

ANNAPURNA

**14 TREKS INCLUDING
THE ANNAPURNA CIRCUIT AND SANCTUARY**

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Dedicated to the preservation of the Spirit of Adventure

Horizon

All around, the illusory edge of the sky,
Masterpiece of a magical hand,
A faraway line that doesn't exist,
Yet stretches away to the end...

*Translated by Siân and her father John Pritchard-Jones from the traditional Welsh
Englyn poem 'Y Gorwel' by Dewi Emrys (David Emrys James)*

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Front cover: Dhaulagiri from above Lubra (Stage 3 of the Annapurna Circuit –Trek 1)

it was completely untroubled by the jeep road. As construction continues apace, expect disruption to the trail. Bhulbule had some good lodges and a checkpoint. The trail headed relatively benignly up to the village of **Ngadi** (930m). En route up the Marsyangdi are views of Ngadi Chuli (7870m), previously known as Peak 29.

From Ngadi the trail crosses the Ngadi Khola, then climbs rather tiringly up to **Lampata**, through wooded areas and terraces dotted with farmhouses. As work continues on the 'new road' to Bahundanda, there could be some disruption to the trail, so keep an eye out for the right direction wherever the road is intersected. Being the first real big hill, this hike can seem rather long, but **Bahundanda** (1310m) is welcoming. 'Bahun' means Brahmins, who predominate in the village and often paint their houses blue. Brahmins are a priestly caste, but many are also poor. Danda means hill or ridge, thus Bahundanda – hill of Brahmins.

Dirt roads have reached Bahundanda so expect a mix of road and trail for now. From Bahundanda the route, some on trail and some on the dirt road drops to the relatively flat terrace above the river through farms where rice and millet are grown on hillsides.

*Above the
Marsyangdi River
near Syange*



The cluster of buildings at Jagat has 10 or so good lodges (mattress thickness 10cm, so quite deluxe).

Millet is a popular crop, providing grain as well as the ingredients of a popular intoxicating drink, *thukpa*.

After **Kanigaon** and **Ghermuphant**, it's not far to the bridge across the Marsyangdi to **Syange** (1100m).

Bhulbhule to Syange direct (3¼hrs)

The jeep road from Bhulbhule climbs gradually up and then down to **Arkhole**, with spectacular views of Himalchuli ahead. It's a rather hot walk. After Arkhole the 'road' heads up and down past a bridge to the east bank, and up to Ram Bazaar (2¼hrs' walk from Arkhole). There are two lodges in Ram Bazaar and, if you are walking, expect another hour to **Syange**.

Syange to Chamje (3–4hrs)

Most trekkers follow the dirt road to **Jagat** (1314m), once the trading checkpost for goods along the Marsyangdi. ◀ From Jagat, the route heads north on the west side of the Marsyangdi, following the jeep track. Magnificent waterfalls tumble on each side of the ever-narrowing canyon. For simplicity and ease underfoot, follow the dirt road on to **Chamje** (1433m). There is a side trail, but the road is much quicker.

Chamje to Dharapani (5–6hrs)

This stage is characterised by the ever-steeper cliffs that hem in the Marsyangdi River.

Originally the river was crossed on nerve-tingling **log bridges** that threatened to collapse into the foaming fury at any moment. Those precarious obstacles have now been replaced by new suspension bridges.

From Chamje taking the old trail is much preferred on the east side of the river through Tal to Dharapani. Occasional mule caravans still use the route.

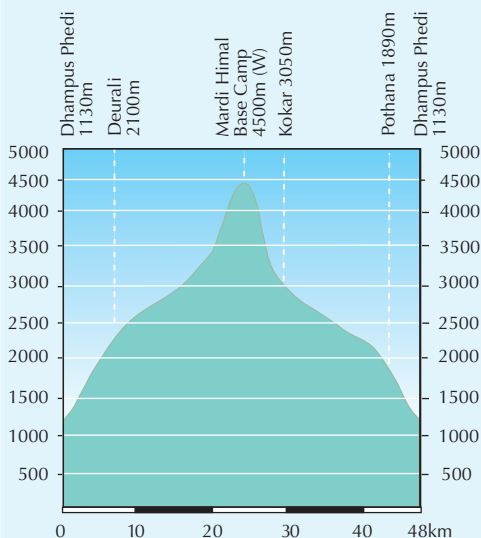
TREK 7

Mardi Himal Trek

Start	Kande (1770m/5807ft) or Dhampus Phedi (1130m/3706ft) or Dhampus (1650m/ 5413ft)
Finish	Kalimati (1800m/3706ft)
Distance	48km (30 miles)
Time	6–8 days
Maximum altitude	Mardi Himal Base Camp West (4500m/14,760ft)
Transport	Bus, jeep and taxi
Trekking style	Lodges

The trek can be commenced from Dhampus or Kande by taking transport from Pokhara to either point.

MARDI HIMAL TREK



Kande/Dhampus to Pitam Deurali (3–4hrs)

From Kande the trail climbs steeply to Australian Camp and then is easier to Pothana, where an equally moderate route **from Dhampus** meets at Pothana (1890m). Pitam Deurali (2115m) is up the ridge and has good lodges.

Pitam Deurali to Kokar Forest Camp (4–5hrs)

The trail climbs along the Kali Danda ridge in wild tranquil forest with fleeting mountain views. The improved path climbs on through magical rhododendron and magnolia, larch and moss-covered decaying vegetation. Ancient gnarled trunks host dripping and wispy lichens. Kokar Forest Camp (28 23' 00.27" N 83 50' 35.96") has six lodges of a surprisingly excellent standard (with thick mattresses for the more mature!).

Kokar Forest Camp – Badal Danda (4–5hrs)

The trail continues to climb through forest – the domain of woodcutters, herders, monkeys and birds. There are a couple of lodges at Rest Camp (2605m) and then more uphill with some tree roots to navigate to Low Camp (2990m). Just as the trail leaves the forest is the lowest lodge of Badal Danda (3209m), and then a few more clumped above, with the top lodge (3258m) right on the ridge line.

Badal Danda – High Camp (2–3hrs)

Now above the treeline, the route climbs up steadily along the ridge. There are fabulous panoramic views over the Modi Khola, the southern hills and the ridges to the east. Ahead the amazing buttresses of Machhapuchhre are ever more enticing. High Camp (3900m) is a small oasis of at least nine lodges now; sunsets are stunning from here.

High Camp – Mardi Himal Base Camp (5–7hrs)

It's a day of sensational views, including the trail into the Annapurna Base Camp/Sanctuary and the tremendous ice wall that links Gangapurna to Annapurna I. It is not necessary to reach Mardi Himal Base Camp for the best views, although Annapurna I is not seen from the ABC Viewpoint – only the summit tip is offered from Mardi Himal Base



Camp. Agile trekkers and local guides do go up the ridge slightly higher, but this is risky. Most trekkers return to High Camp for nourishment before descending to Low Camp.

On the trail

High Camp – Low Camp (2–3hrs)

Take care on the descent; it's all too easy to rush down to warmer climes. Badal Danda is around 1-1½hrs down; when in the forest, be wary of the roots to Low Camp.

Low Camp – Kalimati (5–6hrs)

The trail heads steeply down to Rest Camp and Forest Camp for a tea break and early lunch. There are no more teashops before Kalimati.

Be sure to get the right trail out of Forest Camp. There is a **buffalo meadow** 15mins down. Beware the buffaloes. Soon after is a sign; go right for Kalimati-Ghalel (with Sidhing 2hrs left). Going quite steeply down there is a sign: **Bisaune 2000m**. The Kalimati route descends to **Tilche 1820m** followed by an easy descent through trees into the fields. Traditional, picturesque houses grace the route to the roadhead at **Kalimati (1800m)** with a lodge. Most trekkers get their guide to arrange a jeep in advance for the drive to Pokhara the same day.

DHAULAGIRI SANCTUARY TREK

Until a small research party including Himalayan Map House trekked deeper into the pristine southern valley of Dhaulagiri, only local herders knew that a route existed to the heart of the peak. During that reconnaissance, the route from Phedi into the Sanctuary was virtually barred by tortuous cliffs and water-drenched canyons.

Approaching the vast ramparts of Dhaulagiri, this new route forges its way around guarding canyons and towering cliffs towards the icy domain of the Sanctuary. This abode of the gods is dominated by the soaring (4000m) south face of Dhaulagiri and virtually encircled by peaks including Manapati (6380m) and Jirbang (6062m).

Few have been to the Dhaulagiri Sanctuary, so this is a pioneering trek route. Since Covid the last stage of the trail to the south base camp has been delayed, although agile trekkers might consider it – but be very careful! Homestays are often basic and food simple but sustaining – Dal Bhat. Magar and Chantyal people inhabit the lower foothills of Dhaulagiri. Most are Hindu, although some Buddhists call this valley home. Quaint traditional farmhouses, terraced fields and a sprinkling of temples dot the landscape.

Following the direct route into the Dhaulagiri Sanctuary allows a multitude of environments to be experienced while not going higher than 4100m. Parts of the trail require special care and attention; short stages of exposure are encountered. Altitude problems are most likely to occur when climbing the last stage into the Sanctuary itself. In any case it's easy to retreat downwards if symptoms persist.

With only a few homestays, no lodges and no trail signs on overgrown paths, taking a guide is necessary at the moment. Camping and carrying all food is essential and having a porter/porters is also desirable for all but the strongest trekkers, since there are no facilities above Chhari. Ideally it would be best to hire porters locally, but this is becoming quite difficult as more and more younger people head for the cities. Finding porters in Kathmandu can be daunting; see appendix 5 for local trekking agencies.

In the spring we encountered a large ice sheet near Odar Camp that will stop all those without an ice axe, rope and mountaineering gear. This ice sheet runs down steeply from the cliffs for 200m straight into the river. It is around 25–30m across. We are informed that it does not exist after the monsoon, but being prepared is vital just in case it does!

Regarding the weather, be sure to avoid the higher areas in early spring unless you relish icy conditions. March and April are popular for those

enjoying the rhododendron and orchid show. However, it can be especially hot in the lower reaches in April. Avoid the monsoon – it's horribly cloudy, often raining and the leeches are voracious. Just after the monsoon and until mid-October, the higher areas suffer from lingering snow. For views, November and the first weeks of December are best.

It is necessary to take a sleeping bag; homestay blankets are not always clean, might be unavailable and bed bugs are determined critters. Groups should plan on taking a full camping crew, as homestays are mostly one-room affairs.

Following the Raghuganga Khola valley from the Magar village of Jhi, the trail initially crosses farming hillsides high above the valley. The route passes through Pakhapani, Kotgaon and Ulleri to Rayakhor. Climbing onwards, it passes through Mulpani to Ghyasikharka, below Dhar and on to Chhari, the last settlement. Cloud rainforest and dense jungle dominate the way up to Phedi. After this a new trail climbs around the cliffs on the east through to Odar Camp and into the defile that guards the Sanctuary. The last haul into this treasury of the gods is spectacular, to within a yak's whisker of the unbelievable soaring south face of Dhaulagiri. Returning from Phedi,



an alternative trail on the east side of the valley after Ghyasikharka leads through Chimkhola to Dagnam, where a sensational cliff route is the final adventure. A dirt road drops back to Beni, serviced by jeeps. Plan on at least 12–13 days for the trek and at least 7 to reach Phedi and back from Pokhara.

Start	Beni (830m)
Finish	Beni (830m)
Distance	approx. 60–70km (38–44 miles)
Time	12–14 days
Maximum altitude	Sanctuary (4100m/13,450ft)
Trekking style	Homestay and camping
Transport	Bus, jeep and plane