

EVEREST: A TREKKER'S GUIDE



photo: Anna Chmielewska

About the Author

Radek Kucharski grew up in Poland and lives in Warsaw. Born to a jazz-playing father, he was probably never destined to have a full-time job. After studying geography, he completed his first overland trip to India and Nepal in 2000, and trekking in the Himalayas quickly became a favourite activity. He has also trekked in Iran, Pakistan and Scandinavia. He treks independently, often alone, and believes this is the best way to get to know a place and its people. Introduced to the darkroom by his grandfather, Radek uses a camera to document every trip and shows his work in public while speaking about the places that fascinate him.

Having worked for a small geographic information systems company for over 10 years, Radek now chiefly guides trekking groups to Ladakh and the Nepali Himalayas, as well as leading adventure travel trips to South Asia and tours to Scandinavia.

Having recently become a father, he looks forward to the challenges and inspirations that discovering the world with a child will bring. www.radekkucharski.com

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Trekking in Ladakh

EVEREST: A TREKKER'S GUIDE

**BASE CAMP, KALA PATTHAR AND OTHER TREKKING
ROUTES IN NEPAL AND TIBET**

by Radek Kucharski

CICERONE

JUNIPER HOUSE, MURLEY MOSS,
OXENHOLME ROAD, KENDAL, CUMBRIA LA9 7RL
www.cicerone.co.uk

Warning

All mountain activities contain an element of danger, with a risk of personal injury or death. Treks described in this guidebook are no exception. Under normal conditions, wandering the trails towards Everest will be neither more nor less hazardous than walking among big mountains anywhere in the world, but trekking involves physically demanding exercise in a challenging landscape, where caution is advised and a degree of stamina is often required, and it should be undertaken only by those with a full and proper understanding of the risks involved, and with the training and experience to evaluate them. Trekkers should be properly equipped for the routes undertaken. The effects of altitude and the potential for altitude sickness (AMS) or worse, and how to deal with it, should be understood before you go trekking.

While every care and effort has been taken in the preparation of this guide, the user should be aware that conditions can be highly variable and change rapidly. Rockfall, landslide and crumbling paths can alter the character of the route, and the presence of snow and the possibility of avalanche must be carefully considered, for these can materially affect the seriousness of a trek.

Therefore, except for any liability which cannot be excluded by law, neither Cicerone Press nor the author accepts liability for damage of any nature (including damage to property, personal injury or death) arising directly or indirectly from information given in this guide.

Readers are warned that trekkers are sometimes badly injured by passing yaks; a few unfortunates die of hypothermia or acute mountain sickness; others simply lose their balance and fall from the trail due to a momentary loss of concentration. Since there is no organised mountain rescue service in Nepal, such as exists in some mountain regions of Europe, if an accident occurs self-help may be the only option. Note too, that where it is possible to summon a rescue helicopter, the cost of doing so is very high and guarantee of payment essential. Make sure your insurance includes such costs, and carry a credit card with sufficient funds to back its use for the initial call-out.

Everyone trekking in the Everest region should assume responsibility for their own safety and look to the needs of those with them. This includes especially porters and members of a trek crew, as well as fellow trekkers.



Crossing the glacier moraines between Lobuche and Gorakshep with Pumori and Kala Patthar above (Trek 3)

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Dedication

To the nameless porters who supply lodges along the trail in Khumbu, making the trek easier or even feasible. To those travellers who are ready to compromise some of their comforts and desires to protect the vulnerable environment and the local cultures. To visitors who come to learn and enrich themselves rather than change others.

Updates to this guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/836/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency, although naturally we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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Front cover: Everest, Nuptse, Lhotse, Ngozumpa Glacier and Gokyo viewed from the way to Renjo Pass

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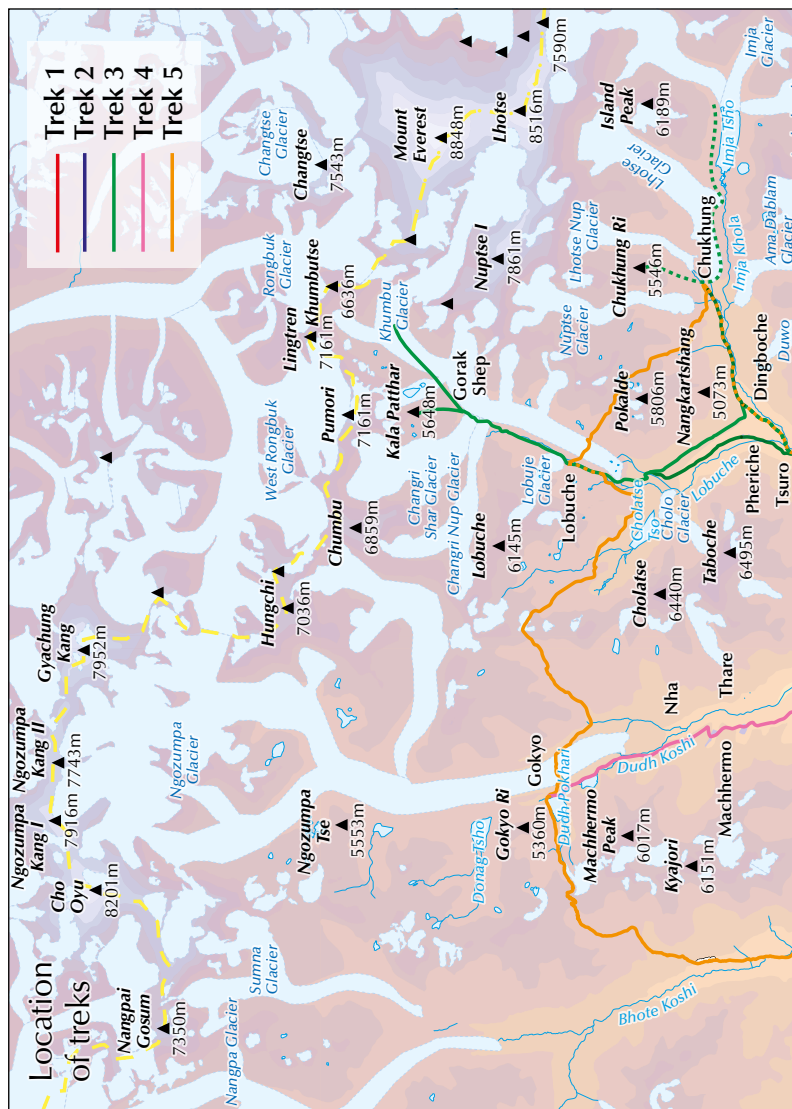
Symbols used on route maps

	route
	alternative route
	linking route
	footpath
	track
	road
	start or finish point
	start/finish or alternative start/finish
	alternative start or finish point
	alternative start or finish point
	glacier
	woodland
	settlement
	regional border
	international border
	national park/conservation area boundary
	peak
	town/village
	campsite
	building/statue or monument
	buddhist monastery/hindu temple
	hospital/clinic/medical aid-post
	pass
	bridge/suspension bridge
	water feature/waterfall
	helipad
	viewpoint

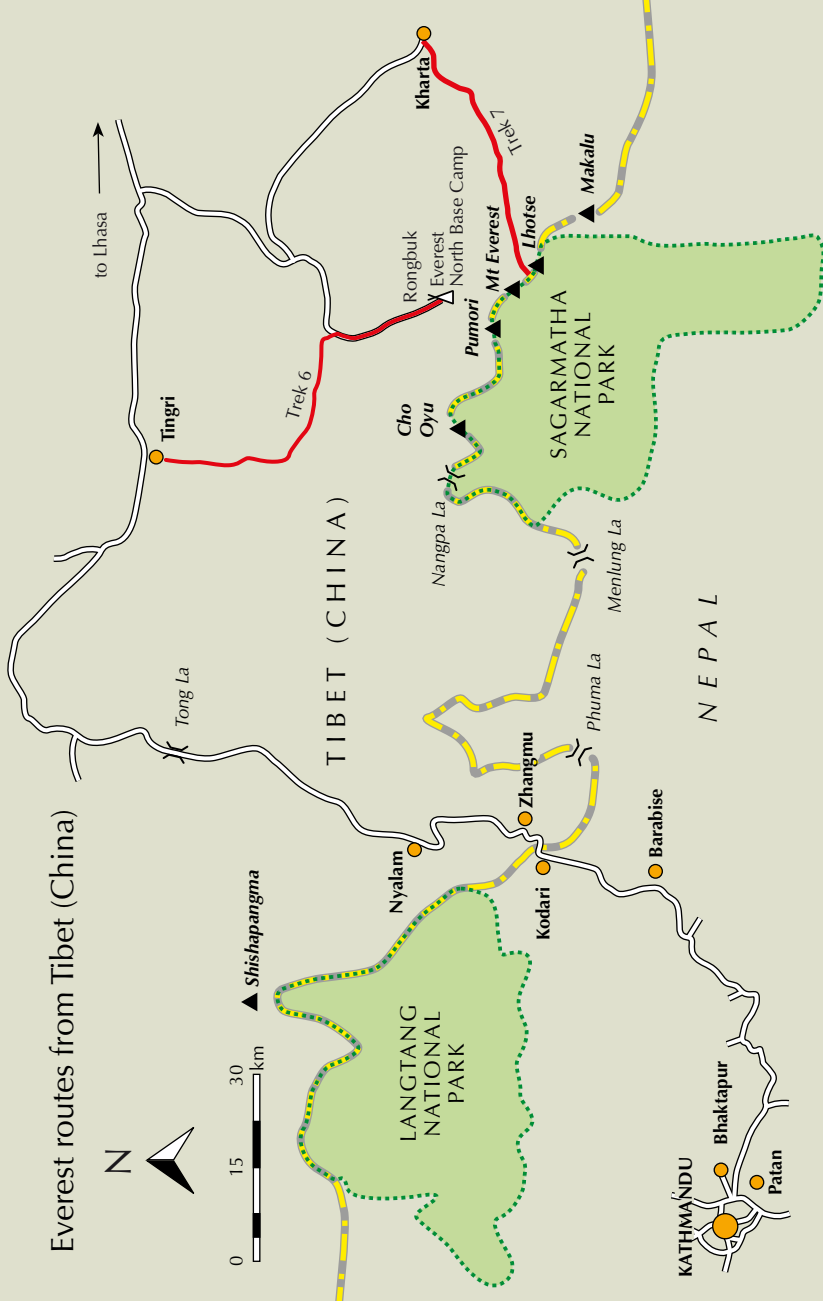
Relief in metres

8400–8800	
8000–8400	
7600–8000	
7200–7600	
6800–7200	
6400–6800	
6000–6400	
5600–6000	
5200–5600	
4800–5200	
4400–4800	
4000–4400	
3600–4000	
3200–3600	
2800–3200	
2400–2800	
2000–2400	
1600–2000	
1200–1600	
800–1200	
400–800	





Everest routes from Tibet (China)



Makalu seen from the Kongma La

as you observe yours or your friends'. Let them rest on arrival at the new lodge at the end of the day – it is their free time. Although many porters and guides will want to serve you during meals, you may try to limit that by collecting your own meal from the kitchen and returning utensils and plates when you have finished.

Never overload your porters, and make sure that the bag they carry for you is reasonably comfortable. Although you will see porters carrying uncomfortable loads weighing at least 80kg, this is unacceptable. Porters are not super-human; they are simply trying to make a living in a tough environment.

A few organisations try to implement porters' work standards by publishing guidelines and suggestions. Porters' Progress UK (www.portersprogressuk.org) suggests the weight limit of a load carried by a porter in Nepal should be 30kg and this should be further adjusted according to altitude and other conditions. In the author's opinion, on a Khumbu trek where a large part of each route runs above 4000m, the load should be smaller. Remember that in addition to your bag, your porter needs to carry his own belongings. Consider also that in an emergency or if you become weak, the porter will also be expected to carry your daypack. It is therefore suggested that the bag you give a porter should weigh no more than about 15kg, and it should be a comfortable rucksack or duffel bag with shoulder straps for convenient carrying. If you came to Nepal with a suitcase, leave it in Kathmandu. If you hire a porter for two trekkers – although some organisations dictate 'one trekker, one porter' – pack everything in one rucksack to ensure the load is comfortable.

Porters should have life insurance (see above). If your porter becomes unwell on the trek, provide him with medicine and do not leave him on his own. If he needs to stay at altitude, make sure he is safe and has someone to care for him. If a sick porter needs to descend, it is imperative that someone assists him. Before the trek, make sure your porter has adequate clothing and boots, and consider tipping him when the trek is over (see above). If you have clothes you do not want to take back home, you might ask your porter if he would find them useful. If the answer is no, donate them to the Everest Clothing Bank (see above).

SEASONS AND WEATHER

Although trekking may be possible at any time of the year in Solukhumbu, there are generally considered to be two main seasons: the pre-monsoon period (spring), and the more popular post-monsoon months before winter sets in. However, these periods receive a great many tourists and the number of visitors has been rapidly growing in recent

years. Therefore, you might want to consider other seasons to avoid the crowds.

According to data displayed at the entry gate to the Sagarmatha National Park in Monjo, in 2017 the number of tourists entering in September (the busiest month of the year) reached almost 12,500 – the highest monthly number since records began in 1998. April, the busiest pre-monsoon month, the same

year, saw over 9500 visitors – compared with 5500 in 2016, almost 6300 in 2015 when the earthquake struck and 6900 in 2014. In the spring season, however, a large number of those who attempt to climb Everest should be added, as the quoted figures exclude members of expeditions. Spring is the season for commercial expeditions on Everest when a town of tents appears at the Base Camp, while in autumn the same place is usually empty. The summer monsoon season in 2017 saw 340 tourists in July and 530 in August. In winter 2016/17 there were almost 2500 trekkers in December, about 1300 in January and the same number in February.

Spring (pre-monsoon): March–May
The spring trekking season runs from late March to May. Early March above Namche can be colder than December, but from mid March onwards temperatures in the lower hills rise considerably, and by May the first few days of a trek

from Jiri will be uncomfortably humid – especially for independent travellers carrying large rucksacks. Clouds often build up during the afternoon, while heat haze throughout the day can spoil distant views in the foothills and middle hills, although at higher elevations the atmosphere is generally clear and temperatures moderate. This is the season for the keen botanist, as numerous wildflower varieties add a riot of colour throughout the region. Rhododendrons will be blooming at lower elevations as early as late February, but coming into flower during March and April at higher levels.

Summer (monsoon): June–September

From June to September Nepal is affected by the monsoon. During this time paths can be treacherous with mud, rivers and streams become raging torrents, torrential rain and mist deny views for much of the day, while trees, shrubs and undergrowth are infested with

Rhododendrons are one of the attractions in spring



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leeches except in the highest valleys. However, the countryside is then green and lush, wildflowers are impressive, and when clouds shred and momentarily part the mountains reveal an undeniable drama. There are very few trekkers along the trails, and village life resumes its age-old pattern. Anyone tempted to trek during the monsoon, though, should be aware that paths may be rerouted, some bridges could be washed away and lengthy diversions become necessary. That being said, when conditions allow, flights to Lukla still operate, so determined trekkers with sufficient time to wait for a window of opportunity could avoid the worst effects of the monsoon and begin there.

Autumn (post-monsoon): October–late November The post-monsoon period traditionally began at the end of September and continued until the arrival of winter in December, but weather patterns are changing and in recent years the rains have continued well into October. Should this pattern continue, trekkers may face unpredictable weather at least until mid October, with more stable conditions in November and December. Autumn remains the most popular trekking period, when trails and lodges are at their busiest, and with the monsoon having cleansed the atmosphere, the weather is mostly settled. Above 3000m an occasional dump of snow is not unusual, however, and when prolonged can have an effect on plans to cross high passes. Mostly, though, days are blessed with clear, often cloud-free skies with a magical light ideal for photography. Daytime temperatures are very pleasant. Above Namche nights can be chilly in October, while at Gokyo, Tengboche

and beyond heavy frosts should be expected. By mid November night-time temperatures will have dropped to well below freezing, although views by day have a lustre unrivalled at any other time of the year.

Winter: December–February December is statistically the driest month, and as long as you've got good down clothing and sleeping bag, trekking right up to Christmas can be magnificent. In mid winter (January) the intense cold experienced above Namche Bazaar can make nights especially uncomfortable, and in some years heavy snowfall in the higher regions can make travel difficult or even impossible. Late winter (February–March) is sometimes disrupted by snowstorms. Not only can these cause severe trail problems, but on occasion flights are unable to land at Lukla for several days at a time. Although some lodges close for the season, expect to find accommodation along the main routes as owners arrange to keep at least one lodge open in each settlement. This particularly refers to Lobuche and Gokyo where you can expect to find a place all year round.

WEATHER FORECAST

For a local weather forecast, check www.mountain-forecast.com (which has forecasts for various altitudes on mountains including Kala Patthar, Gokyo Ri and Everest, as well as all the other giants in the region), www.accuweather.com (Lukla, Namche Bazaar), www.yr.no (for the majority of the region's main settlements), www.meteoblue.com (main settlements and peaks and any given coordinates), and www.mfd.gov.np.

**FITNESS, HEALTH AND EMERGENCIES****Fitness**

You do not need to be extremely fit to go trekking in the Everest Region. The range of possible styles of trek, the length and flexibility of stages and the diversity of routes make trekking available to people of different ages and levels of physical strength.

Trekking is a matter of walking – you don't need any particular skills to do it. However, trekking inevitably means spending days in the mountains, changing your routine, abandoning home comforts, and stepping beyond your comfort zone. It means long hours of constant walking, possibly with a heavy rucksack, usually steeply up or down at altitude, often with unpleasant weather as a close companion. You need to be able to cope with a full day's activity in

mountainous terrain, so what you need to practise before the trek is walking. Regular running or any other physical activity will of course help, but walking is most important. Familiarity with mountain walking is especially useful, given the ascents and descents involved, but if you do not live near mountains simply go on frequent long walks in your neighbourhood.

The Everest Region is a moderately demanding trekking destination in Himalayan terms. Easier areas should be chosen by first-time visitors to this mountain range and – even more importantly – first-time trekkers at altitude. The Annapurna Himal or Langtang, among others, are generally considered easier and safer than the Khumbu in terms of altitude and acclimatisation, although the comprehensive tourist infrastructure in the Khumbu vastly aids its exploration. Altitude is the biggest challenge here.

Vaccinations and medical preparations

A number of vaccinations are recommended before a trip to Nepal. These are best started a few months, and at least four weeks, in advance of your visit. Consult your doctor and treat the following as a basic suggestion only. Although no vaccination is mandatory, the following are usually advised: diphtheria, tetanus, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, typhoid, and meningococcal meningitis. Of these, hepatitis A and typhoid vaccines are particularly important as you may get infected through contaminated water or food. In addition, if you haven't already been immunised against tuberculosis (TB), consider getting the vaccine. Those who trek from Jiri during the monsoon, or plan to visit Chitwan, should consider vaccinations for Japanese encephalitis as well as malaria prophylaxis. All visitors should take measures to avoid mosquito bites, as they can transmit Japanese encephalitis and malaria as well as dengue fever. Be aware, too, that there is a serious risk of rabies via dog bites. Rabies vaccinations are often recommended to those travelling to Nepal, and should also be considered. (Contact with stray dogs should be avoided; beware of monkeys too.) For more information about vaccines, check the following sources: www.who.int/ith, https://travelhealthpro.org.uk, www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk, www.nhs.uk/conditions/travel-vaccinations, www.cdc.gov, and www.traveldoctor.info.

It is also advisable to visit a dentist well before your trip, to make sure your teeth are in good condition.

It is important to take some medicines with you on your trek. Make sure

to include drugs used to treat altitude sickness – Diamox (acetazolamide) is an absolute minimum, but carrying Dexamethasone is strongly recommended (see below). You should take painkillers with you as well as medicines to deal with stomach problems. Carrying a wide-range antibiotic is also recommended. All medication should obviously be accompanied by notes on their usage – ask your doctor to help you complete your first aid kit. All the necessary medication can be purchased in pharmacies in Kathmandu without prescription.

Altitude sickness

Altitude sickness can be a reality for those trekking in the Everest Region and the risk should not be ignored or underestimated. If not treated properly, severe forms of the illness can rapidly become fatal.

However, as long as you follow a few simple rules, you should not be affected. Consider the following information as a base for further reading – it has not been written by a doctor and must not be treated as authorised medical advice.

Make sure you understand the process of proper acclimatisation and that you are able to recognise the various symptoms of altitude sickness. Never ignore any symptoms. If you feel unwell at altitude, assume it is altitude-related unless an alternative explanation is obvious. Observe your condition and that of those travelling with you. Remember that anyone can become ill, no matter their number of visits, their age, or fitness.

Consult the following sources:



Villages around Jiri were badly affected by the 2015 earthquake (Trek 1, Section 1)

- 'Travel at High Altitude' – a free book published by Medex, recommended by UIAA, BMC and BMG, available at www.medex.org.uk;
- 'Emergency Field Management of Acute Mountain Sickness, High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema, and High Altitude Cerebral Oedema' – document available at www.theuiaa.org (select 'Safety' > 'Mountain Medicine' > 'High altitude medical advice');
- articles regarding acclimatisation and altitude illness in 'Resources' at www.ismm.org;
- High Altitude Medicine Guide: www.high-altitude-medicine.com;
- www.altitude.org

The higher the altitude, the lower the air pressure. Hence there is less oxygen – as well as other particles – in a single breath. At an altitude of 3400m (Namche Bazaar) the standard barometric pressure is 680hPa (it is about

1013hPa at sea level) – meaning there is only 67% of the oxygen available at sea level. It is 53% at 5275m (EBC). Our bodies adjust to these conditions in a process called acclimatisation. Most of us can adapt to an altitude of about 5000–5500m, but the process takes time. If the rate of acclimatisation is not adequate, a form of altitude sickness occurs. This might be acute mountain sickness (AMS), high-altitude cerebral oedema (HACE) or high-altitude pulmonary oedema (HAPE). When travelling to any altitude above 2500m, acclimatisation must be considered!

AMS is not life-threatening but it can quickly develop into HACE or HAPE if symptoms are ignored. With AMS you may experience symptoms including headache, nausea, loss of appetite, dizziness, sleep disorder and vomiting. Use a painkiller such as ibuprofen or paracetamol, consider acetazolamide (Diamox), hydrate properly and do not