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Outdoors and Eco-Friendly

Trekking Nepal

Trekking Through Nepal's Grand Ridges

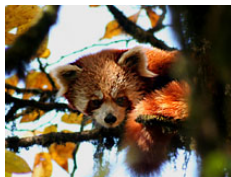
By Wendee Holtcamp

The landlocked country of Nepal has long beckoned outdoor adventurers and spiritual seekers. The first ascent of Mount Everest in 1953 by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay brought attention to the country, and it became known as a Shangri-La during the 1960s "search for enlightenment." With its jagged Himalayan Mountains, Asian culture, and rare wildlife, Nepal remains a popular destination for long-distance trekkers, who follow clearly marked routes for days at a time. These three adventures offer the best of Nepal, with the added bonus of benefiting social and environmental causes.



Nepal's jagged peaks have inspired scores of trekkers.

In Search of the Red Panda - Nepal's New Mai Valley Trek



Catch a glimpse of the endangered red panda while exploring the new Mai Valley trek in eastern Nepal, along the Singhalila ridgeline, which borders India. This eco-tour, developed by the nonprofit **Red Panda Project** and guided by the Nepalese-owned **Sea and Sky Tour**, features 12 days of trekking through the Himalayan foothills.

Ideal for those who prefer traveling off the beaten path, the trip involves primarily tent camping, stays in rustic teahouses and visits to Nepali villagers' homes. After several days hiking through open pasture and cool, misty mountain forests, resplendent with rhododendron, bamboo, silver fir and Himalayan yew, you will reach Santapur at nearly 12,000 feet. Here the Mai Valley trek intersects with another trekking route on the India side of the border. Santapur (Sandakphu in India) offers panoramic views of both Mount Everest and Mount Kanchenjunga - the world's third-highest peak.

Trekkers can count on four to eight hours of moderate to strenuous hiking per day, and delicious hot meals of both Western and Nepalese food, cooked by the tour guide company and served in a heated food tent. Travelers will clamber up steep mossy hillsides while searching for red panda with the help of experienced forest guardians, Nepali villagers who monitor the red panda populations. Observing the charismatic mammal rarely seen in the wild makes this an experience like no other.

Everest Base Camp

Few will ever summit the world's tallest mountain, but every year thousands of people hike to Mount Everest's base camp at 17,600 feet. The popular route offers glorious alpine scenery and lodging in some of Nepal's nicest teahouses. The trek falls mostly within Sagarmatha National Park, and you may see wild mountain goats, monal pheasant and working yaks on the trail. After flying into Lukla, expect up to eight hours of moderate to strenuous hiking on most days, with a few rest days to acclimatize to elevation gains - 10,000 feet in total. You'll visit the famous village of Namche Bazaar as well as Khumbu glacier at base camp. Once notorious for trash, base camp now stays clean due to stringent new rules.



The environmentally and socially conscious **Himalayan Glacier Trekking Ltd.**, owned by Nepal native Naba Raj Amgai, accommodates groups of any size, even one person. Skilled in mountain emergencies, they have porters to carry travelers' gear and prepare hot tea for breaks along the way. The group dines in teahouses for all meals, as well as for overnight stays. Teahouses have solo or shared accommodation, and heated dining and sun rooms. But bring a warm sleeping bag for chilly nights.

"I can't say enough about this company," said teacher Carol Gunter, who trekked with them in November 2007. The company goes out of its way to ensure travelers stay healthy and satisfied during the trip, Gunter said. Gunter was surprised by the age of people trekking. "I am 50 and I was young," she said. That's not to say the trek is not strenuous, but fit people of all ages brave it every year. Barring a climb to the summit, this trek gives intrepid explorers the closest view of Mount Everest possible.

Experience Nepal on a No-Trekking Cultural Adventure

If you've always wanted to visit Nepal but trekking doesn't suit you, **Myths and Mountains Inc.**, a Nevada-based travel company, offers a 14-day Nepal READ Expedition: Mountains, Monkeys and Books. You'll travel with the company's president, Dr. Toni Neubauer, an educational administrator.

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sustainable development. In Nepal alone, they have built libraries in 45 villages, pairing them with start-up businesses including a medical clinic, hotel, furniture factory, grain mill and an ambulance service.

This particular expedition begins in Kathmandu. Admire the ancient architecture of Patan's Dhurbar Square, visit Swayambunath, or the monkey temple, where langurs roam freely, and meet a young girl whom locals believe is a virgin goddess. Next, fly from Kathmandu to Pokhara, settling in amidst the Annapurna mountain range. Over the next several days, you'll visit libraries built by READ Global in the towns of Pokhara, Jomsom and Tukche and meet the local people who have benefited from these endeavors. Then spend a few days exploring Royal Chitwan National Park, a sanctuary for Bengal tigers, rhinoceros, sloth bears and other wildlife. Ride on the back of an elephant, paddle a canoe down the Rapti River, scout for native birdlife and visit the park's endangered Asian elephant breeding facility.

The trip includes lodging at Kathmandu's five-star Yak and Yeti and the famous Fishtail Lodge in Pokhara. Accommodations in the towns of Jomsom and Tukche are clean, simple inns. The trip involves a maximum of four hours of walking per day, but you can opt for riding on a Tibetan pony or in a taxi. Throughout the trip, children and adults from this famously warm culture will celebrate your arrival with smiles. Many will bring their hands together in prayer, bow and say, "Namaste," which means, "The spirit in me honors the spirit in you."

Pictures: Wendee Holtcamp

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