

THE GREAT HIMALAYA TRAIL SECTION BY SECTION



One trail to rule them all

The Great Himalaya Trail is one of the longest and highest walking trails in the world. Winding beneath the world's highest peaks and visiting some of the most remote communities on earth, it passes through lush green valleys, arid high plateaus and incredible landscapes. Nepal's GHT has 10 sections comprising a network of upper and lower routes, each offering you something different, be it adventure and exploration, authentic cultural experiences, or simply spectacular Himalayan nature.



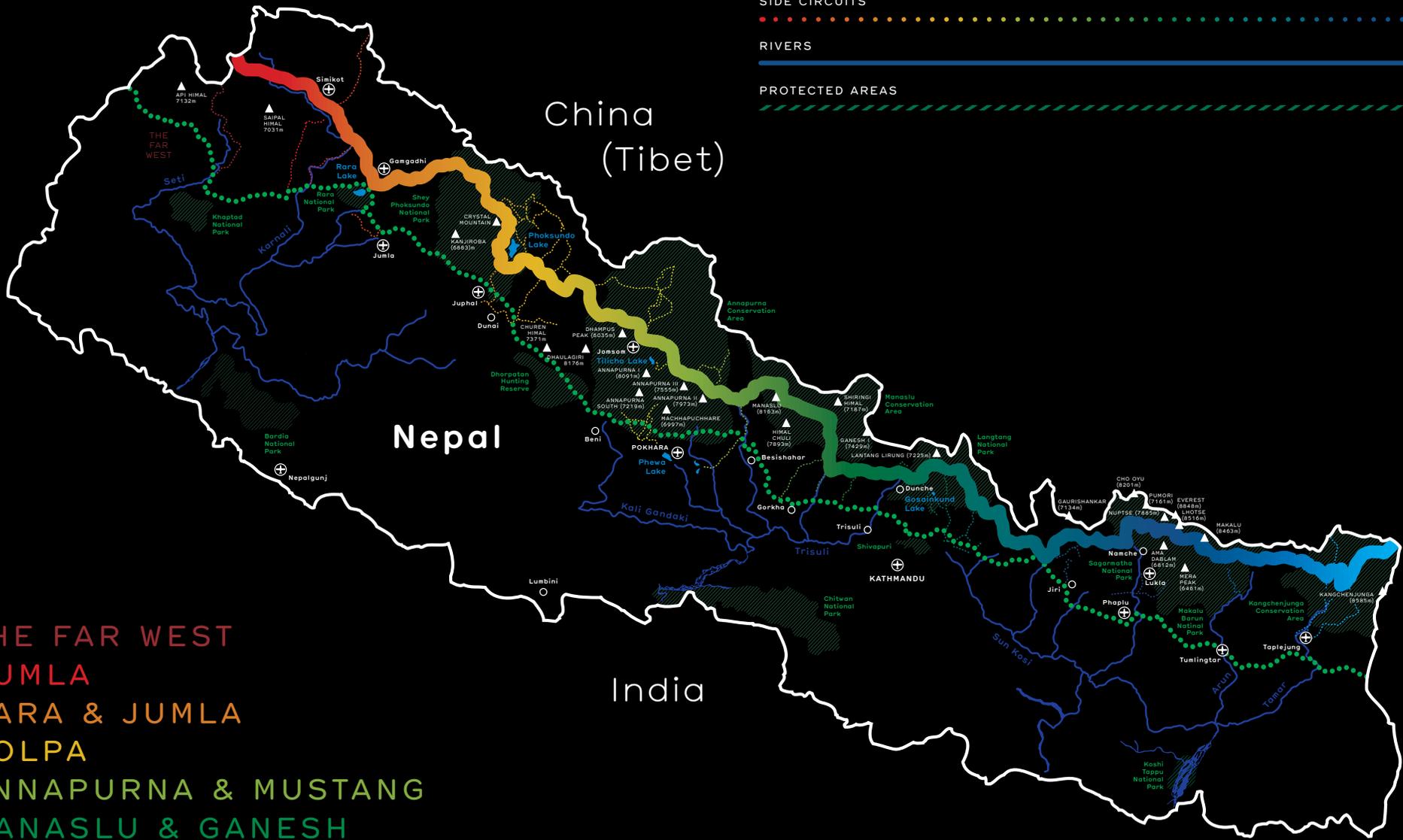
THE GREAT HIMALAYA TRAIL

THE LOWER GREAT HIMALAYA TRAIL

SIDE CIRCUITS

RIVERS

PROTECTED AREAS



China (Tibet)

Nepal

India

- THE FAR WEST
- HUMLA
- RARA & JUMLA
- DOLPA
- ANNAPURNA & MUSTANG
- MANASLU & GANESH
- LANGTANG & HELAMBU
- ROLWALING & EVEREST
- MAKALU BARUN
- KANCHENJUNGA

The Far West

The Far West is one of the least explored areas of Nepal. Its area is bounded to the east by mighty, turquoise Karnali River that flows from Tibet's sacred Mount Kailash.

Myth and superstition remain part of the fabric of life here. Though the Nepali language originated here, it seems a distant world from 'modern' Nepal. One Nepali visitor described his visit as "fascinating, like travelling back to the 18th century."

Along the trails you may meet a turbaned *Dhami*, a shaman, with silver-bangled limbs and gold-ringed ears, who are still depended on for treating sickness.

Organised tourism has so far been limited to Khaptad National Park, the only national park in the mid-hills of Nepal which is held dearly by conservationists. Gentle hills, pristine forests and abundant wildlife with a snow-covered backdrop of the Nampa, Api and Saipal peaks make for beautiful trekking.

It's also a holy place associated with Khaptad Swami, a great ascetic who was renowned for his wisdom. He lived to be 110 and people travelled from far to receive blessings from him in his cave dwelling.

The *Jestha Purnima* (June full-moon) festival attracts thousands to Tribeni, at the confluence of three rivers, to worship at Shiva's shrine.

The lower route of the GHT passes just to the north here and it will one day connect Rara with the trail in India. Trekking here is less easy than elsewhere—porters are difficult to find and current maps lack detail. With patience, however, and a sense of adventure, you'll find your journey into this forgotten world to be an experience you'll never forget.



FAST FACTS:

- Leopard, goral, Himalayan black bear and monkeys thrive here
- Birdlife is rich - colourful Impeyan Pheasant and Himalayan Griffon Vulture can be spotted here
- Khaptad festival is held around August or September every year



During the *Dashain* festival, bull fighting, *sadey judhai*, takes place with the animals fuelled with rice-wine and *cannabis sativa*. The loser becomes dinner and the winner enjoys a year with the cows. You'll only see the Chamar people celebrate Dashain in this way, close to the border with Humla.

Humla

“Here in Limi, I felt as if I’d dropped through a trap door into another time, into a place where the world of Tibetan myth, of Shangri-La was still alive,” – BBC historian Michael Wood.

Welcome to Limi, a hidden valley encircled by mountains in the far north western reaches of Nepal in Humla. It is Tibet in all but name. The Tibetan-speaking people of Limi’s three well-kept, medieval-looking, villages are friendly, proud and very welcoming. Halji’s Rinchenling Gumpa is a fascinating structure over 800 years old. The ancient *Kagyupa* sect of Tibetan Buddhism is practiced here.

Life here is for the hardy, sustained by simple agriculture and traditional wooden handicrafts made for trading in Tibet. Only recently did local collaboration with NGO Nepal Trust bring solar lighting and a health post to Limi. Now residents are looking at how responsible tourism can benefit their communities.

“We need to tell the world about Humla so they will want to come here,” lama Padma Riksal told National Geographic’s James Vlahos. “We need more tourists.”

While the final section of the GHT in Nepal and the route to Mount Kailash follows the roaring, turquoise Karnali River, ‘the pulse of the earth’, make the detour to Limi for a unique and unforgettable experience. You’ll be welcomed and your journey will make a difference.

“For some well-travelled and trekked people, myself included, Humla and the Limi Valley is simply the most beautiful places they have ever visited.” – Jamie McGuinness, Guide



FAST FACTS:

- Remote Humla is often called the ‘Hidden Himalaya’
- Humla is the gateway to sacred Mt. Kailash
- The ancient salt trade traditionally carries salt on goats rather than yaks
- The highest mountain of the region is Mt. Saipal (7031 m)
- The best time to visit is from May through November

“I think Humla is honestly one of the most culturally fascinating places in all of Nepal, a cultural tapestry woven from ancient Khasa kingdoms, ancestors of the grand Zhangzhung kingdom of the north, with a mix of Rajput and Thakuri blended into the mix.”

Carol Dunham,
anthropologist.

Rara & Jumla

Legend says you can see all of Tibet reflected in the crystal clear waters of Rara Lake. While that might be a small exaggeration, it has accurately been described as “a shimmering blue jewel set in a ring of snowy peaks.”

Rara National Park protects rugged hills forested with ancient blue pine, spruce and cedar. Its visitors are more often birds than people and it becomes busy in November and April when ducks, cormorants and other birds land here during their seasonal migration.

In some ways this is the ancient heart of Nepal—the nearby Sinja Valley is where the earliest examples of Nepali written script from the 13th Century were found on cliff walls. The Malla, or Khasa kingdom, which reigned from the 12th to 14th centuries, had its capital here and the ruins of its temples are there to be explored. You’ll see ‘Malla stones’—tall pillars of rock inscribed with images of the sun and moon—all around this area.

The Great Himalaya Trail’s lower and upper routes make a crossroads at Rara Lake. The ancient salt route to Humla and Taklakot heads north west from here. South west, via the ancient royal highway, the lower route leads through the less explored far west to the border with India. To the north, and for the truly curious adventurer, lie the lost land of Mugu and the seldom-travelled high route to Dolpa.

To the east, the lower route ambles through Jumla and some of Nepal’s highest red *Kala Marci* rice growing areas, making an enchanting entrance in to lower Dolpa.

It is also a cultural crossroads: a fascinating aspect of travel in this region is the ‘blurring’ between Hindu, Buddhist and ancient shamanic practices, as well as styles of living as seen in dress and architecture.

While facilities are still basic, the area is an adventurer’s dream—authentic culture, a wealth of natural beauty and the trails largely to yourself.

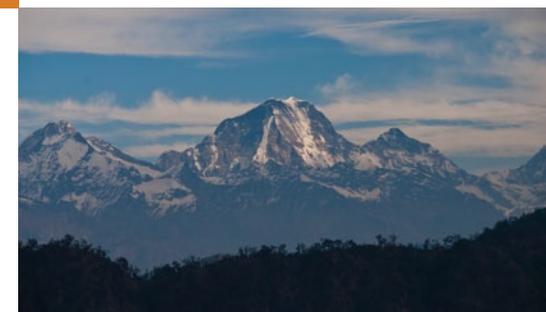
FAST FACTS:

- Crossroads of the upper and lower GHT route
- Pristine, untouched nature and authentic cultural experience
- Rara is Nepal’s largest lake, home to otters, fish and many breeds of migrating water fowl
- Mugu is one of Nepal’s most remote and least developed areas - mysterious even to Nepali people.



“Almost from the moment we left Gamgadhi, I felt like we’d moved back not just decades, but centuries.”

**Ed Douglas,
journalist and author.**



Dolpa

Inner Dolpo is one of the last vestiges of authentic Tibetan culture. It's a land of ancient trading routes, monasteries and medieval fortresses set in a timeless landscape that is very distant from the modern world.

While Tibetan Buddhism is prevalent, the Bön religion of Tibet, which pre-dates Buddhism, is still practiced in just two villages, Ringmo and Vijer.

This mix of spirituality is visible everywhere—from the pilgrims on the trail to the sacred Crystal Mountain, to the many monasteries where monks carefully depict stories in intricate Thangka paintings, to the animistic wooden dolls (*dokpas*) placed on bridges and roofs tasked with keeping evil spirits at bay.

The Dolpa district's southern fringes lie among green hills, but the further north you travel, into the rain shadow of the 8,000 m high Dhaulagiri and Annapurna peaks, the more barren the landscape becomes.

Here, in Inner Dolpo, lies Shey Gompa and Dho Tarap, some of the highest permanently inhabited villages on earth, reached only over high passes which, when snow-covered, leave Inner Dolpo isolated for many months of the year. The inhabitants are semi-nomadic, and trade forms a necessary part of their existence, as depicted in Eric Valli's beautiful film *Himalaya*. The stunning combination of arid slopes backed by endless snowy peaks requires a certain amount of quiet contemplation.

After such arid countryside, the stunning Phoksumdo Lake seems like a miracle. Unusually clear, turquoise waters are bound by rocky cliffs traversed by frightening trails. From the right viewpoint, this picture is perfectly framed by snow-capped peaks. This is a must-see place—pictures won't do it justice.

The GHT section that crosses Dolpa mixes unique culture and an amazing diversity of nature with tough terrain that has challenged generations of nomads before you. It's certainly one of the more difficult sections, but perhaps the most rewarding.



FAST FACTS:

- Dolpa is a district of Nepal, Dolpo is the isolated, culturally Tibetan region to the North of it.
- People from ancient Jupal speak a language spoken only in two other villages.
- Wonderfully depicted in the film *Himalaya* by Eric Valli and *The Snow Leopard* written by Peter Matthiesen
- Overlooking the Phoksumdo Lake is the Pal Sentan Thasoon Chholing Gompa, a Bönpo Gompa said to have been built 60 generations ago

Dolpa, one of the highest inhabited places on earth, with scattered fortress-like villages and monasteries nestling amongst mountains of stark, ascetic beauty. With the beautiful azure of Phoksumdo Lake, authentic culture and few visitors, it makes for an extraordinary trekking experience.

Annapurna & Mustang

The Annapurna range is an enormous 55 km long chain of six mountains over 7,200 m including Annapurna I, the world's 10th highest mountain.

These mountains receive almost double the average annual precipitation, making them some of the most dangerous to climb, and this fuels the visually stunning mighty glaciers that tumble far into the valleys below.

It is as if all this immensity is by design to protect the mystical 'Kingdom of Lo', or Mustang, lying hidden behind, which in contrast remains arid, hardly touched by the summer monsoon rains. Here is a last living example of pure Tibetan culture. The capital of this spiritual land is Lo Manthang, meaning "The Southern Plains of Aspiration" and here vivid green fields, ochre-daubed monasteries burst out of the barren landscape. Visit this area during the demon-chasing *Teej* festival for a dazzling cultural experience.

For independent trekkers the Annapurnas are by far the most popular and the Annapurna Circuit is surely one of the world's favourite treks—it's easily accessible, the views are incredible and can be enjoyed with a delicious piece of apple pie in one of the many comfortable lodges.

Times are changing though and road construction, welcome for local communities, is bringing modernity and dust into the landscape. However, creative guides are taking the curious back in time to the magical medieval villages of Nar and Phu, over the high trail of Kang La with its breathtaking views, and the up to the frozen Tilicho Lake.

Even in Nepal's most trekked places, a trail less travelled is never far away.



FAST FACTS:

- Annapurna is the Hindu goddess of grain and prosperity
- The Annapurna circuit can be trekked in all but mid-February to March and Mustang is accessible all year round.
- You'll meet Gurung, Manangba, Thakali, Magar, Baragaunle and Bhotia ethnic groups
- The Kali Gandaki river valley pinched between Annapurna and Dhaulagiri is the deepest gorge in the world



"Phu is a tiny settlement just near the border with Tibet. When I first walked towards this little village it felt almost like magic."

Billi Bierling, climber.



Manaslu & Ganesh

Manaslu, the world's 8th highest mountain, marks the halfway point of the Great Himalaya Trail. Its Sanskrit name means Mountain of the Spirit and this spirit certainly reflects into the peaceful villages and valleys around it.

Neighbouring to the east is the Ganesh Himal, named after the elephant-headed Hindu god of good fortune – a ridge on the south face of Ganesh IV is reminiscent of an elephant's trunk.

The dramatic scenery on this section of the GHT is as diverse as the numerous ethnic groups living along it, and there are many magical trekking options that are easy to reach from Kathmandu.

The Tamang Heritage Trail is a real colourful, cultural experience where you can experience Tamang life by staying with families in their own homes. The adventurous could continue higher and walk the famous Tiru Danda ridge.

An all round gem on the GHT is the Manaslu circuit trek and it's tempting to compare it with the popular Annapurna circuit. While the Annapurna round has lost much of its authenticity to the crowds, and its trails to roads, Manaslu remains as it has always been and offers a personal and truly authentic cultural experience.

Trails are immaculate and grassy and are devoid of dusty yak caravans hauling provisions for tea-house trekkers. The passing villages have wonderful character: Kholabensi with its majestic backdrop of Ganesh Himal, picturesque Jagat with its old paved square, and nearby Tatopani where hot spring water issues from stone spouts. You may hear villagers singing together as they work in the fields. You may even be asked to join in and lend a hand!

Eventually, the valleys open up to reveal stunning mountain panoramas. Samagaon enjoys heavenly views of Manaslu towering above—nowhere else will you get up so close to an 8,000 m peak. Enjoy some days exploring and acclimatising here—the scenery is simply amazing.

FAST FACTS

- The area is highly diverse, being home to Tamang, Magar, Larke and Siar, Christian Gurung and Ru-Pa peoples and Tibetan Buddhists to the north
- Tamang means 'horse trader' in Tibetan
- Easy to reach from Kathmandu
- The Tamang Heritage Trail is great for independent trekkers
- Manaslu is very popular with Japanese people—a Japanese expedition first climbed it in 1956
- Lamas from local monasteries have prohibited hunting of wildlife which has helped it to prosper. It's now a prime habitat for the elusive snow leopard, gray wolf, musk deer, blue sheep and the goat-like Himalayan Tahr.



Tiru Danda ridge often brings you above the clouds. It's been described as 'a walk in the sky' giving great views of the Annapurnas, Manaslu and nearby Ganesh peaks.

"The view from the Larkya La is just astonishing. It looks straight out over four converging glaciers to the huge wall of 7,000 m and 8000 m peaks of Himal Chuli and the Annapurnas."

Alex Treadway, adventure photographer.



Langtang & Helambu

On a clear day in Kathmandu, bright white peaks rise over the forested ridges of the Shivapuri National Park as if curious to see what is going on in the bustling city.

You can literally walk out of the Kathmandu valley towards these mountains and into the Helambu and Langtang trekking areas.

Helambu, is a *beyul*, one of 108 sacred Himalayan valleys, places of peace and refuge revered by Tibetan Buddhists. The welcoming Sherpas, distant relatives of the Sherpas of Everest, call themselves Hyalmo after the name of their beyul. Here is a green and pleasant land of quiet villages, terraced slopes and pine forests leading up to the Langtang National Park – its perfect for relaxed trekking. Many small and secluded holy lakes are found around here. At Gosaikunda, under August's full moon, you can witness Hindu followers of Shiva bathing in its icy waters, before changing their sacred Janai thread.

The Great Himalaya Trail passes over into Langtang, via the challenging 5,308 m Tilman pass from where you can see right into Tibet. The descent delivers you into another, very different beyul, of glaciers and majestic snowy peaks of which Langtang Lirung at 7,227 m is the shining star.

Take time to explore this stunning landscape and keep alert for signs of snow leopard.

If it's autumn, stop in Kanjin Gomba or Langtang and sample delicious locally-made cheese, while it lasts. Then plunge homeward into the verdant forested gorge of the Langtang *Khola*, home to families of playful grey langur monkeys and the elusive red panda.

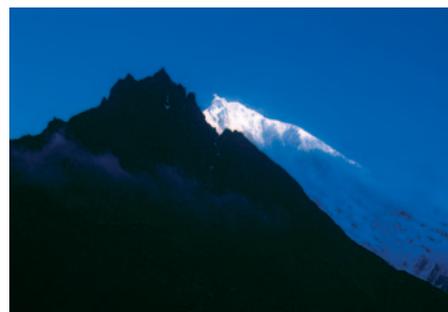
FAST FACTS:

- Panch pokhari located west of Helambu means five lakes – it's a spiritual place of Hindus and Buddhists alike
- Helambu's Sherpas are distant relatives of the Sherpa's of Everest
- The Kanja La or Laurebina La are great alternatives to Tilman pass
- Easiest access trekking areas in Nepal
- World class yak curd from the Kanjin gomba dairy!
- August's spectacular Janai Purnima festival sees hundreds of devotees purifying themselves in Gosaikunda's frigid waters



“Langtang is fantastic. It's a quick route up into the high mountains, through an area of great cultural interest and spectacular scenery, and most of the time it's completely tourist-free! Not only that, but the yak curd is simply world class. Highly recommended!”

Laurie MacGregor, UK.



Rolwaling & Everest

Mount Everest's dark, imposing mass has a gravitational attraction for adventurers and rightly so. After all, it is a deeply impressive sight and one of the seven natural wonders of the world.

The trek to Everest's base camp is a popular classic and it's easy to reach its starting point by a short flight although the beautiful walk in from Jiri is highly recommended. Jagged white peaks surround you from day one and comfortable, well-stocked lodges run by friendly Sherpas are sprinkled along the wide and even trails.

And busy! In peak season, you could be sharing the trails with hundreds of others. If you add a little of the GHT route to your journey, you can find a little solitude and enjoy a more intimate experience of Sherpa culture. The 'Three Passes Trek' will take you on an adventure across the heart of the Sagarmatha National Park—with its quiet monasteries and turquoise glacial lakes, it has arguably the most stunning viewpoint of Everest atop the Renjo La. Plan your trip carefully to coincide with the colourful Mani Rimdu festival in Thame after October's full moon.

True GHT adventurers will look further east and west. Shipton and Hillary first trekked to the east in their exploratory 1952 expedition via the formidable 'three cols' into the Makalu region, this must certainly rank among the greatest mountain walks in the world. To the west, the trail exits to Rolwaling valley via the challenging Tashi Labsta (5,760 m), which, difficult as it is, used to be the Sherpas' fastest route to Kathmandu.

The trail then skirts along Rolwaling's wide glaciated valley and leads on to the picturesque villages of Bigu Gompa and Beding giving occasional views of the imposing face of Gauri Shakar (7,121 m). With only a few visitors passing here each season, those who do are assured of a friendly welcome from Rolwaling's Sherpa, Tamang and Gurung communities.

FAST FACTS

- Everest is also known as Sagarmatha in Nepali and Chomolungma in Tibetan
- Rolwaling means 'furrow' and this wide valley is thought to have been ploughed by the mighty Guru Ripoché, the second Buddha
- Mani Rimdu festival after full moon in October—famous in Tengboche but can be experienced in many other places
- Three of the world's highest peaks are found here (Everest, Lhotse and Cho Oyu)



While this region is famous for its high peaks and its Sherpa inhabitants, just to the south is a wonderful opportunity to swap mountain experiences for cultural ones.

There is an Indigenous People's trail here and you can try to play the Tamang's 'Dampoo', consult a Thami shaman or fish with Majhi peoples and enjoy a fresh fish BBQ on a sandy riverbank.

This is also a good place to experience the 'out of season' festivals of Saune Sakranti (middle of July), Sorha Shradda (middle of September), Janai-Purnima (end of June) and Maghi (middle of February) and Lhosar (February).

Makalu Barun

The Makalu Barun National Park offers some of the most spectacular scenery in the Himalayas. The rewards of trekking here are great, but hard won - it's remote, wilderness country and for the experienced trekker.

The trail to Makalu base camp takes you deep into the high Himalaya and while the giant of Makalu, *The Great Black*, looms above you, Everest, Lhotse and Baruntse are all in view.

While the GHT links directly with the Kanchenjunga section via the remote Lumbha Sambha, and to the Everest section via the challenging three cols, most will experience the Makalu section of the trail via the verdant Arun and Barun river valleys.

The trail from Tumlingtar is either ascending or descending, there are really no flat walking sections. It's arduous trekking. However, the natural surroundings are stunning. The upper reaches of the trail resemble the Yosemite Valley – towering polished granite cliffs capped by hanging glaciers, overflowing with waterfalls.

“Breathtaking—it made you stop, I was in awe, the landscape was just that dynamic.”

The lower reaches of the trail are renowned for their lushness.

“It was so rich. The rhododendron forests had the most vibrant colours I've ever seen – from scarlet and fuchsia to the purest white. It is prettiest hike I've done in a long time,” says Robbie Klimek, a Makalu summiteer from USA.

There are plans to dam the Arun River for hydropower. If the Makalu section sounds appealing, trek it now before it changes forever.

FAST FACTS

Special to Makalu Barun...

- 25 SPECIES OF RHODODENDRON
- 47 TYPES OF ORCHIDS
- 440 SPECIES OF BIRDS
- 75 SPECIES OF MAMMALS
- CLOUDED LEOPARD
- RED PANDA
- ASIAN GOLDEN CAT
- FORESTS SPAN FIVE BIOCLIMATIC ZONES FROM TROPICAL THROUGH TEMPERATE TO ALPINE.



“It was so rich. The rhododendron forests had the most vibrant colours I've ever seen – from scarlet and fuchsia to the purest white. It is prettiest hike I've done in a long time.”

Robbie Klimek, a Makalu summiteer, USA.

Kanchenjunga

Kanchenjunga (8,586 m), the world's third highest mountain, forms Nepal's eastern border with India's Sikkim. In Tibetan, the name Kanchenjunga means 'five great treasure houses of snow' which hints at the mountain spectacle that awaits should you visit this area.

This corner of Nepal is a protected area. The Kanchenjunga Conservation Area, managed by local and indigenous communities in partnership with WWF, is one of the least densely populated in Nepal. It contains tracts of pristine forests, alpine meadows and high altitude wetlands that are home to the endangered snow leopard and red panda, and the vulnerable Himalayan black bear, clouded leopard and Assamese macaque. Like the neighboring Makalu Barun, the region feels the full force of the monsoon and is consequently bursting with flora—2,000 species of flowering plants have been recorded here, and you'll see some of the richest rhododendron forests in Nepal.

It is a long and challenging trek just to reach the beginning of the GHT in Nepal near the Kanchenjunga base camp. Starting from Tumlingtar, you pass through agricultural areas and friendly Rai and Limbu communities before encountering, lush but steep-sided valleys. In these higher reaches you meet the Buddhist communities of Sherpas, Tamangs and Bhotias, the trading nomads from Tibet.

Further on, the lake-dotted Milke Danda ridge brings exhilarating views of Kanchenjunga and Jannu. Makalu and Everest are equally spectacular to the northwest. This will be enough of a destination for many but for those who continue, the views just get grander. GHT enthusiasts will venture north of Kanchenjunga, past the base camp at Pangpema, to get as close as they can to the Jhinsang La, the starting point of the GHT in Nepal.

The route backtracks before heading west in earnest via Olanchung Gola, the largest of the five stone and wood villages of the Walung people. Constrained by time, most will bring their adventure to a close here and head south while free spirits will bravely cross the uninhabited Lumbha Sambha towards Makalu. This is wilderness exploring at its best.



Accomplished 8,000 m mountaineer Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner says Kanchenjunga is her favorite place in Nepal, "I love it because it's so wild."

"I love the Kanchenjunga region because there is still so much exploring to do. Even the main route feels un-trekked."

Jamie McGuiness, mountain guide.

FAST FACTS

- Kanchenjunga is the world's third highest mountain
- Pristine forests and wild trails at lower altitudes
- Stunning big-mountain scenery
- Kanchenjunga Conservation Area is snow leopard territory
- A great destination for exploring
- For deep blue skies, visit in November. For a blooming rhododendron sensation, April is wonderful

