broad and well-marked trail meanders around fields of potatoes and buckwheat and passes through small villages. We pass small groups of donkeys and yaks carrying trading goods, food supplies, building materials and trek gear along the trail. We pass through a variety of small hamlets as we slowly gain altitude. Spectacular mountain peaks rise above us and seem to hover above the tree line as they rise above the deep river valley. We also cross the Kusum Khola, a tributary of the Dudh Khosi, and the peak of Kusum Kangra (6,369m) can be seen to the east, at the head of the valley.

Day 2 : To Namche Bazaar 3,440m

Walk approximately 3 to 4 hours. This morning we pass through the gates of the Sagarmatha National Park before crossing the milky white waters of the Dudh Kosi and pass. The establishment of this national park has seen a significant attempt to stem the use of firewood in this area. Tea houses and lodges are encouraged to use kerosene, yak dung or electricity, but unfortunately a lot still rely on firewood.

We follow the river course to the confluence of the Dudh Khosi and the Bhote Khosi and cross a spectacular high bridge before commencing our ascent to the village of Namche Bazaar, the Sherpa Capital of Nepal. It is a tough climb as the trail passes through a pine forest to a vantage point that provides our first view of Mt Everest. The trail continues to climb and meander to Namche, and the sight of the prosperous village spread within a horseshoe shaped valley opposite the beautiful peak of Kongde Ri is worth every step. After lunch you may wish to peruse the Tibetan trader stalls or the Sherpa shops in search of a bargain.

Day 3: Rest Day in Namche

Sagarmatha National Headquarters offers very interesting displays of photographs, memorabilia and information on the park, and the hill above is a wonderful vantage point for the spectacular view up the Imja Khola valley towards Everest. The change from the narrow lowland valleys to the broad glacial ones is immediately obvious. The steep sided glacial valley before us gradually winds towards the base of Everest, broken only by moraines left by retreating glaciers.

It's more gradual gradient is a blessing for those trekking higher. Towering to over 4,000m above the valley floor, spectacular peaks seem to engulf us. Around us are Taweche (6,542m), Thamserku (6,808m), Kantega (6,685m), Ama Dablan (6,856m), Nuptse (7,896m) and Lhotse (8,511m). The greatest of all, Mt Everest (8,848m) rises at the head of the valley.

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The Sherpa cultural centre has an interesting collection of mountaineering items and photographs. If you are feeling fit and wanting to acclimatise well you may wish to take a walk to the Everest View Hotel where spectacular views of Everest and Ama Dablam can be seen.

Day 4: To Portse Tenga 3,600m

Walk approximately 6 hours. Heading North-East we initially follow the trail to Thyang boche as it contours around the hills, before we branch off on a climb on the flanks of the sacred peak of Khumbila (5,761m). We traverse for some time across yak pastures as the trail gradually ascends to Mon La. Below us is the confluence of the Dudh Khosi and Imja Khola and across the valley, Thyangboche monastery is framed by Ama Dablam and Kantega.

We reach a stupa draped in prayer flags atop a ridge at 3,992m and then descend steeply through forest to the Dudh Khosi. Crossing the river on a traditional log pole bridge, we pass a water powered grain mill and camp in the potato fields beyond. In the afternoon we can take an optional walk up the ridge to bring us to the village of Portse.

Day 5: To Dole 4,000m

Walk approximately 3 hours. We head north today following the Dudh Khosi towards its source, the magnificent Ngozumpa Glacier. An initial short climb gets us onto the trail for the steady climb towards Gokyo. Since leaving the main trail we have seen progressively fewer trekkers and locals and the relative isolation of the trail is a pleasure. Sections of red birch, fir and dwarf rhododendrum forest are interspersed with yak pastures as we gradually gain altitude.

We pass pleasant waterfalls and can rest and gaze at the glaciers that flow from Taweche and Cholatse on the opposite side of the valley. Behind us the spectacular ridges lead to the peak of Khumbila and the numerous unnamed peaks that reach almost 6,000m. It was at Dole that one or more of the more recent credible yeti sightings took place !!!!

Day 6: To Machhermo 4,410m

Continuing a steady but constant climb, we reach the yerser or summer village of Machhermo for lunch. Like the few small villages in this valley, Machhermo has only a few buildings and these are empty in the winter. Villagers in Khumjung and Khunde own land up here in the high valley, where they graze yaks in the summer months. This is a valuable acclimatisation day as we prepare for our ascent of Gokyo Ri (5,483m). We take things easy but this afternoon you may wish to stretch your legs and take a walk up the ridge behind Luza for a view of the Gokyo Valley.

Day 7: To Gokyo 4,759m

Walk approximately 5 to 6 hours. Following the high valley above the river, we commence the ascent of Gokyo village. There are excellent views of Cholatse at the village of Pangka and we stop to enjoy them. We are now in high alpine country and as we approach the Ngozumpa Glacier we trek onto the moraine and rock that extends down from it. We enjoy excellent views of Kantega to the south and Cho Oyu to the North.

Once we have ascended the snout of the glacier the path begins to level. We pass the first of the lakes, Longpong, before reaching Taoche lake, a larger body of water and a place where ducks swim

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in the freezing waters on their annual migrations to and from Tibet. As we walk up the valley our path parallels the Ngozumpa Glacier, while separating us from the glacier is the massive lateral moraine. We camp near the shores of the Dudh Pokhari, the third lake.

Day 8: Ascent of Gokyo Ri 5,483m

Walk approximately 4 hours. An early start takes advantage of the early morning views. The steady yet unrelenting ascent of Gokyo Ri will take 2-3 hours depending on your level of fitness and acclimatisation. It is not a race and climbs of up to 6 hours are cherished by those who thought they would not make it at all.

When you reach the summit you will enjoy probably the most spectacular and comprehensive view of 8,000m peaks in Nepal. Surrounding us are Cho Oyu(8,153m), Gyangchung Kang (7,922m), Lhotse (8,501m), Makalu (8,475m), Cholatse (6,440m), Taweche (6,542m), Kantega (6,685m), Thamserku (6,808m), Lobuche (6,145m) and Mt Everest (8,848m).

Hundreds of other peaks fill the scene, whilst below us the Ngozumpa Glacier, the largest in Nepal, stretches through the valley. The striking colour of the lakes below completes the picture. The only way to get a better view of the entire Everest region would be to climb an 8,000m peak.

Day 9. To Yak Kharka 5,000m

We weave our way across the glacier to our lunch stop at Thangna on a trail that meanders around the constantly changing obstacles. Great views today of Cho Oyo and Cholatse. It's a slow climb after lunch as we cross deserted yak pastures and climb high into the mountains. Keep an eye out for Himalayan Thar on the rocky slopes as they are not hunted and not at all shy.

Day 10. To Dzongla 4,843m

Walk 5 to 7 hours. We start early to take advantage of the stable early morning weather pattern that prevails in the Himalaya. Depending on the snow conditions, it will take us approximately 2 hours to reach the saddle of the pass (5,420m). This is a special day and for some the highlight of the trip. The views of the peaks are excellent all day and once at the saddle of the pass, the glaciers and the immediate peaks seem to hover above us. Finally we descend to our camp beside the steep North face of Cholatse. Ama Dablam comes into view.

Day 11. To Lobuche 4,930m

Walk approximately 3 hours. The early morning sun is welcome after a cold night and reveals a dramatic panorama of spectacular peaks. We traverse high on the flanks of Awi Peak, above the village of Chola and continue past the Cholatse Lake. Beyond the lake, the Chola Glacier flows steeply from a saddle between the cliffs of Cholatse and Taweche in a rugged and beautiful display.

We crest a small rise and before us unfolds the stunning form of Nuptse (7,745m) rising above the Khumbu glacier. We continue our traverse until we join the bust trail from Thyangboche to Lobuche where the volume of people and yaks may come as quite a shock. Following this trail we stride along towards our lunch spot and accommodation at Lobuche.

Day 12. To Gorak Shep 5,288m

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Walk Approximately 4 hours. We trek alongside the Khumbu glacier as the path winds over the rocky moraine towards the settlement of Gorak Shep. We are high, among the glacier and peaks of the world's highest mountains including Pumori (7,145m), Lingtren (6,697m), Nuptse (7,745m) and of course Everest. The air is clean and the sun is strong but as the sun sets it becomes very cold. Sunsets here can be stunning. The afternoon can be spent exploring or just taking it all in.

Day 13. To Lobuche via Kali Pattar 4,930m

Walk approximately 5 hours. An early start to Kala Pattar (5,545m) is made to avoid the crowd that can converge on Kala Pattar at some times of the year and to get the clearest views. You will be surprised at how well you have acclimatised compared to those on shorter treks and should not have any difficulty ascending the peak.

Kala Pattar is not a Nepali name but a Hindu name and translates to "Black Rock". From these black rocks atop the hill the views are spectacular. Most eyes are locked on the mass of Everest and its rocky buttresses immediately before us. Many of the famous ascent routes are quite clear. Below us the Khumbu glacier snakes towards the icefall and Western Cwm. We can see the area where expeditions set up their base camps. Take a look in every direction and take it all in. We descend to Gorak Shep for lunch, then we walk down hill to Lobuche.

Day 14. To Dingboche 4,330m

Walk approximately 4 hours. Descending alongside the glacier we reach the snout of the glacier and drop steeply onto the old moraine. We reach a memorial to the Sherpa climbers who died on Everest, before we continue to the small settlement of Tugla. Our path on an old lateral moraine takes us to the sheltered village of Dingboche. To the east at the head of the Imja Khola valley sits the pyramid peak of Imja Tse (6,189m). This afternoon we can walk up the ridge behind Dingboche for sunset views of Nuptse, Lhotse and Chukung Peak.

Day 15. To Thyangboche 3,867m

Walk approximately 5 hours. There can be a tendency now to rush, particularly as we are walking downhill but there is still much to see. We descend to Pangboche and visit its historic old monastery before leaving through the monastery archway down to the Imja Khola. The bridge across the river is spectacular and the rapids cause the river to roar beneath us. We walk through forests of rhododendrum, fir, pine and birch that provides shelter for birds and hog deer, before reaching a clearing at Thyangboche Monastery. The monastery was rebuilt with the assistance of Sir Edmund Hillary after it was destroyed by fire.

Day 16. To Khumjung 3,780m

Walk approximately 4 hours. The early morning mountain views from the monastery are outstanding. Everest, Lhotse and Nuptse are at the head of the valley, their line of sight flanked by Taweche on one side and Ama Dablam on the other. From Thyanboche we follow the main trail through the monastery gate and into the forest, continuing downhill to the river. We head off on a small trail that ascends to the villages of Khumde and Khunde. It is a comfortable day's walk, with time to explore these unique and traditional villages. Khumjung is where Sir Edmund Hillary built his

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“Schoolhouse in the clouds”, and the famed Khunde hospital is close by. You may want to visit the monastery at Khumjung where we may see the “scalp of a yeti”.

Day 17. To Benkar 2,600m

Walk approximately 4 hours. Nearby on a hilltop, with views of the mountains, is the Everest View hotel, a joint Nepali-Japanese project, where you can stop for refreshments before passing through a yak breeding farm and descending to Namche. After a break we continue down through the forest to the valley floor to follow the Dudh Khosi downhill and out of the National Park to our camp at the small settlement of Benkar.

Day 18. To Lukla 2,800m

Walk approximately 5 hours. Retracing our steps along the valley, we pass through a variety of settlements and forests and before a gentle climb to Lukla. We savour our final mountain sunset of the trek as we contemplate this exhilarating journey.

Day 19. Kathmandu by air 1,330m

This morning we fly to Kathmandu, a thrilling flight over forests, fields and villages, with the Himalaya in the background.

Day 20. Day of leisure in Kathmandu 1,330m

Rest your weary limbs and take in some sightseeing and shopping around Kathmandu.