

Everest Region

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sneaking a peek of the highest peak on earth from **Kala Pattar** (p122) or **Gokyo Ri** (p128)
- Scrambling over the rugged Cho La pass on the challenging **Three Passes trek** (p130)
- Joining the monks for the morning prayers at **Tengboche Gumpa** (p114)
- Escaping the crowds at the **Lamjura Bhanjyang pass** (p137) on the Shivalaya to Lukla trek

Mt Everest has been calling out to trekkers and climbers since it first appeared in the telescopes of mountain surveyors, and the trails that climb through the foothills of the world's highest mountain still offer some of the most challenging trekking in Nepal. Like the Annapurna region, the districts of Solu and Khumbu have been extensively developed for trekking, with well-maintained trails and plentiful lodges, but the trekking routes start higher and stay higher, touching the tops of some of the most famous mountains in the Himalaya.

Most trekkers fly into Lukla, climbing steeply through the mountains of Khumbu to Everest Base Camp or the sacred lakes at Gokyo. However, you'll be better able to deal with the effects of the altitude if you walk in via the trails from Shivalaya (near Jiri) or Tumlingtar (near Hile). Because many treks climb above 4000m, acute mountain sickness (AMS) is a serious risk in this region – it is essential to ascend slowly and take the recommended rest days.

Solu Khumbu is the homeland of the Sherpa people, who have become famous for their skills as guides and mountaineers. As often as not, the owner of the lodge you stay at will have climbed some of the tallest mountains on earth. The Buddhist monuments of the Sherpas – stupas, chortens (stone Buddhist monuments), mani walls (built of stones carved with Buddhist prayers), and gompas (monasteries) – mirror the towering landscape all around. Bring extra film or memory cards for your camera as it's easy to go snapping-crazy in the Khumbu.



ENVIRONMENT

The mountains of the Khumbu are so large that they create their own local climate. As you climb through the hills, mixed deciduous forests and scattered rice terraces give way to pine forests, then rhododendrons, then scrub junipers, before finally the only vegetation is low alpine shrubs and grasses. As you walk, scan the skies and the undergrowth for golden eagles and the spectacular Himalayan monal (danphe or impeyan pheasant) with its regal, shimmering green, blue and purple plumage.

In forested areas around Namche Bazaar, Thame, Phortse and Tengboche, keep your eyes peeled for Himalayan tahr and musk deer, often spotted beside trails early in the morning. You may also hear the strange, hoarse call of the muntjak, or barking deer. The predators of the Himalaya are rarely seen but they are out there – the Khumbu is home to both leopards and snow leopards, and allegedly, the fearsome yeti (see the boxed text, p113).

INFORMATION

When to Trek

It is theoretically possible to trek in the Khumbu year-round, but flights are frequently cancelled in winter and during the monsoon because of poor visibility at the Lukla airstrip. The best weather is in autumn, when the skies are clear and temperatures at higher altitudes are more bearable. However, the competition for seats on planes and bed space in lodges can be intense. Spring is a calmer time to visit, though cloud and rain become more frequent in the build-up to the monsoon.

The most serious obstacle to trekking in winter is the cold. Days can be perfectly comfortable, but the mercury plummets as soon as the sun sinks behind the mountains. At some time during the season from

October to March there is certain to be a storm or two that will blanket the countryside with snow. Check the weather conditions locally before attempting to cross any high-altitude passes in winter.

Maps

Nepa Maps produces a series of superior maps of the Everest region – so many, in fact, that other publishers rarely get a look-in. Useful maps include the 1:50,000 *Lukla to Everest Base Camp* and *Trekking Lukla to Gokyo*, and the handy-sized 1:60,000 *Lukla to Everest Base Camp Pocket Map* and *Lukla to Gokyo Pocket Map*. For an overview of the entire region, the 1:100,000 *Jiri to Everest* map covers the trails from Jiri all the way to Everest Base Camp and Gokyo. Less-visited areas are covered by the 1:125,000 *New & Old Trekking Routes to Khumbu* and 1:125,000 *Jiri-Pikey-Everest*, which also covers the Dudh Kunda–Pikey Cultural Trail.

Himalaya Kartographisches produces the 1:50,000 *Everest Base Camp* and the 1:60,000 *Everest to Gokyo*, which has handy inserts of the Cho La and Renjo La passes. Sherpa Maps publishes a decent 1:50,000 *Lukla to Everest Base Camp* map. There are two OK maps published by Map Point (Nepal Map Publisher): the 1:50,000 *Gokyo Six Sacred Lakes* and the 1:125,000 *Khumbu*.

National Geographic prints the 1:50,000 *Everest Base Camp Adventure Map* and 1:125,000 *Khumbu Adventure Map*, which shows the walk in from Jiri. For a bit of mountaineering nostalgia, pick up the reprint of the 1:90,000 *Mt Everest 50th Anniversary Map*, which shows the ascent paths of famous mountaineering groups.

PLACE NAMES

There are both Sherpa names and Nepali names for most villages in the Khumbu. The Nepali names are used here because these



EMERGENCY FACILITIES IN THE KHUMBU

The Khumbu has better medical facilities than most mountain districts, but there is only one hospital convenient for trekkers – the **Khunde Hospital** (Map pp110–11; ☎ 038-640053, 640013) just north of Namche Bazaar, built by Sir Edmund Hillary in 1965. Above Namche, the only option is the volunteer-staffed health post at Pheriche (Map pp96–7), run by the **Himalayan Rescue Association** (HRA; www.himalayanrescue.org). There are telephones at every trekking stop that can be used to summon a rescue helicopter, but even emergency flights rely on clear weather. Prevention is better than treatment – trek slowly to avoid problems with acute mountain sickness (AMS).

appear on all official maps and records, but locals may use alternative names in tribal languages, which are listed in parenthesis after the more common name.

Books

You could fill a library with books about climbing Everest. *Everest: The Mountaineering History* by Walt Unsworth gives a detailed history of mountaineering on the peak. *Forerunners to Everest*, by Rene Dittert, Gabriel Chevalley and Raymond Lambert, is a classic description of the two Swiss expeditions to Everest in 1952, with a fine description of the old approach trek.

Into Thin Air by Jon Krakauer is a powerful account of the 1996 Everest disaster, later made into a terrible TV movie. *Everest: Mountain Without Mercy* by Broughton Coburn and Tim Cahill tells the same story using pictures and first-person accounts from the IMAX team that was filming at the same time as the ill-fated expedition.

Clint Willis' *Boys of Everest* tells the story of a fanatical group of climbers led by Chris Bonington. *The Ghosts of Everest*, by Jochen Hemmleb, Larry A Johnson and Eric R Simonson, is a fascinating account of the search for Mallory and Irvine, who vanished on the peak in 1924. *Touching My Father's Soul* by Jamling Tenzing Norgay is a rousing account of a son following in his famous father's footsteps.

Sagarmatha, Mother of the Universe by Margaret Jefferies is a good introduction to the terrain of the Sagarmatha National Park. *High in the Thin Cold Air*, by Edmund Hillary and Desmond Doig, describes many of the projects undertaken by the Himalayan Trust, including the investigation of the Khumjung 'yeti skull' (see p113). *Schoolhouse in the Clouds* by Edmund Hillary describes the construction of Khumjung school and other projects in the Khumbu. For more books on the Everest region, see the boxed text, p29.

Information Sources

Apart from talking to trekking agencies, you can enquire about current conditions in Sagarmatha National Park at the **Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation** (Map p78; ☎ 01-4222406, 4227926; www.dnpwc.gov.np; Pradarshanti; ☎ 9am-2pm Sun-Fri) in Kathmandu.

In Lukla (Map p99) and Namche Bazaar (Map p105), drop into the offices of the **Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee** (SPCC; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) for information on responsible travel and conservation in the Khumbu.

Permits & Regulations

All of the treks described in this chapter pass through the Sagarmatha National Park, so you must pay the Rs 1000 entry fee, either in advance at the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation in Kathmandu (see Information Sources, left) or at the park entry checkpoint at Monjo. You must also obtain the usual TIMS trekking permit (see p370). To climb Island Peak, Mera Peak or any of the other trekking peaks in the region, you must apply for a special permit – see the Trekking Peaks chapter (p345) for more information.

Trekking groups are required to use kerosene instead of firewood in Sagarmatha National Park and this is strongly encouraged elsewhere. You should be able to find kerosene in Lukla and Namche Bazaar, but expect to pay upwards of Rs 90 per litre.

Foreigners are not permitted to trek north from Thame to the Nangpa La, the pass leading to Tibet. However, you are allowed to follow this route as far north as the turn-off to the Renjo La, the pass leading to Gokyo.

Accommodation

Few independent trekkers bother to camp in the Khumbu region because there are so many lodges along the trails. However, there is still massive competition for beds at the height of trekking season, particularly on the trail to Everest Base Camp. Some lodges have dorms to handle the overflow of trekkers, but you may find yourself sleeping on the floor in the dining room if no beds are available. A good way to guarantee a bed for the night is to stop between the established overnight stops – you rarely have to walk more than an hour to find another place to stay.

North of Lukla, lodges are broadly identical stone houses with tiny box rooms separated by plywood partitions. All have restaurants serving a standard menu of dal bhat, fried potatoes, noodle soup and loose interpretations of Western food, along with



tea, soft drinks, beers and spirits. You may be able to negotiate a free room if you stay in the same lodge for a few days and take all your meals at in the lodge restaurant.

Throughout the Khumbu, rooms with shared bathroom cost Rs 100 to Rs 200. In Namche Bazaar, you can also find rooms with private bathrooms for Rs 500 to US\$15. Most lodges will let you camp in their grounds for Rs 50 per person. Expect to pay upwards of Rs 200 for a meal and Rs 350 or more for a big bottle of Nepali beer. Unless otherwise stated, these prices apply to all the lodges in this chapter.

There are also several upmarket hotel-style lodges in the hills. Paying extra usually gets you a private bathroom and a gas-powered heater for your room.

The upmarket chain **Yeti Mountain Home** (☎ in Kathmandu 01-4356482; www.yetimountainhome.com) operates attractive stone lodges in Lukla, Phakding, Namche Bazaar, Thame and Kongde. Rates start at US\$115 per person per night (from US\$185 per night at Kongde), plus meals.

Nepal Luxury Treks (☎ in Kathmandu 01-4371537; www.nepalluxurytreks.com) runs the superior Everest Summit Lodges in Lukla, Monjo, Tashinga (near Phortse), Mende (near Thame) and Pangboche. Priority is given to guests on the company's treks, but if there is space, rooms with heaters and private bathrooms start at US\$70/90 for a single/double.

Asian Trekking (☎ in Kathmandu 01-4424249; www.astrek.com/asiantrekking) runs the mid-priced Eco Lodges (formerly Himalayan Chain Resorts) at Phakding, Khumjung and Lobuche, with rates starting from US\$20 per person.

On the ridge above Namche Bazaar are the famous **Hotel Everest View** (www.hoteleverestview.com) and **Shyangboche Panorama Hotel** (www.everestpanorama.com), two of the highest hotels in the world – see p113.

Guides & Porters

Many people organise porters and guides before flying to Lukla, but sherpas crowd around the exit gate to Lukla airstrip every morning offering their services. Many are every bit as professional as guides and porters hired in Kathmandu, but it pays to find someone who speaks enough English to understand you.

When negotiating a fee, make sure you know what you are getting for your money.

If the fee does not include food and lodging, you will have to pay for meals, accommodation and usually *chhang* (rice beer) or *rakshi* (rice wine) for your guide or porter at every stop. Porters can be temperamental, so it helps to hire a guide who can act as *sirdar* (group leader) and manage the group.

Supplies & Equipment

If you've forgotten anything, you can buy or rent most items in Lukla or Namche Bazaar. Lodges throughout the Khumbu sell batteries, sunscreen, films and memory cards and, of course, imported chocolate bars. Prices for everything shoot up dramatically the further you get from the airstrip at Lukla.

There is no need to carry ice axes or crampons for any of the treks listed in this chapter, though these might be useful in snowy conditions on the Cho La, Renjo La or Kongma La passes (see p130).

Electricity

There is electricity throughout the Solu Khumbu region, thanks to widespread use of solar panels and hydroelectricity. However, in many smaller lodges the power runs directly to the lights and there are no sockets for recharging electronic devices. Even places with electric sockets will charge upwards of Rs 100 per hour to charge your batteries.

Festivals

There are four major festivals in Solu Khumbu, all linked to Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan lunar calendar.

GYALPO LOSAR (TIBETAN NEW YEAR)

Tibetan New Year is celebrated with masked dances, performances of *lhamo* (Tibetan opera) and other festivities at gompas and shrines throughout the Khumbu. The festival is celebrated at the end of the 12th month of the Tibetan calendar, which usually falls in late February or early March.

BUDDHA JAYANTI

Also known as Saga Dawa, Buddha Jayanti celebrates the birthday of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (the historical Buddha), with parades to stupas and gompas, and the lighting of butter lamps at sacred sites. The festival falls on the full moon of the fourth Tibetan month, which is normally in May.



MANI RIMDU

The most famous Sherpa festival, Mani Rimdu is celebrated for three days at the monasteries of Tengboche, Thame and Chiwang (near Phaplu). On the second day of the festival, monks don elaborate masks and costumes and perform ritualistic *chaam* dances that symbolise the triumph of Buddhism over Bön, the ancient animistic religion of Tibet. Sherpas from all over the Khumbu flock to attend the spectacle and the final evening turns into the Sherpa equivalent of an all-night rave.

At Tengboche the celebrations start on the full moon of the ninth Sherpa month, which normally falls in October or November. As large crowds of Westerners attend the ceremony, both hotel and tent space is hard to come by and the monastery charges for tickets. For details see www.tengboche.org.

Similar festivals are held at Chiwang in the 10th Tibetan month, typically in November or December, and at Thame on the full moon of the fourth Tibetan month, which normally falls in May.

DUMJE

Sherpas celebrate the birth of Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava), the Indian saint who introduced Buddhism to Tibet, with six days of rituals and feasting, normally in June or July. The largest celebrations are at Namche Bazaar, Pangboche, Khumjung and Thame.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most visitors to the Khumbu fly into the tiny airstrip at Lukla, which is served by dozens of daily flights from Kathmandu. The minimum timescale for a trek from Lukla to Everest Base Camp or Gokyo and back is two weeks – any less, and you will be exposing yourself to the risk of AMS. Because flights to Lukla do not always take off as planned, always allow a few spare days for your flight back to Kathmandu. For details of flights, see p100.

The tiny grass airstrip at Shyangboche no longer receives planes, but it is possible to charter a helicopter from here back to Kathmandu (see p381). Because of the risk of AMS, it is never wise to fly *into* Shyangboche.

Alternative airstrips in the Khumbu region include Phaplu (US\$112 from Kath-

mandu), a three-day walk southwest from Lukla, and Lamidanda (US\$98/52 from Kathmandu/Biratnagar), a five-day walk south of Lukla.

You can also access the Khumbu region on foot, avoiding the crowds and improving your fitness and acclimatisation for the high mountain trails. Buses run from Kathmandu to Shivalaya, the start of a six-day hike to Lukla – see p133.

An interesting exit route from the Khumbu is the nine-day trek to Tumlingtar (see p236), connecting with buses to Kathmandu or the eastern Terai.

GATEWAYS

Jiri

☎ 049 / elevation 2100m

Now that buses run directly to Shivalaya, most trekkers skip Jiri (Map pp90–1). However, the village is a useful starting point for treks to Lukla if you miss the one daily bus to Shivalaya. Jiri is the largest settlement of the Jirel tribe, a Tibeto-Burman people with cultural links to the Sherpas and Sunwars, but it looks like any other roadhead bazaar. There are several decent lodges and lots of well-stocked shops, and you can walk to Shivalaya in half a day on a muddy trail that has largely been replaced by a dirt road.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are numerous lodges on the main road through Jiri – unless otherwise stated, all offer rooms with shared bathrooms for Rs 100 per person.

The **Sagarmatha Lodge** (☎ 690315) has decent wooden rooms, a good restaurant and an agreeable traveller vibe. Other good choices include the large Hotel Jiri View, the Cherdung Lodge across the road and the Hotel Jirel Gabila, set just off the main drag, facing onto a flower-filled garden. Above a shop in the tallest building in Jiri, **Hotel Gauri Himal** (☎ 690342; s/d Rs 250/500) has clean Nepali-style hotel rooms.

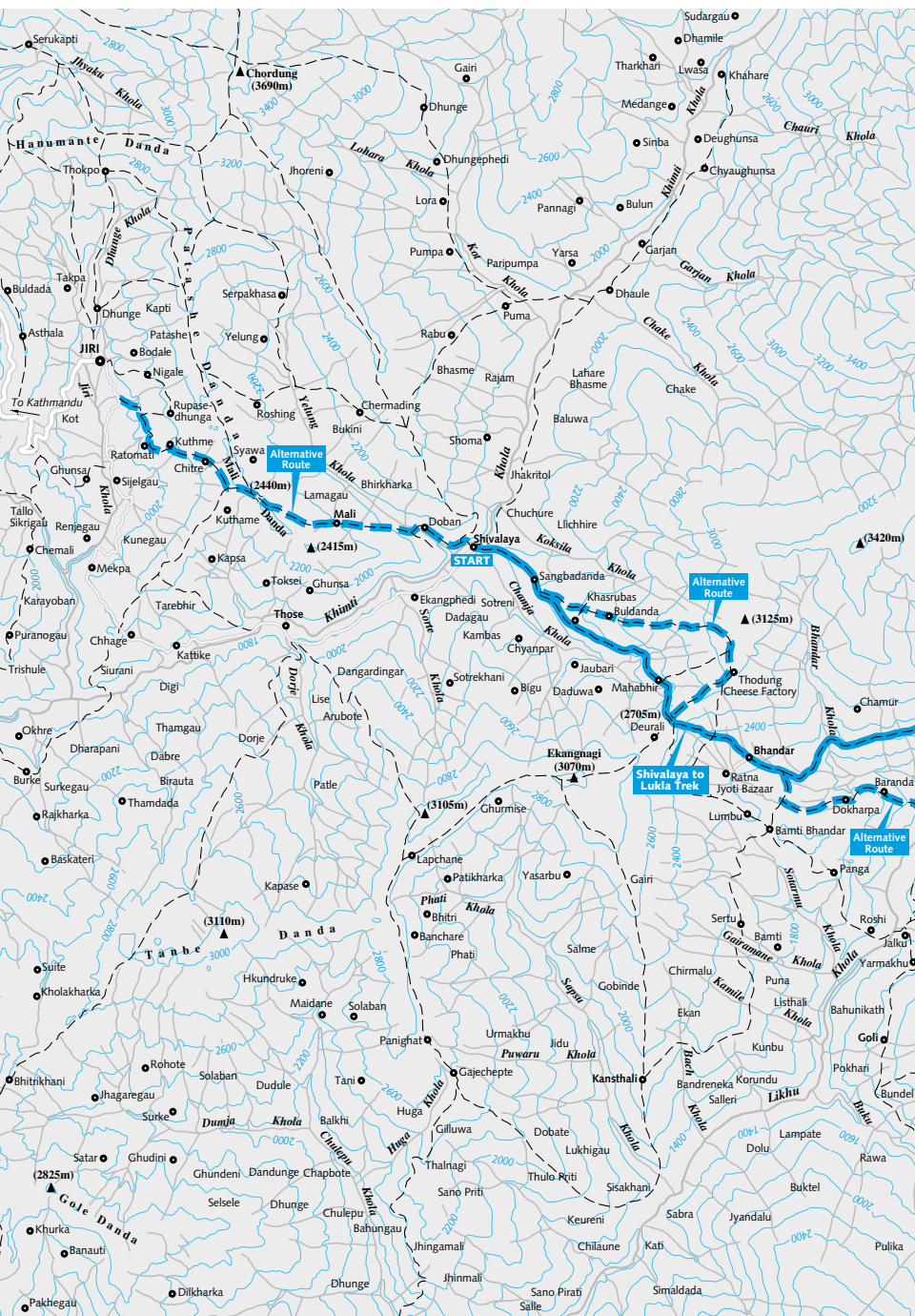
GETTING THERE & AWAY

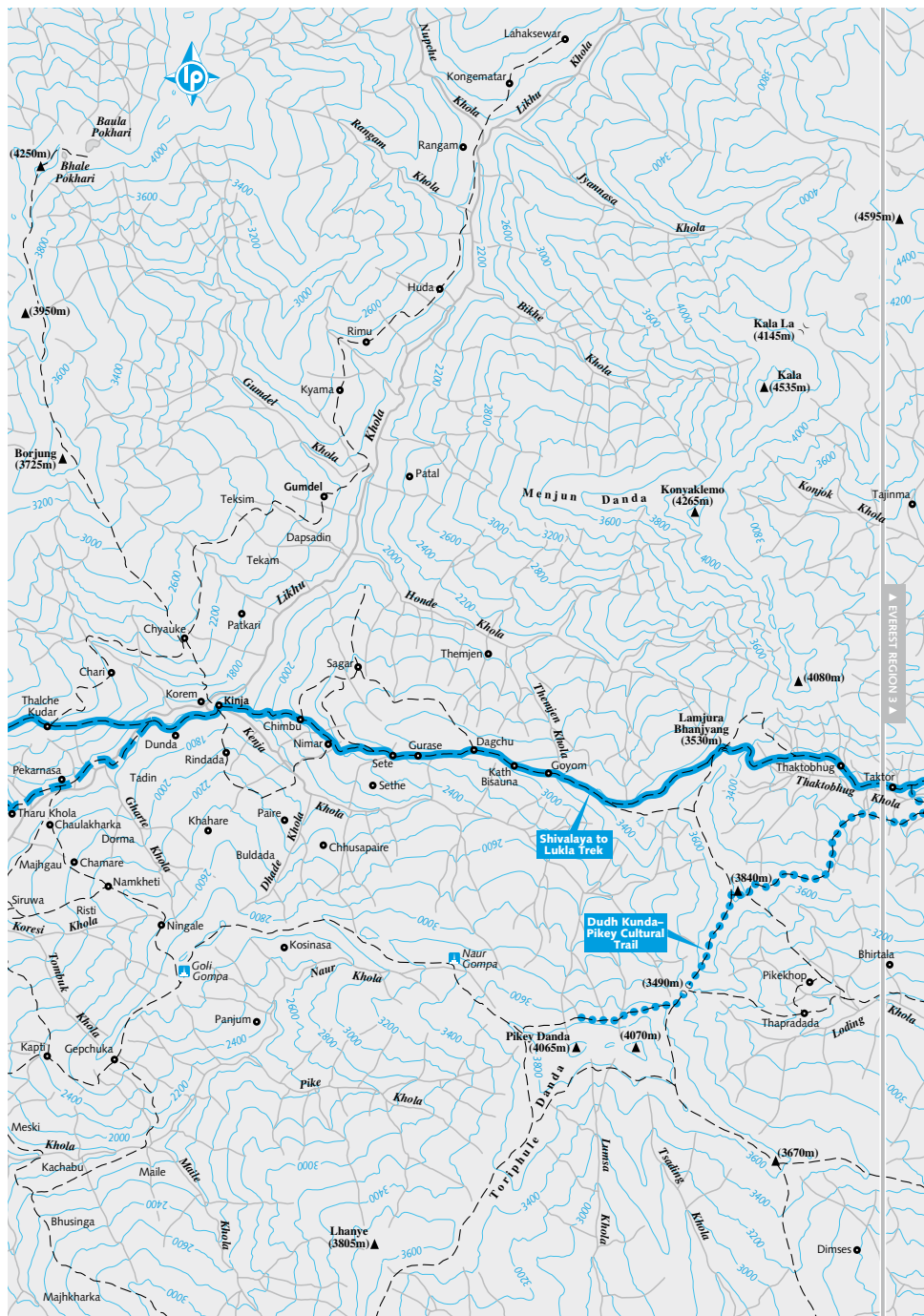
There are around five daily buses from Kathmandu's City (Ratna Park) bus stand to Jiri (Rs 300 to Rs 450, 10 to 12 hours), leaving between 5.30am and 8.30am. The 6am bus continues to Shivalaya. Travelling

(Continued on page 98)



EVEREST REGION 1

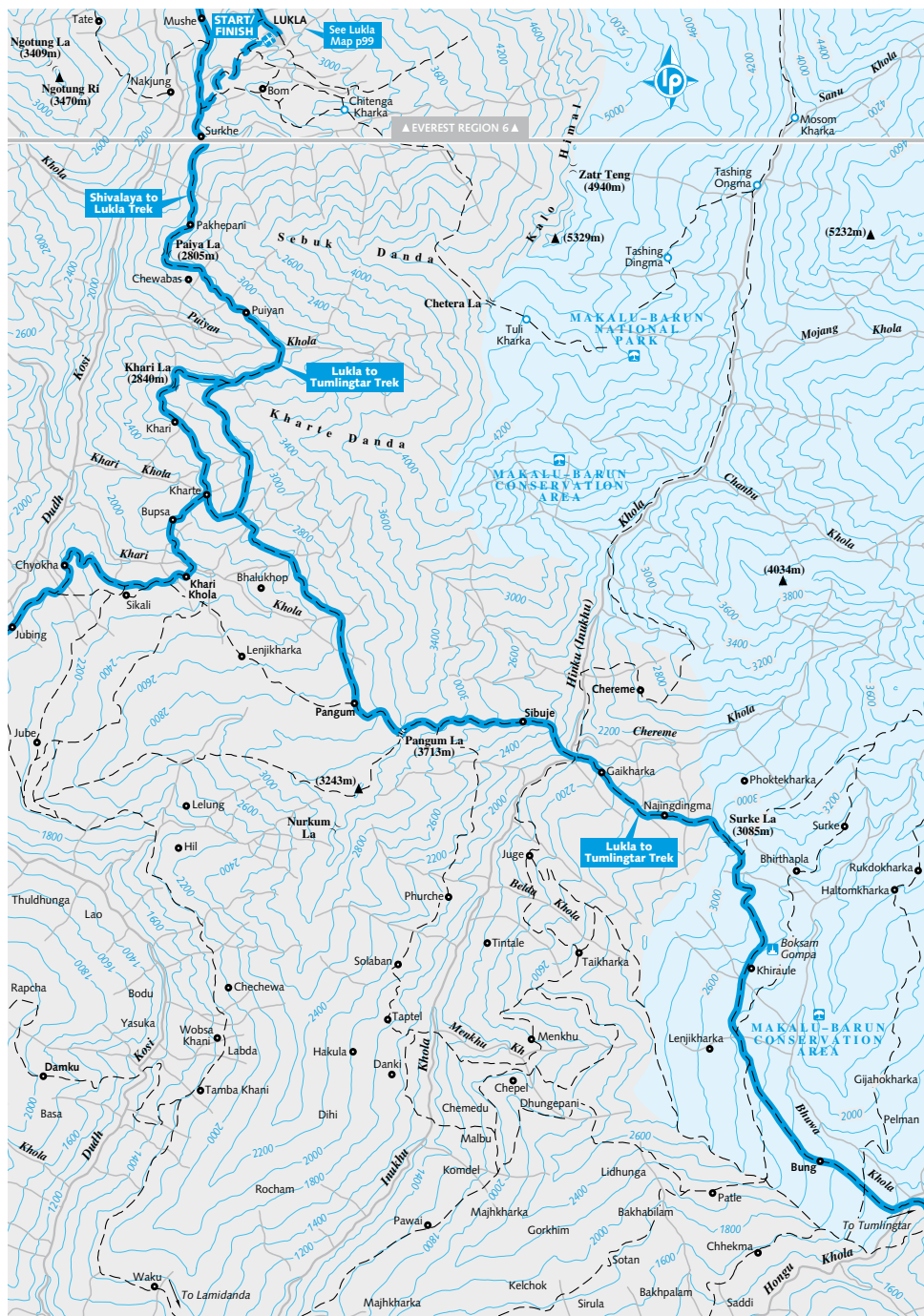




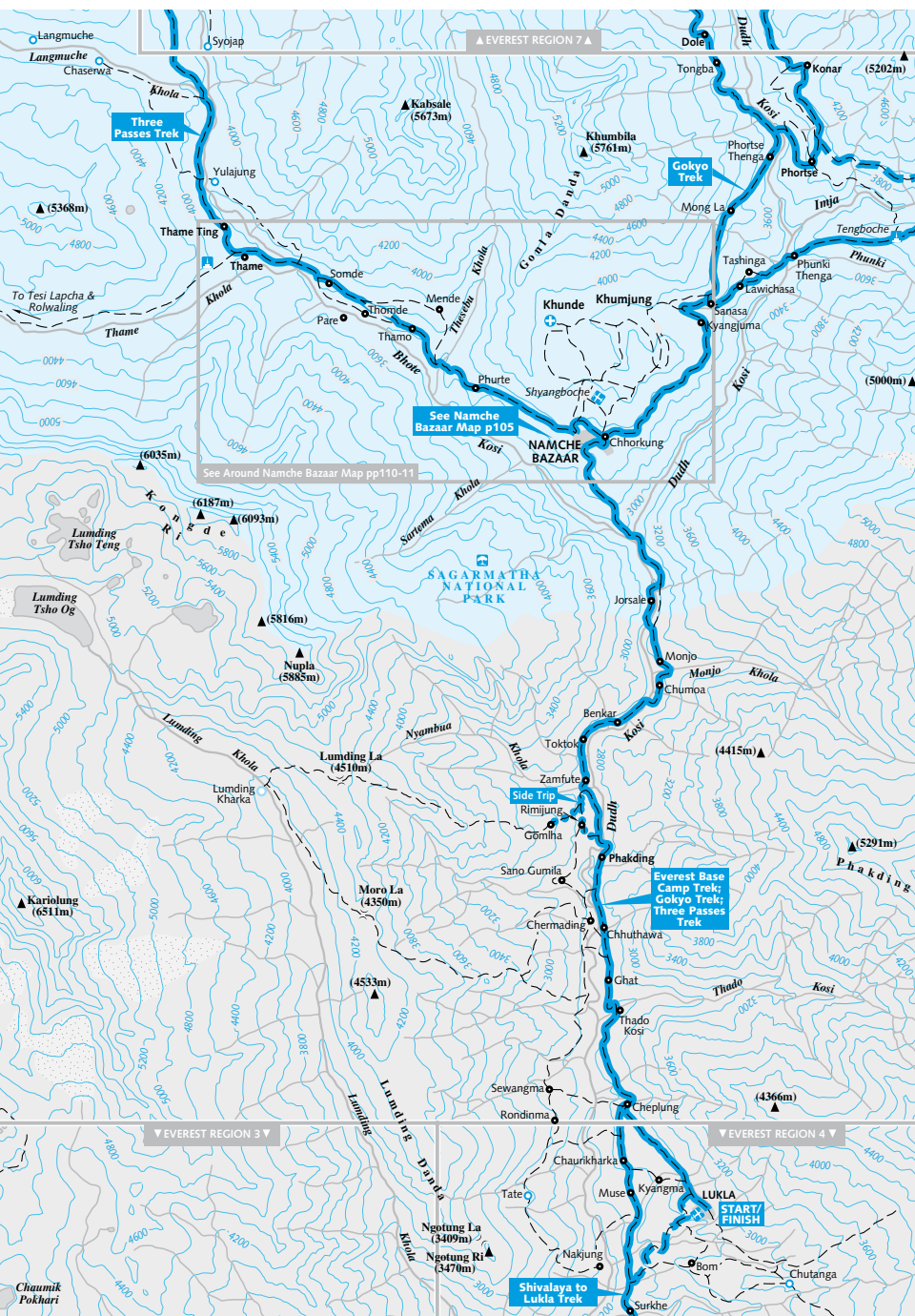
This map illustrates the Everest region in Nepal, highlighting two primary trekking routes: the **Dudh Kunda-Pikey Cultural Trail** and the **Shivalaya to Lukla Trek**. The trail starts in the north near the border with Tibet and descends through a series of villages including Lapcha La, Trakshindu La, and Beni, eventually reaching Salleri. The Shivalaya to Lukla Trek branches off from the main trail near Beni and leads towards Lukla. The map also shows the Dudh Kunda lake and the surrounding mountainous terrain with various peaks and ridges. Key locations marked include Lukla, Phaplu, and Salleri. The map includes a scale bar and a north arrow.

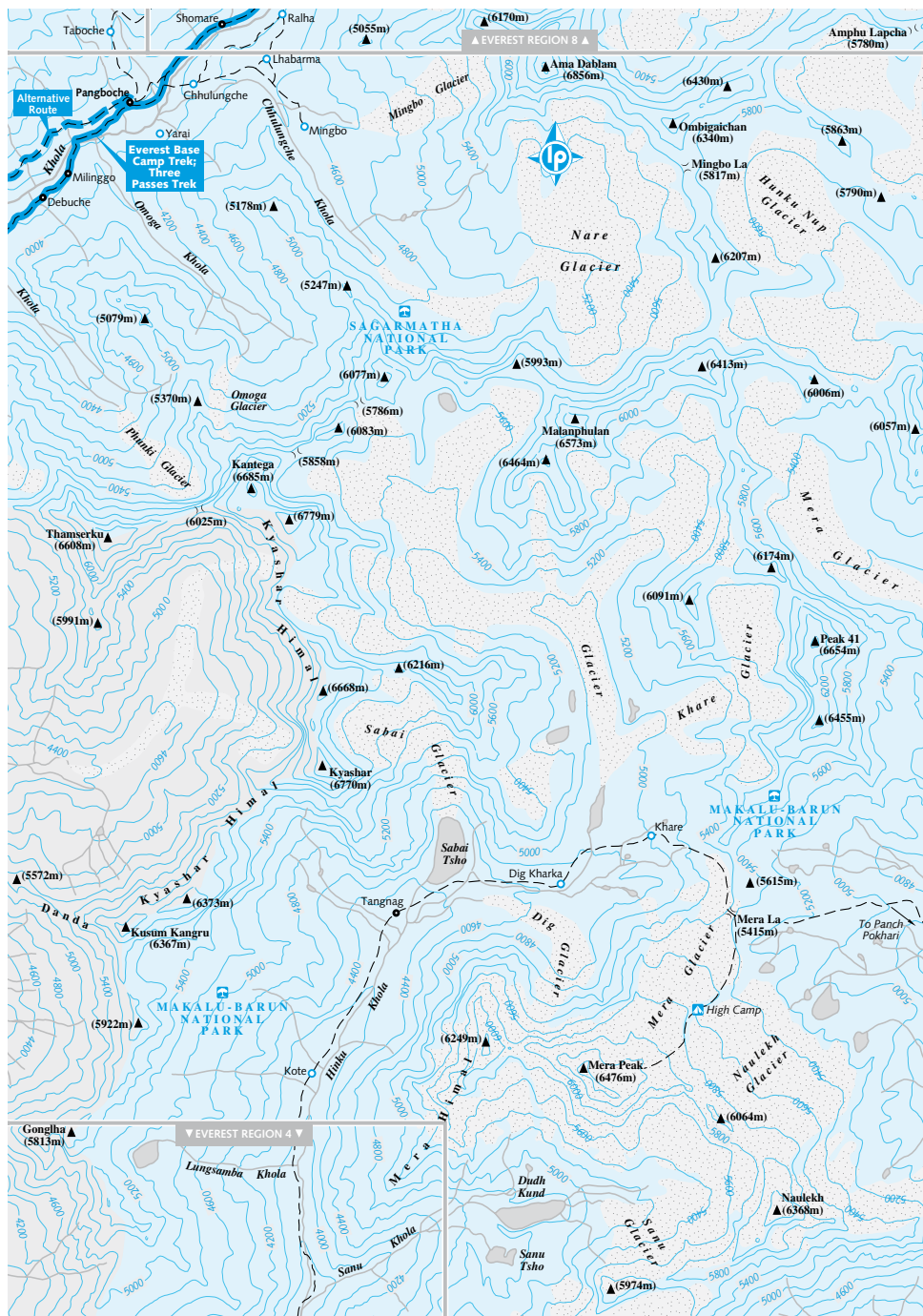
0 4 km
0 2 miles
Scale 1:125,000

EVEREST REGION 4



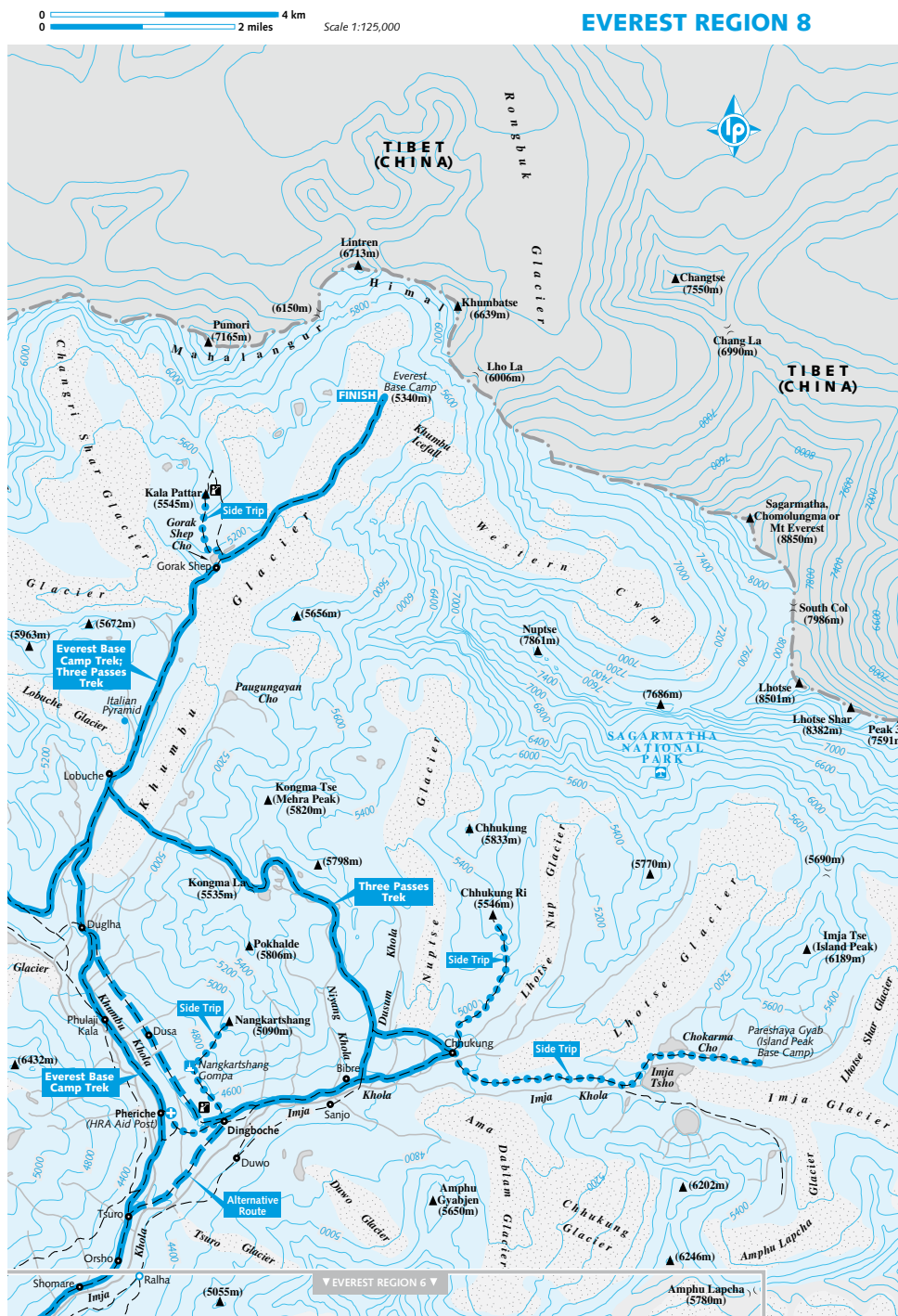
EVEREST REGION 5





EVEREST REGION 7





(Continued from page 89)

in the other direction, buses leave for Kathmandu between 5.30am and 7.30am; you can book seats the day before at the bus stand. Heading to Shivalaya, you might also be able to hitch a lift on a goods truck, though you will be expected to pay for the ride.

To walk to Shivalaya (three to four hours), follow the road south from the bus stand into the forest and turn uphill on an obvious muddy trail after a small stream. The trail climbs through the villages of Ratomati and Chitre to the Mali Danda (2440m) and then drops down past Mali into the valley of the Yelung Khola, meeting the larger Khimti Khola just west of Shivalaya. The trail follows a series of short cuts and stretches of dusty dirt road and it's easy to get lost – ask for directions to Shivalaya as you go.

Shivalaya

elevation 1767m

Now that the road has been extended along the Khimti Khola Valley to Shivalaya (Map pp90–1), there is no need to trek all the way from Jiri. Buses run daily between Kathmandu and Shivalaya and the trail to Lukla climbs straight up from the village bazaar. There's nothing much to see in the village, but the rusty chain-link bridge is a rare example of the kind of bridges found throughout the region before international charities started building modern suspension bridges.

SLEEPING & EATING

All the lodges in Shivalaya are wooden houses with boxy rooms for Rs 100 per person. The best choices are next to the suspension bridge over the Khimti Khola at the north end of the village – try the Paradise Lodge, New Sherpa Guide Lodge or River Guest House. Closer to the bazaar and set above shops are the rustic Solu Khumbu Lodge and the optimistically named Shivalaya Hilton Lodge. There are more lodges along the main path through the village.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A bus leaves Kathmandu's Ratna Park bus stand daily for Shivalaya (Rs 550, 12 to 14 hours) at 6am, returning at 5.30am. You also might be able to hitch a ride on a

freight truck bound for Jiri or Kathmandu, though you'll probably have to pay for your ride.

If there is no bus, you can walk to Jiri in three to four hours – see p89 for a description of the route.

Lukla

☎ 019 / elevation 2800m

The main trailhead for the Khumbu region, Lukla sprawls around the steeply angled runway of Tenzing-Hillary Airport, set high in the mountains at a giddy 2800m. The single cobbled street is lined with lodges and shops selling and renting trekking gear, and the ceremonial gateway at the north end of town marks the start of the trail to Everest Base Camp and Gokyo.

The red and white **gompa** at the bottom of Lukla has a small religious school that produces and sells *thangkas* (cloth paintings). Every Thursday, there's a lively **market** on the open area below the Lukla Resort.

For good mountain views, climb the hill above the airstrip to a small pavilion with a large statue of Sakyamuni (the historical Buddha).

INFORMATION

For information on responsible travel and conservation in the Khumbu, drop into the offices of the **Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee** (SPCC; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri) near the Khumbu Lodge.

If you have any gear you don't need at the end of your trip, **Porters Progress** (☎ 01-4410020; www.portersprogressnepal.org; ☎ 10am–4pm) will put your donations to good use, making sure porters are not left out in the cold.

Lukla has two internet cafes with slow connections charging Rs 10 per hour (open 8am to 7pm, providing there is electricity). The Karma Inn Communications Centre can also change US dollars, UK pounds and euros. If you have any other currencies, try the **Rastriya Banijya Bank** (☎ 10.30am–3pm Sun–Fri).

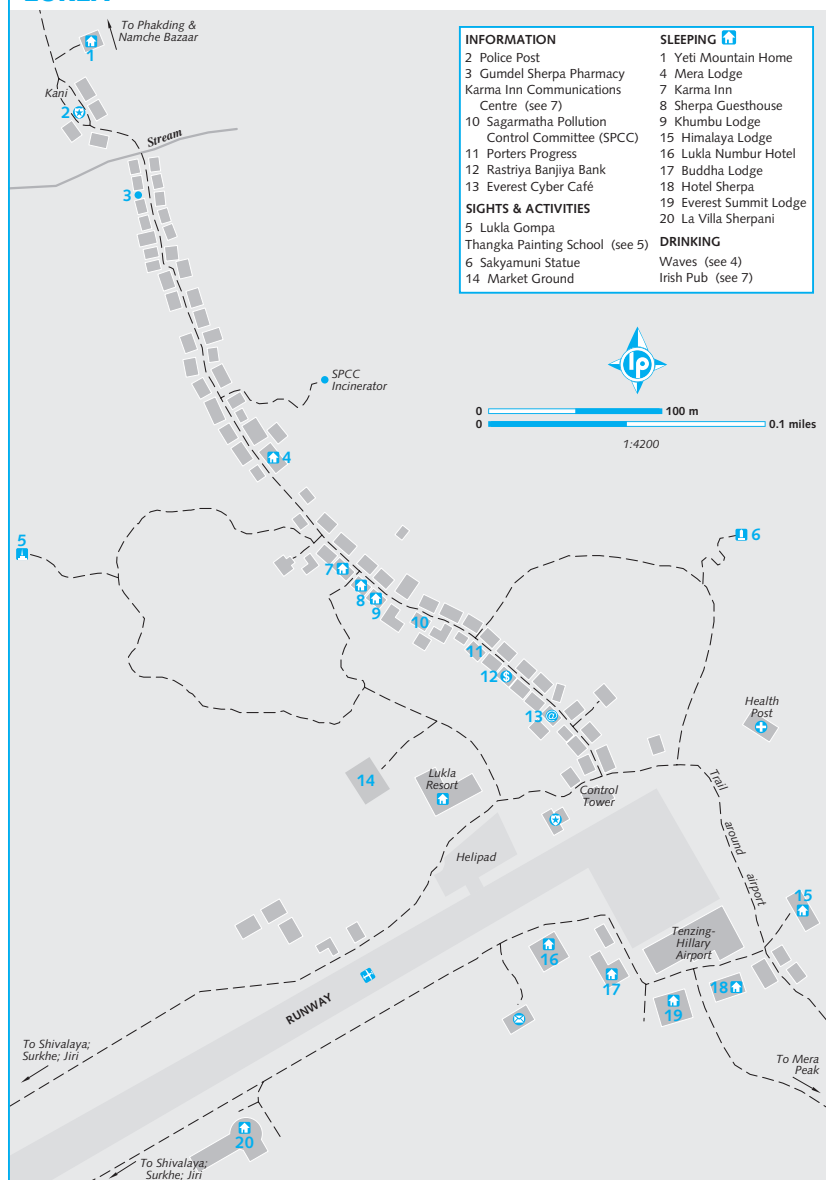
You can usually find Diamox tablets at the small Gumdel Sherpa Pharmacy at the north end of the village.

SLEEPING & EATING

Lukla is jam-packed with accommodation so you can afford to be selective. Unless otherwise stated, rooms at the following



LUKLA



AIR SAFETY AT LUKLA

Considering its location and the prevailing weather conditions in the Himalaya, it is remarkable that there have not been more accidents at Lukla. Nevertheless, the airport has seen a number of tragic air disasters over the years. There were fatal crashes in 1991, 2004 and most recently in October 2008, when a Yeti Airlines Twin Otter hit rocks below the airstrip, killing 18 passengers and crew.

This record does not necessarily reflect the safety standards of the airlines involved. All the accidents at Lukla have been caused by bad weather, affecting visibility on the final approach. By the standards of short take-off and landing (STOL) airstrips around the world, Lukla has a fairly good record, but if you are a nervous flyer you might prefer to walk into Lukla from Shivalaya (see p133).

lodges cost from Rs 100; camping costs Rs 50 per person. The following places are just a few recommendations – there are many more lodges that are just as attractive as the options listed here.

At the end of the airport is the pleasant Himalaya Lodge, with a cosy wood-lined restaurant and a big garden where you can watch aeroplanes take off and land. Immediately south of the runway are the large Buddha Lodge and Hotel Sherpa, which both fill up fast because of their proximity to the airport entrance.

Downhill is the tasteful **Lukla Numbur Hotel** (r with bathroom Rs 500), which woos trekking groups with private bathrooms, a ski chalet-style wooden lounge and a pretty garden. Nearby is the large and lavish **Everest Summit Lodge** (☎ in Kathmandu 01-4371537; www.nepalluxurytreks.com; s/d with bathroom from US\$70/90). Rooms are immaculate and plentiful heaters keep the place toasty warm.

Close to the end of the runway is the agreeable **La Villa Sherpani** (☎ 038-21145; www.lavillasherpani.com; r from Rs 1000), a rare midrange choice with comfortable rooms in a stone chalet set in a massive garden. Rates fluctuate so ask when you arrive.

The track running north from the airstrip is one continuous strip of lodges offering cheap rooms with shared bathrooms. The stone-built Khumbu Lodge and Sherpa Guesthouse are well-established favourites. Another good choice is the large green Mera Lodge; the attached Waves pub is a fine spot for a celebratory, end-of-trek knees-up. Closer to the airport is the similar Karma Inn, with the popular Irish pub and a reliable internet cafe.

At the north end of town is the upmarket **Yeti Mountain Home** (☎ in Kathmandu 01-4356482;

www.yetimountainhome.com; r from US\$105), with smart, heated rooms and a restaurant full of low Tibetan tables in a stone building above the main trail.

If you get bored in the evening, there are several **snooker halls** (per game Rs 100) along the main drag.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Set at 2800m and sloping uphill at an angle of 12 degrees, Tenzing-Hillary Airport can only accommodate tiny Twin Otter or Dornier aircraft. During the trekking season there are up to 100 flights daily to and from Kathmandu, carrying trekkers, porters, guides and cargo.

The list of airlines flying to Lukla changes yearly – at the time of writing there were flights with Nepal Airlines, Yeti Airlines, Sita Air and Agni Air. The going rate for one-way tickets from Kathmandu is US\$120. If you need to buy a ticket for your guide or porter, Nepalis are charged around Rs 3000.

Note that flights are regularly delayed or cancelled at short notice if there is insufficient visibility at the airstrip. If this happens at the Kathmandu end, the airline will normally find space for you on the next available flight. If aircraft are grounded at Lukla, it can lead to days of delays and rebookings. For this reason, it would be foolish to book a flight from Lukla to Kathmandu fewer than three days before your flight out of Kathmandu.

It is a good idea to reconfirm your flights, particularly when heading from Lukla to Kathmandu. Airline offices in Lukla are open for an hour or so in the afternoon for reconfirmation – usually from 3pm to 4pm. Many guesthouses will do this on your behalf.



EVEREST BASE CAMP

Duration 16 days

Max Elevation 5545m

Difficulty medium-hard

Season October to December and February to May

Start/Finish Lukla (p98)

Summary The definitive Himalayan trek, flying into Lukla and climbing to the foot of Mt Everest, through breathless mountain landscapes. Your destination is either Everest Base Camp or the stunning viewpoint at Kala Pattar.

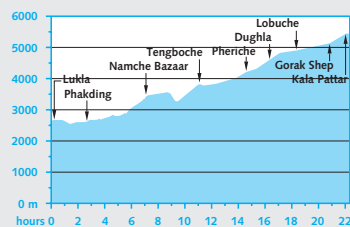
EVEREST BASE CAMP - TIMES

The following are trekking times only; stops are not included.

Day	Section	Hours
1	Lukla to Cheplung	1:15
	Cheplung to Phakding	1:15
2	Phakding to Benkar	1:30
	Benkar to Monjo	1:00
	Monjo to Namche Bazaar	3:00
3	Rest day	
4	Namche Bazaar to Sanasa	1:00
	Sanasa to Phunki Thenga	1:30
	Phunki Thenga to Tengboche	1:30
5	Rest day	
6	Tengboche to Pangboche	1:15
	Pangboche to Orsho	1:15
	Orsho to Pheriche/Dingboche	1:00
7	Rest day	
8	Pheriche/Dingboche to Dughla	2:00
9	Dughla to Lobuche	2:30
10	Lobuche to Gorak Shep	2:30
11	Gorak Shep to Everest Base Camp	6:00
	Gorak Shep to Kala Pattar	4:00
12	Gorak Shep to Lobuche	2:00
13	Lobuche to Pheriche/Dingboche	3:00
14	Pheriche/Dingboche to Tengboche	2:30
15	Tengboche to Namche Bazaar	4:30
16	Namche Bazaar to Lukla	6:00

There is a powerful mystique surrounding the trek to the foot of Mt Everest. By following this route, you will be following in the footsteps of great mountaineers like Reinhold Messner, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. As you climb through the foothills of the world's highest mountain, the terrain

Lukla to Everest Base Camp



soars on all sides like jagged shards of glass. The trails are steep and the altitude hangs on your muscles like a diving belt, but the sense of achievement at the end of the trek is quite profound.

However, this is not a mountaineering expedition or a wilderness survival experience. There are trekking lodges every few hundred metres along the trails and tens of thousands of trekkers storm the trails every year. Competition for accommodation can be fierce, particularly during the peak trekking season from October to November and March to May.

You should also be aware that views of Mt Everest are not guaranteed. Although you stand a good chance of a clear view in the morning, many trekkers climb to the summit of Kala Pattar, only to find that the peaks have vanished into a swirling mass of vapour. You will have more fun if you set aside any preconceptions about what to expect from this trek and allow the journey to be the destination.

Because of the risk of AMS, it takes a minimum of two weeks to climb to Everest Base Camp or Kala Pattar and return to Lukla. You don't have to sit around on rest days – there are lots of interesting side treks that will improve your fitness and acclimatisation before you head up the mountain.

Most trekkers fly into and out from Lukla, but it is also possible to walk in or out in around one week from Shivalaya to the southwest – see p133 for a description of this route. An alternative approach or exit trek is the nine-day hike from Tumblingtar to the southeast – see p236.

Rather than walking the same way twice, you can trek to Everest Base Camp or Kala Pattar, then climb over the 5420m Cho La

WARNING

Be alert for the symptoms of altitude sickness (p391) on this trek, and follow the recommended rest days. These are very important for acclimatisation and will allow you to see much more of the Khumbu region than you'll see if you rush directly to Base Camp.

to Gokyo, returning to Namche Bazaar via Machhermo or Phortse – see p124 for details. Another interesting option is to loop around from Lobuche over the 5535m Kongma La to Dingboche. You can combine both these options as part of the outstanding Three Passes trek (p130).

THE TREK (SEE MAPS PP94–7)

Day 1: Lukla to Phakding

2½ hours, 200m descent, 50m ascent

It's an easy and gentle first day from Lukla to Phakding. The trail starts at the north end of Lukla, passing a *kani* (ceremonial gatehouse) and a police checkpoint where you must present your TIMS card.

Within a few minutes of leaving Lukla, you'll probably spot your first yaks hauling gear for trekking groups – these beasts of burden will not give way to pedestrians so step to the side of the trail to let them pass. As an aid to identification, true yaks have thick woolly coats hanging down to their knees. Anything less hairy is probably a *dzo* or *dzopkyo*, a cross-breed between a yak and a cow.

Leaving Lukla, the trail drops steeply then runs level above the village of **Kyangma**, which has a large gompa and a school founded by Sir Edmund Hillary. Nearby are the Sherpa villages of **Muse** and **Chaurikharka**, which are also worth exploring if you have an afternoon to kill in Lukla.

About 40 minutes from Lukla, you'll enter the village of **Cheplung** (Chablung; 2700m), where a signposted trail turns south towards Jiri and Shivalaya near the Hilltop View Lodge. There are several places to stay along the trail – the Khumbila Guesthouse and Amadablam Lodge have pleasant front terraces and the imposing Norbu Linkha Guesthouse has good rooms and valley views from the overhanging balconies on its upper floors. There are more lodges across

the stream. Above the village, squeezed into a cave at the bottom of soaring cliffs, is the tiny **Taktag Gompa**.

As you continue north from Cheplung, you'll catch your first views of the Dudh Kosi River roaring along the bottom of the valley. The trail descends through a community forest, before crossing a swaying metal suspension bridge above the Thado Kosi Khola. Just beyond the bridge is another cluster of trekking lodges, including the pleasant Saino Lodge and Kusum View Lodge. The view in question is of **Kusum Kangru** (6367m), the most difficult of the trekking peaks, which rises at the east end of the valley. The trek to Kusum Kangru leaves the trail just before Monjo.

It's a short climb around the ridge to **Ghat** (Lhawa; 2590m), on the edge of the Dudh Kosi. There are numerous lodges here – the stone-built Himalaya Lodge and Himalaya Sherpa Lodge are cosy and well run. Further uphill is the Lama Lodge, which faces onto a small private gompa with a brass prayer wheel in its courtyard. Leaving Ghat, the trail passes a school and enters a curious complex of *mani* walls, *chortens*, boulders carved with Tibetan mantras and brightly painted prayer wheels. The focal point for this sacred Buddhist site is a small rock with strata in the shape of a lama's hat, worshipped as a symbol of Guru Rinpoche.

The trail climbs over an old landslide to the hamlet of **Chhuthawa** (2591m), where you can take tea at the tiny Peace Lodge, and then winds through the forest beside the Dudh Kosi passing the large, red-roofed **Yeti Mountain Home** (www.yetimountainhome.com; r per person US\$105). It's a peaceful spot and the smart, modern rooms have bathrooms and heaters.

Follow the path up into the village of **Phakding**, a collection of more than a dozen

FUEL IN THE EVEREST REGION

Under national park rules, trekkers are banned from using firewood for heating or cooking meals. Kerosene is available in Lukla, Namche Bazaar and Dingboche for around Rs 1000 for a 650ml bottle, but it should be filtered before use. If you stay at lodges, look for places that use stoves powered by kerosene, biogas or other alternative fuels – see p40.



lodges, straddling the Dudh Kosi at 2610m. Most lodges are lined up along the cobble main street – top picks include the Snowland Lodge, the Buddha Lodge, the Eco-Friendship Lodge, the Shangrila Guesthouse and the Khumbu Travellers Guesthouse. Across the small stream is another collection of lodges, including the large Namaste Lodge and the Hotel Beer Garden, which has a popular pool hall.

The path runs north across a long, sinuous suspension bridge over the Dudh Kosi to another group of lodges – the Phakding Star Lodge and Sunrise Lodge have big gardens, large terraces and better-than-average rooms. Behind these two lodges, a small track runs south to **Jo's Garden Lodge** (s/d from Rs 375/400), a collection of stone cottages on the riverbank, run by Asian Trekking (see p88).

If you find Phakding too busy and crowded, you can walk on to Benkar in two hours or Monjo in three.

SIDE TRIP: RIMIJUNG & PANGJUNG

2–6 hours, 300m ascent, 300m descent

Just north of Phakding, a signposted side trail leads steeply up the ridge to the Sherpa village of **Rimijung**, set on a plateau overlooking the valley. As you enter the village, turn left to reach the 350-year-old **Pema Choling Gumpa**, which enshrines statues of Guru Rinpoche, Red Mahakala and the lion-faced goddess Senge Dongma. Allow about 30 minutes each way for the walk from Phakding.

With more time to spare, you can climb for 45 minutes above the gompa to a small Buddhist nunnery at **Gomlha**. This path continues for four hours to a hilltop viewpoint at **Pangjung**, which offers splendid views of Everest and 15 other Khumbu peaks. This is a useful training walk for the climb to Namche Bazaar, but make sure you have time to return to Phakding the same day.

Day 2: Phakding to Namche Bazaar

5½ hours, 1000m ascent, 100m descent

From Phakding the trail follows the Dudh Kosi Valley north, meandering through the pines about 100m above the west bank of the river. At the village of **Zamfute** you'll pass the modest Sherpa Garden Lodge and the larger Kongde Peak Guesthouse, on a bluff overlooking the river. A second trail to Rimijung runs uphill from the edge of the village.

Continuing up the valley, you'll reach a cluster of local *bhattis* (porter rest houses) and a small hydroelectric project. The trail climbs up over the ridge past rocky cliffs and scattered pines to the tiny village of **Toktok**, where you can grab a bed or a bite at the Himalayan Lodge. Nearby is a pretty, multilevel waterfall where locals wash their laundry.

As compensation for the steep climb from Toktok, there are great views up and down the valley from this section of the trail. You'll soon get your first glimpse of Thamskeru, the 6608m peak that rises to the east of Namche Bazaar. The trail climbs steeply around the ridge to a neat stone wall marking the entrance to **Benkar** at 2710m.

This is an attractive village, and a good alternative overnight stop to Phakding. On either side of a small waterfall are the agreeable Benkar Guesthouse and the smaller Waterfall View Lodge, which does indeed look over the falls. Dotted among walled potato fields in the main village are half a dozen more lodges, including the Solukhumbu Himalaya Lodge, Yak & Yeti Guesthouse and the tasteful Gauri Shanker Lodge. Dotted around the cliffs above Benkar are some huge paintings of Buddhist deities.

You are now about four hours' walk from Namche Bazaar, but what a walk it is! Heading north from Benkar, the trail first crosses back to the east bank of the Dudh Kosi on a steel suspension bridge – look upriver to see the remains of the old wooden bridge, which was destroyed in floods in 1985. The wind whistles along the valley so hold onto your hat as you cross.

Before long, you'll reach **Chumoa** (2820m), where the Monjo Khola rises up the western flank of Kusum Kangru. A difficult camping-only trail runs along the stream to the base camp for ascents of the peak, but this is a trip for climbing groups only. There are five lodges in Chumoa, but there is better accommodation 30 minutes along the trail at Monjo.

Along this stage of the trek, villages are interspersed with magnificent forests of rhododendron, magnolia and fir. From Chumoa, it's another steep climb to the outskirts of **Monjo** at 2840m. The village has a pretty setting beside the Dudh Kosi, and you can visit the village school and a small gompa set on a rocky outcrop overlooking the vegetable fields.



SAGARMATHA NATIONAL PARK

Nepal's most famous nature reserve was founded in 1976 to protect a 1148-sq-km area of forests, mountain pastures and high-altitude desert surrounding Sagarmatha (the Sherpa name for Mt Everest). Since 1979 Sagarmatha National Park has been listed as a Unesco World Heritage site, reflecting its importance as a preserve for rare Himalayan animals and plants. Himalayan tahr, musk deer and Himalayan monals (also known as danphe or impeyan pheasants) are now quite commonly seen in the forests below Namche Bazaar, but snow leopards, Himalayan bears, Himalayan wolves, red pandas and other high-altitude species still hover on the verge of extinction.

Park rules prohibit trekkers from using wood as fuel, and glass bottles were banned in 1998. Sadly, the rules were not extended to plastic bottles, so discarded bottles of mineral water and soft drinks remain a depressing blot on the landscape. Do Sagarmatha a favour and pick up any litter you see and dispose of it in the next large village or back in Kathmandu.

As you enter the village, the large but welcoming **Monjo Guesthouse** (r from Rs 100, s/d with bathroom Rs 300/600) is set around a kitchen garden that provides plenty of fresh organic vegetables for the cookpot. There are more lodges uphill, including the Mount Kailash Lodge, which is enlivened by flowers growing in old tin cans. At the top end of the village you'll find the upmarket **Everest Summit Lodge** (www.nepalluxurytreks.com; s/d from US\$70/90), set in a garden full of fluttering prayer flags. It mainly caters to organised trekking groups, who appreciate luxuries like solar-heated water.

Just above Monjo is the entrance checkpoint for the **Sagarmatha National Park** (adult/child under 12 Rs 1000/500; ☎ 6am–6pm), where your TIMS card and national park receipt will be checked. If you did not pay in advance, you can pay the national park fee at the counter. The attached information centre has a 3-D map of the Khumbu Himalaya and displays on responsible trekking.

Beyond the national park checkpoint, the trail dives next to an enormous granite bluff, carved with mantras in huge Tibetan characters, soon reaching the farmhouse-style Greenland Lodge, set in sprawling vegetable gardens. The trail cuts across to the west bank of the Dudh Kosi on another suspension bridge then runs north to **Jorsale** (Thumbug; 2830m). This is the last settlement before Namche Bazaar, so charge your fuel cells with a decent helping of dal bhat.

Lined up along the trail are six almost identical lodges – the Boudha lodge has the most comfortable rooms. Guides have to stop here to register with the army, but you can use this time to climb to the ruined former residence of the local lama, set in a huge cave above the village.

Above Jorsale the trail recrosses the Dudh Kosi on yet another suspension bridge, with another flood-damaged bridge just upstream. Follow the riverbank over gravel and boulders before climbing back into the forest. Before long, you'll see the confluence of the Bhote Kosi and Dudh Kosi rivers – the trail to Namche Bazaar climbs directly up the spur between these two watercourses, a continuous ascent of at least two hours.

Grit your teeth and climb to a drooping suspension bridge floating at a dizzying height above the Dudh Kosi (if any yak or pony trains are already on the bridge, let them pass – you don't want to be tipped into the gorge by a pushy bovine). There is a powerful sense that this is where the mountains really begin – like the scene in *Lord of the Rings* where the Fellowship starts to climb into the Misty Mountains.

From here to Namche Bazaar, it's a tortuous, zigzagging ascent through dense pine forests, with only a handful of water-pipes where you can fill your drinking bottle. This climb will take you to an elevation where you may feel the first symptoms of altitude sickness – climb slowly and be alert for the warning signs (see p391).

Eventually, the path levels out and climbs gently out of the forest to the police checkpoint at Mislung, where you must present your TIMS card and national park receipt. The main trail continues to climb, entering Namche Bazaar just below the market ground.

Namche Bazaar

☎ 038 / elevation 3420m

Set in a natural amphitheatre looking across to the jagged ridge of Kongde Ri (6187m),



NAMCHE BAZAAR

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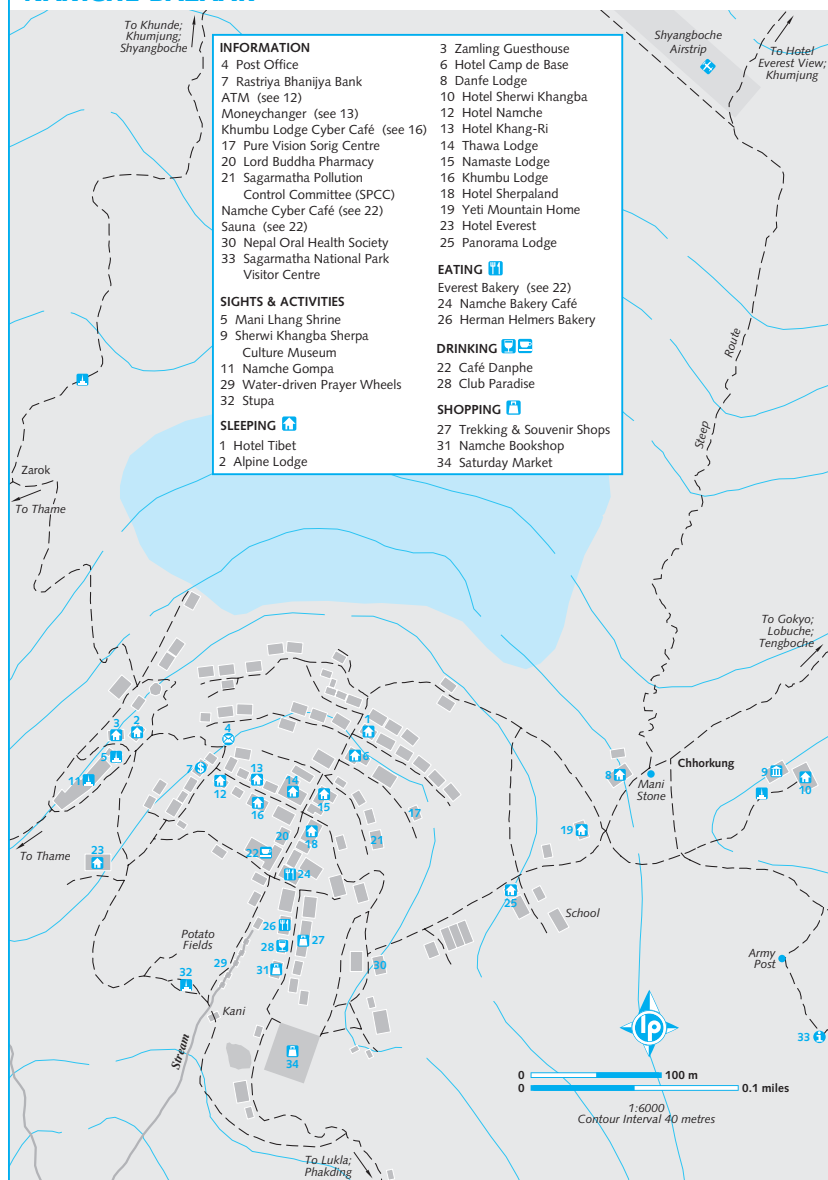
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Namche Bazaar is one of the most attractive settlements in the Khumbu. This tight tangle of cobbled streets is often described as a village but it feels more like a town, and new lodges are popping up here faster than you can say 'Everest Base Camp'. Indeed, the tap-tap of stonemasons chipping rocks into neat cubes for walls and foundations is probably the main sound you'll hear as you walk around the village.

Historically, Namche Bazaar was an important staging point for trading expeditions across the Nangpa La into Tibet, but today the village makes most of its money from the hundreds of trekkers who arrive every day en route to Base Camp, Gokyo or Lukla. The winding lines are dotted with lodges and shops selling sleeping bags, Diamox tablets, Mars Bars, trekking poles and other must-haves for treks into the mountains.

On one level, it's relentlessly commercial, but the spectacular setting and the handsome stone and timber buildings make it feel like a proper mountain village. Because of the steep climb from Phakding, it is essential to stay at least one extra night to adjust to the altitude, but you can fill the time with some excellent acclimatisation treks – see p108 for some suggestions.

INFORMATION

Communications

There are numerous cybercafes charging Rs 10 per minute for slow connections. Most will burn digital camera cards to blank DVDs for around Rs 200. Try the **Namche Cyber Café** (☎ 7am-9pm) behind the Everest Bakery or the **Khumbu Lodge Cyber Café** (☎ 6.30am-9pm) at the Khumbu Lodge.

There are numerous telephone offices where you can make international and domestic calls – expect to pay Rs 80 per minute to the UK, Europe, Australia or the USA.

Postcards sent from the tiny Namche **post office** (☎ 10am-4pm Sun-Fri) near the Khumbu Lodge may eventually reach their destination.

Information Sources

The Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee runs a useful **information centre** (☎ 039-540057; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) next to the Shangri-La Guesthouse in the lower part of Namche.

There are no airline offices, but any of the lodges in town can help you book or reconfirm flights out of Lukla.

Medical Services

The **Lord Buddha Pharmacy** (☎ 8-10am & 2-7pm) near Café Danphe has a decent stock of iodine drops, antibiotics, sunscreen lotion and Diamox tablets. For serious conditions, visit the **Khunde Hospital** (☎ 640053, 640013; consultations US\$50; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Fri, 9am-noon Wed) in Khunde – see p111.

If you've eaten too many Mars Bars, you may be able to get an emergency filling at the **Nepal Oral Health Society** (☎ 540058; ☎ Sun-Fri) near the Panorama Lodge (ask at the Khumbu Lodge if nobody is around).

The **Pure Vision Sorig Centre** (☎ 540259; ☎ 9am-5pm) behind the Hotel Camp de Base provides massages for tired muscles (from Rs 300 for 20 minutes) and consultations in Tibetan traditional medicine. Alternatively, you could try the **sauna** (for as long as you can stand the heat Rs 500) at Café Danphe.

Money

You can change most foreign currencies at the **Rastriya Banijya Bank** (☎ 10.15am-3pm Sun-Fri), across the road from the Namche Hotel, or a private moneychanger on the same lane. The Bank of Kathmandu ATM at the Namche Hotel intermittently accepts foreign credit and debit cards.

SIGHTS

The best thing to do in Namche is wander around the cobbled streets. The most interesting part of the village is on the western side of the basin. A maze of stone steps winds between traditional stone houses to the large **Namche Gompa**, which enshrines a large statue of Guru Rinpoche and some fine murals painted on wooden panels. You can hear the monks chanting mantras daily at around 8am and 5pm. Just downhill, near Zamling Guesthouse, is a **mani lhakhang** (shrine) containing an enormous prayer wheel.

The second-best thing to do in Namche is soak up the **views**. There are stunning views west across the valley of the Bhote Kosi to the knife-edge ridge of Kongde Ri (Kwangde Ri; 6187m) and east across the valley of the Dudh Kosi to the snow-dusted peaks of Thamserku (6608m) and Kantega (6685m).



At the bottom of Namche, a stream runs past **water-powered prayer wheels** to a large whitewashed **stupa** decorated with Buddha eyes, set among stone-walled potato fields.

The slopes above Namche have been heavily denuded by villagers collecting firewood, but a **forest plantation** of young juniper trees has been established at the top of the village and there are several huge boulders among the trees painted with images of Buddhist deities.

SLEEPING

Room rates are fixed by the Lodge and Hotel Association of Namche, so don't bother hunting around for a special bargain. Rooms cost Rs 200 with shared bathroom and Rs 500 with private bathroom. A few lodges offer more upmarket en suite rooms with heaters for US\$15 to US\$20. Unless otherwise stated, these rates apply to all the following lodges. Camping facilities are limited – organised groups tend to camp in the gardens of lodges on the hill above the village.

The following list is just a small selection of the best lodges – there are many more places to stay that are just as attractive. If you want to avoid the Namche crowds, you could also stay in Chhorkung, Shyangboche, Khunde or Khumjung, though you will feel the increase in altitude.

In the middle of town, the **Khumbu Lodge** (☎ 540144; www.khumbulodge.com; r Rs 200, r with private bathroom US\$15-20) is something of an institution. Former US president Jimmy Carter slept here when he trekked the Khumbu in 1985. Rooms are well kept and there's a good restaurant and an internet cafe.

Another well-established lodge is the **Hotel Namche** (☎ 540004; r Rs 200, r with private bathroom US\$15), with an internet cafe, a bookshop and a bookworm-friendly dining room looking out over the valley. Nearby are the similar Thawa Lodge, Hotel Khang-Ri and Namaste Lodge, offering the usual rooms and facilities at the usual rates.

At the well-designed **Hotel Sherpaland** (☎ 540107; www.hotelsherpaland.com; r with shared bathroom Rs 200, s/d with bathroom from Rs 1000/1300), good facilities and little Tibetan details attract midrange travellers in search of creature comforts.

European trekking groups favour the large **Hotel Camp de Base** (☎ 035-540106; r with

shared/private bathroom Rs 200/500, r with bathroom & view US\$20) uphill from the main shopping area, which has a large garden for camping. One block further uphill, **Hotel Tibet** (☎ 540145; www.hoteltibetatnamche.com; r with shared/private bathroom Rs 200/US\$15) benefits from a stone front terrace with good views.

High on the east side of the basin is the appropriately named **Panorama Lodge** (☎ 540159; www.namchepanoramalodge.com; r with shared bathroom Rs 200, deluxe from Rs 1500); come for the mountain vista and the tasteful modern rooms.

Nearby is the pricey but rather stylish **Yeti Mountain Home** (www.yetimountainhome.com; r per person US\$110), which also basks in stunning views. Rooms here have heaters and bathrooms with running hot water.

In the maze of alleyways near the Namche Gumpa are the appealing **Zamling Guesthouse** (☎ 540366), **Alpine Lodge** (☎ 540300; www.alpinelodge.info) and **Hotel Everest** (☎ 540250) – all offer good rooms with shared or private bathrooms.

EATING & DRINKING

Your lodge owner will probably encourage you to eat where you are staying, but you can also stroll down to the **Namche Bakery Café** (cakes & pizzas from Rs 100) and **Everest Bakery** (snacks from Rs 100) at the bottom of the village. Both use gas-powered ovens to bake European-style bread and cakes, and convincing pizzas topped with yak cheese. There are more good cakes at **Herman Helmers Bakery** (cakes from Rs 120), on the way to the market.

The liveliest nightspot in Namche is **Café Danphe** (dishes from Rs 200, beers Rs 250; ☎ 6-11pm), below the Everest Bakery. The kitchen cooks up a tasty steak sizzler, the drinks menu runs to imported spirits and glasses of wine, and the pool table is always in demand.

There's another pool table at the rather optimistically named **Club Paradise** (pool games Rs 50; ☎ 4-10pm) below the market.

SHOPPING

There are numerous shops selling hiking poles, ice axes and other bits of trekking equipment. You can rent a down jacket for Rs 50 per day, a sleeping bag for Rs 80 per day and an ice axe for Rs 40 per day. Near the market, the Namche Bookshop has a decent selection of maps, guidebooks and novels.



THE SATURDAY MARKET IN NAMCHE BAZAAR

Every Saturday morning, the market ground at the bottom of Namche is filled with traders for the weekly *haat* (bazaar). Most of the goods are trekked up from the lowlands, or over the border from China, so there are lots of fresh vegetables, packaged foods, clothes and bottled spirits on offer. Prices tend to be lower than in the shops of Namche, so the market is a good place to stock up on boiled sweets and other trekking snacks.

For locals, the market represents a chance to socialise, drink, gamble and stock up on freshly butchered meat. As Buddhists, the Sherpas of Khumbu will not slaughter goats or cows, and yaks are considered too valuable to be wasted on something as transient as a meal. Instead, buffalo are trekked uphill from the lower valleys and slaughtered above the marketplace to keep Namche stocked with buff momos.

Plenty of shops sell Nepali and Tibetan souvenirs, but most are produced in the Kathmandu Valley or over the border in China. If you do want a reminder of your trip, buy something light on the way downhill – woollen hats and gloves, and yak bells make easily portable souvenirs.

If you are in Namche on a Saturday, head to the market that gives Namche Bazaar its name – see the boxed text, above.

Day 3: Acclimatisation in Namche

Trekkers should schedule an ‘acclimatisation day’ in Namche to avoid symptoms of AMS further up the trail. This doesn’t mean you have to stop walking – there are numerous short walks through the hills around Namche that will improve your fitness and help you adjust to the altitude without any dangerous increases in elevation. See the following side trips for some suggestions.

SIDE TRIP: CHHORKUNG

3 hours return, 120m ascent, 120m descent

One easy acclimatisation trek is the short climb to the village of **Chhorkung** (3540m), which sprawls along the ridge east on Namche. Climb up past the Panorama Lodge to a memorial gateway, where a sandy path leads through the local army barracks to the **Sagarmatha National Park Visitor Centre** (free admission; ☎ 8am–4pm Sun–Fri). Inside, you can see some well-presented displays on Himalayan flora and fauna, and the culture of the Khumbu Sherpas.

From the flat area in front of the visitor centre, you can soak up an eye-watering panorama of Himalayan peaks, from Nuptse (7861m) and Everest (8850m) to Ama Dablam (6856m) and Thamserku (6608m).

If you follow the trail above the turn-off to the visitor centre, you’ll come to a large white *chorten* surrounded by *mani* stones and the **Sherwi Khangba Sherpa Culture Museum** (☎ 038-540005; www.sherpa-culture.com.np; admission Rs 100; ☎ 6am–sunset). Run by local photographer Lakpa Sonam, the museum has an intriguing collection of Sherpa cultural objects, and the attached Mount Everest Documentation Centre displays photos and press cuttings covering all the Sherpa Everest summiteers.

If you fancy stopping the night, Lakpa runs the inviting **Hotel Sherwi Khangba** (☎ 038-540005; r with shared bathroom Rs 200) near the museum. There are more lodges just uphill, by the level trail to Tengboche, including the Danfe Lodge, which offers standard rooms for standard rates.

From the large *mani* stone at the top of Chhorkung you can drop back down to Namche or climb the zigzag path uphill to the end of the runway at Shyangboche, looping back around to Namche via Zarak (around 1½ to two hours).

CEREMONIAL SCARVES

Throughout the Khumbu, you will see Sherpas presenting each other with *kata* – silk scarves bearing woven images of the eight lucky Buddhist symbols. Sherpas offer *kata* to high lamas, relatives, friends, guests and the gods as a gesture of respect – when you finish your trek, your guide may drape a *kata* around your neck to wish you luck on the rest of your travels. If you plan to present a *kata* to a lama (Buddhist teacher), place the scarf in their hands, rather than putting it around their neck. See also p68.



SIDE TRIP: NAMCHE BAZAAR TO THAME

6–7 hours, 600m ascent, 600m descent

The most exciting acclimatisation trek around Namche takes you west along the valley of the Bhote Kosi to the secluded village of **Thame** (3750m), set among alpine meadows beneath the mountain wall of Kongde Ri. From here, trails run west towards Tesi Lapcha, the 5755m pass leading to the Rolwaling Valley, and north towards the Renjo La (5345m) and the Nangpa La (5716m) to Tibet.

Many people pass through Thame as part of the Three Passes trek (see p130), but foreigners are prohibited from climbing the Nangpa La to Tibet. Chinese soldiers killed Tibetan refugees here as recently as 2006, so it is not wise to test this prohibition. The route over the Tesi Lapcha to Rolwaling should only be attempted by well-equipped groups with experienced guides.

If you are in good shape and well acclimatised, it is possible to make the trip to Thame and back to Namche Bazaar in one long day. However, staying the night will provide the opportunity to enjoy the clear mountain views in the morning. The trail to Thame begins by the Namche Gumpa and climbs around the ridge through quarries and boulder fields, passing some enormous **mani boulders**, with carved mantras picked out in black and white paint.

After passing the turn-off to Shyangboche, the trail enters a pretty forest of pines and rhododendrons, where you'll hear the jangling bells of grazing yaks. Keep an eye out for musk deer among the trees as you skirt around the ridge to an ancient mud-plastered stupa at **Phurte** (3390m). The small Kongde View Lodge by the stupa offers clean rooms and snacks. At the west end of the village is a tree nursery established by Sir Edmund Hillary's Himalayan Trust.

Follow a forest path dotted with flowering irises around the ridge to a boulder with a painted image of Guru Rinpoche and a pair of large *chortens* at **Samshing**, then cross a crystal-clear stream to another cluster of houses and a stupa at **Tesho** (Thesiyo), where the simple Laliy Guras Lodge makes a handy tea stop.

Just beyond the bridge, a side trail climbs north along the valley of the Thesebu Khola to the **Mende** (3700m), a patchwork

of stone-walled fields on a small plateau. A 20-minute walk above Mende is the Laudo Gumpa, used as a meditation retreat by students from **Kopan Monastery** (www.kopan-monastery.com) near Bodhnath. The only accommodation is the comfortable, chalet-style **Everest Summit Lodge** (☎ in Kathmandu 01-4371537; www.nepalluxurytreks.com; s/d from US\$70/90) on the edge of the ridge at Mende.

Continuing west from Tesho, climb through a garden of rhododendrons to the ridge. About an hour after leaving Phurte, you'll roll into **Thamo** (3440m), a scattering of stone houses surrounding the ruins of the old Khumbu Bijuli hydroelectric project, destroyed in the 1985 floods. Near the hydro plant offices, the neat and tidy Maya Lodge uses home-grown organic vegetables in the kitchen. The Thamo Guesthouse and Tashi Dele Restaurant are next to the large *mani* wall and stupa in the middle of the village.

At the top end of Thamo, the trail reaches a *kani* (ceremonial gate) and an important junction – ignore the path that drops down to the Bhote Kosi, and climb past the Valley View Lodge and the modern **Thamo Gumpa**. To the right, the dark, jagged peaks of Khumbila (5761m) soar above the valley. It's easy to see why locals believe this mountain has mystical powers.

Above Thamo, the landscape is drier and dustier, like something from the Sierra Nevada. The path ascends steadily past the stone village of **Thomde**, meeting a side trail that climbs back along the valley to Mende. Continue west to **Somde** (3580m), another cluster of stone-built houses, *chortens* and *mani* stones. You can admire the views of Kongde Ri and Pharchamo (6187m) over a cup of tea at the Sunshine View Lodge.

After another steep climb, the trail dives down to the river by a cliff wall with enormous **murals** of Green Tara, Guru Rinpoche and Thangtong Gyalpo, a 14th-century mystic who constructed a series of iron chain bridges across the Himalaya (note the length of chain depicted in his right hand). Below the murals, the Bhote Kosi charges through a narrow cleft in the rock, sculpting the rock into bizarre formations.

From the bridge, climb beside the sapphire-clear Thame Khola. As you gain the ridge, you'll see the stone houses of **Thame**, scattered across a broad, flat floodplain



AROUND NAMCHE BAZAAR



(3820m). The fang-like ridge of Kongde Ri (6187m) rises sheer above the valley like the gates of Mordor, marking the route west to the Rolwaling Valley.

To the north of Thame, a sandy ridge hides the upper valley of the Bhote Kosi, where another trail cuts north towards Marlung and the 5345m climb over the Renjo La pass to Gokyo. This path continues to the Nangpa La and Tibet, but foreigners are not permitted to travel north of the Renjo turn-off. Because of the steep changes in elevation, most people prefer to trek over the pass from Gokyo to Thame.

The lodges in Thame all have similar facilities and large gardens where trekking groups set up camp. As you enter the village, turn right to reach the Chooyo Thame

Lodge or continue straight to the Valley View Lodge, Everest Summitter Lodge, Sunshine Lodge and the large, inviting Thame View Lodge, run by Ang Phurba Sherpa, who summited Everest with four different expeditions. Trekkers with money to spare enjoy rooms with private bathrooms at the **Yeti Mountain Home** (www.yetimountainhome.com; r per person from US\$115) in the western part of the village.

A 45-minute trek up the sandy ridge behind the Valley View Lodge will get you to **Thame Gompa**, wedged into a crack in the rock at 3970m. Stay to the left as you climb past *chortens* and *mani* walls, and descend on the opposite side on your way back to Thame.

Set in a compound of slate-roofed stone houses, the gompa was founded in 1667



but it has been renovated many times and the murals inside were retouched by local artists in 1998. The main chapel enshrines images of Chenresig, Guru Rinpoche and Sakyamuni, but the views over the valley are even more impressive than the Tibetan iconography inside. Every year in the fourth Tibetan month (usually in May), hundreds of Sherpas flock to the gompa for the annual Mani Rimdu celebrations (see Festivals, p89).

To return to Namche, you can either retrace your steps, or follow a labour-saving short cut along the south bank of the Bhothe Kosi. From the Thame View Lodge, cross the stream to the reservoir, then follow the high path along the ridge. At the end of the spur, the trail drops steeply to the Khumbu

Bijuli hydroelectric plant, then turns left to cross the Bhothe Kosi on a small bridge. Rise gently along the north bank to the stupa at Thonde and finally the *kani* at Thamo. After the long ascent to Thame, the last two hours back to Namche will feel positively leisurely!

SIDE TRIP: SHERPA VILLAGES OF KHUMBU

4–5 hours, 460m ascent, 460m descent

Another rewarding acclimatisation trek is the full-day circuit through Shyangboche, Khunde and Khumjung and back to Namche. Pick up the trail above the Namche Gumpa and make an exhausting ascent of the ridge on a steep, zigzagging path to the boulder-strewn village of **Zarok**, where the

tiny Sunshine Lodge offers a peaceful retreat for trekkers. Small quarries here provide the stone for all the lodge construction going on in the valley.

Continue climbing past a signposted trail to Thame to the small Phinjo Lodge and the grass airstrip at **Shyangboche** (3790m). This lofty runway was built to serve the Hotel Everest View, but no airlines currently have planes that can climb to this lofty altitude. Listen for the thud-thud of freight helicopters dropping off goods for Namche or transporting trekkers and mountaineers downhill from Everest Base Camp.

In October 2008 Shyangboche was the drop zone for the first ever **parachute jump** over Everest. There are plans to make this a regular activity for paying customers – see www.everestskydive.com for the latest information.

Cross the runway and follow the signposted path to Khunde, which rises up a sandy gully between wind-twisted juniper bushes, passing turn-offs to Khumjung and the Khunde yak farm. At the top of the ridge, the path enters an ornamental garden of boulders, *chortens*, junipers and rhododendrons, where a fairy-tale stairway drops to a pair of stupas on the edge of **Khunde** (3840m).

The village is famous as the location of the first hospital in the Khumbu, built by the Himalayan Trust in 1966. To get here, take the path that winds uphill behind a large red *mani dungkhor* (prayer wheel shrine). Above the village is the **Khunde Chamkang**, a Buddhist temple founded by a lama who fled here from Tingri in Tibet in the 1970s. Inside is a statue of thousand-armed Avalokitesvara, the Tibetan god of compassion, who is represented on earth by the Dalai Lama.

There are several lodges – in the tangle of stone lanes near the hospital are the comfortable Eco-Shyar Khumbu Lodge and Khunde Lodge. The smaller Panorama Lodge is just downhill, and the Khonde Lodge is near the stupa at the bottom of the village.

From Khunde, follow the obvious cobbled trail east through potato fields to **Khumjung** (3780m), the largest village in Khumbu, which sprawls below the peak of Khumbila (5761m). The houses here are large and ostentatious, and many locals

own tracts of land further north along the valley.

In the middle of Khumjung is the original Hillary school, established by Sir Edmund Hillary in 1961, just eight years after the conquest of Everest. Today it provides primary and secondary education for more than 350 children from surrounding villages.

Khumjung has a small and atmospheric **gumpa**, reached by a winding path that starts near the Mountain View Lodge. One of the treasures kept here is a 'yeti skull' that was transported to America for analysis by Sir Edmund Hillary and village headman Konchok Chumbi. Tests concluded that the scalp was made from the skin of a serow, a member of the antelope family, but the legend continues. You'll have to find the key-holder to view the skull.

From the flat area in front of the gumpa, there are views east to Ama Dablam and the rocky pyramid of Thamserku, and north to the crags of Khumbila. The swirling mist makes these rocks look like monstrous claws.

There are at least 15 lodges in Khumjung and all offer rooms with shared bathrooms for the standard Khumbu rates (Rs 150 to Rs 200 per person). The Khumbiye-La Garden Lodge, Hidden Village Lodge, Sherpaland Lodge and Tashi Friendship Lodge by the village school are all good choices. Just south of the main trail is the large **Khumjung Hotel** (☎ 038-540041; s/d Rs 200/300). At first glance, the building looks large and impersonal, but there's a sunny conservatory at the back with comfy divans.

For views, try the Gomba Lodge, Valley View Lodge and Khumjung Hilltop View Lodge in the upper part of Khumjung, near the gumpa. There are many more lodges with similar facilities – just stroll through the village and see which places take your fancy.

The long-established **Everest Bakery** (apple pie from Rs 100; ☎ 7am-9pm) is a local institution and the deep-filled apple pie goes down a treat. You can check your email at the **Khumjung Trekking Shop** (per min Rs 20; ☎ 24hr) on the main trail near the school.

Several paths lead on from Khumjung. The largest trail drops over the edge of the ridge on wide stone steps to Sanasa and Phortse Thenga (passed on Day 4 of the Everest Base Camp trek). To return directly



to Namche Bazaar, take the path behind the village school to the north end of the runway at Shyangboche.

For a scenic route, take the small track that climbs south into the forest near the Everest Bakery. Thirty minutes of walking will bring you to a ravine and the perimeter wall of the famous **Hotel Everest View** (📞 in Kathmandu 01-5543908, 5011648; www.hoteleverestview.com; s/d US\$96/164, breakfast/lunch/dinner US\$10/15/20), the highest hotel in the world according to the Guinness Book of Records. The hotel used to fly guests into Shyangboche directly from Kathmandu, using pressurised rooms and piped oxygen to get around the problem of AMS. Needless to say, this is no longer regarded as a sensible policy.

Follow the trail south from the Everest View as it winds around the hillside, then drop down to the southern end of the airfield, passing the heavily advertised **Shyangboche Panorama Hotel** (📞 in Kathmandu 01-4478484; www.everestpanorama.com; s/d US\$70/100). Rooms seem a little faded for such a high price, but you can't fault the views.

Follow the path down through the junipers and cross the airfield, then take the steep trail that zigzags down to a huge carved *mani* stone at Chhorkung (3540m). It's worth visiting the intriguing Sherwi Khangba Sherpa Culture Museum and Sagarmatha National Park Visitor Centre before returning to Namche – see p108 for details.



YETIS

Countries all around the world have legends of hairy human-like animals that live in areas untouched by modern explorers. In Nepal and Tibet, this mythical figure is known as the yeti, from the Tibetan *yeh* (meaning 'snow valley') and *teh* ('man'). You may also hear the name *mehton kangmi*, which translates as 'abominable snowman'.

According to alleged sightings, the yeti walks upright with a lumbering gait, but often drops to all fours. Its body is covered with black or brown fur and it gives a high, piercing yell when disturbed. However, like America's Bigfoot and the Australian yowie, the yeti legend is mainly built on circumstantial evidence – melting footprints found high on the slopes of Himalayan peaks and sightings in blizzards by superstitious herders and altitude-affected mountaineers.

Every year there are new expeditions to find the truth of the yeti legend. Sir Edmund Hillary even carried a yeti skull from Khumjung to America to be studied in 1960. The relic turned out to be made from antelope fur, but believers are still hopeful that proof will be found. Here are some pivotal moments in yeti history:

- 1889 – Major LA Wassell finds a set of mysterious footprints in northeastern Sikkim, the first recorded sighting of a yeti by a Westerner.
- 1923 – British mountaineer Alan Cameron spots humanoid creatures walking along a ridge near Everest.
- 1937 – Lord Hunt and HW Tilman find yeti tracks on the Zemu Glacier in Sikkim.
- 1939 – German professor Ernst Schaefer visits Tibet in search of the yeti, allegedly on the orders of the Nazi SS.
- 1951 – Eric Shipton discovers yeti tracks during a reconnaissance mission to Everest.
- 1970 – Don Whillans hears weird cries and watches a yeti through binoculars while climbing Annapurna.
- 1984 – Tim McCartney-Snape and Greg Mortimer find unexplained tracks near the summit of Everest.
- 1986 – Reinhold Messner claims to have seen a yeti in Tibet; he later describes it as being like a 'Tibetan bear with human abilities'.
- 1992 – Peter Matthiessen collects 'yeti hair' in Mustang, but DNA sequencing reveals it to be from a horse.
- 2008 – A Japanese expedition to Dhaulagiri IV finds yeti footprints, but fails to capture the yeti on film.

Day 4: Namche Bazaar to Tengboche

4 hours, 350m descent, 750m ascent

There are several routes from Namche to Tengboche. One option is to climb to Shyangboche and Khumjung, either directly or via Khunde or the Everest View Hotel (see p111 for a description of these routes), but most trekkers opt for the easy level trail that cuts around the ridge from Chhorkung.

Pick up the path by the giant *mani* boulder in Chhorkung, and trek north around a long, denuded ridge. This slope was once covered by dense juniper forests, but locals have stripped the hillside for firewood to supply the insatiable demands of trekkers for hot food, warm rooms and hot water. At the end of the bluff is a viewpoint over a grand panorama of peaks, from Thamserku to Ama Dablam, Lhotse and Everest.

Every spur you gain seems to bring the mountains closer. At **Kyangjuma** (Kenjoma; 3550m) there are several lodges offering a tea stop – our pick is the Ama Dablam View Lodge with its large sun terrace. Persistent souvenir vendors often set up stalls along this section of the trail, but nothing they have to sell can compete with the views.

A short walk on is an important trail junction at **Sanasa** (3600m). Signposted

trails climb the hillside to Khumjung (30 minutes) and Gokyo (see p124), while the trail to Tengboche runs gently downhill towards the river. There are three lodges at Sanasa, but many trekkers are scared off by over-enthusiastic vendors.

From Sanasa, the Tengboche trail drops gradually to **Lawichasa** (Labisysa), which has a lodge and a few smoky teashops. As you descend, the thumb-like peak of Ama Dablam soars into view above the trail.

A narrow side trail branches north from Lawichasa to **Tashinga** (3380m), a grid of stone-walled fields on a flat bluff. The well-appointed **Everest Summit Lodge** (www.nepalluxurytreks.com; s/d from US\$70/90) takes full advantage of this idyllic spot. Guests can enjoy plunging views across the valley as they sip tea on the front lawn.

Below Lawichasa, the Tengboche trail drops on steep stone steps to **Phunki Thenga** (3250m), a cluster of lodges by a Heath Robinson-esque wood-and-stone bridge across the river. As you cross, look out for the remains of the old bridge, washed away by floods in 2007. From here it's a draining two-hour climb to Tengboche, so make the most of the eating options – Evergreen Lodge and Cozy Garden Lodge both serve hearty plate meals.

TENGBOCHE MONASTERY

A powerful mythology has grown up around the monastery at Tengboche (Thyangboche) as a result of the writings of explorers and mountaineers, but the gumpa is not as ancient as you might expect. The first gumpa at Tengboche was constructed in 1916 by Lama Gulu, a monk from Khumjung, but the building was destroyed in the earthquake of 1934, which also killed its founder. A second gumpa on the site lasted until 1989, when an electrical fire burned the stone-and-timber structure to the ground.

Fortunately, most of the gumpa's valuable books, paintings and religious relics were saved. Using donations from Sherpas, foreign aid organisations, Buddhist groups and mountaineering and trekking companies, Tengboche was painstakingly reconstructed, opening its doors in 1993. Inside is a 4m-high statue of Sakyamuni, backed by an ornate wooden frieze of mythical beasts that was rescued from the fire. In the doorway to the monastery, note the stone with a foot-shaped imprint, allegedly left by Lama Sange Dorje as he flew around the Himalaya in the 17th century (see the boxed text, opposite).

The monastery is the setting for the famous Mani Rimdu festival in the ninth Tibetan month (normally October or November), with whirling masked *chaam* dances and plenty of eating, drinking and making merry. During the festival, all the lodges in Tengboche become gridlocked and there is an entry fee for the monastery and a surcharge for video cameras. See www.tengboche.org for dates and details.

Visitors are welcome to attend the daily *puja* (prayer) ceremonies at 6am and 3pm, but sit to the right so as not to interrupt the monks as they chant the scriptures. Wearing shoes or shorts, smoking and taking photos are all prohibited inside the monastery.



From the bridge, the trail climbs past some water-powered prayer wheels and begins a sustained climb through a forest of tall, mature rhododendrons. Look out for musk deer and Himalayan tahr among the trees. On the way, there are several *chautara* (porter rest stops) where you can set down your pack and enjoy the views towards Kantega. The name means 'horse saddle', and from here it's clear how the mountain got its name.

Eventually you'll reach a *kani* and a pair of *hortens* marking the start of **Tengboche** (3870m). The village is scattered across a wide, grassy saddle below a crescent-shaped ridge covered by scrub pines and dwarf rhododendrons. The focal point of Tengboche is the famous **Tengboche Gumpa**, which has risen phoenix-like from the ashes of a devastating fire in 1989 (see the boxed text, opposite).

Across the meadow from the monastery is the **Sacred Land Visitors Eco Centre** (www.sacredland.net; admission Rs 100; ☎ 7-10.30am & noon-5.30pm Mar-Apr, Jun-Aug, Oct-Nov, 7-9.30am & 1-5pm Sep, Dec & May, 3-5pm Jan & Feb), with some thought-provoking displays on the history of Tengboche, the culture of the Sherpas and the environmental issues facing the Khumbu. The shop sells books, prayer flags, T-shirts and ceremonial objects, and profits go towards health care, education, training and tree-planting initiatives for the local community.

From the viewpoint at the top of the hill (follow the path under the coloured prayer flags), there are awe-inspiring views over the Himalaya. Looking north over the saddle, you'll see the distinctive peak of Ama Dablam (6856m) standing proud of the massif containing Everest (8850m), Nuptse (7861m) and Lhotse (8501m). Looking south, there are views of Kantega, Thamskeru and the sawtooth ridge of Kongde Ri. From the top of the hill, Tengboche Gumpa is framed perfectly against the dark crags of Khumbila.

The lodges at Tengboche get extremely crowded during the trekking season and you may end up in a sleeping bag on the floor. Lodge owners are quite insistent that you eat at their lodge – if you go somewhere else for dinner, you may be asked to pay an insanely inflated price for your room. Camping is permitted in the rhododendron

forest, but monks will come around to collect the Rs 50 fee. Some camp sites are reserved for large trekking groups that make a donation to the gumpa for the privilege.

As you enter Tengboche from Phortse Thenga, turn left to reach the peaceful Trekkers Lodge, in a quiet spot near the start of the trail to Phortse. In the meadow below the gumpa, the village-house style Tashi Delek Lodge and Himalayan View Lodge are often booked out by groups. At the far end of the saddle, the tin-roofed Tengboche Guest House and Gomba Lodge are big, busy, commercial lodges that are frequently mobbed by trekkers.

Between these two lodges, the **Tengboche Bakery** (snacks from Rs 200; ☎ 6.30am-8.30pm) serves big mugs of tea and coffee and huge slices of pie and cake. It's a great place to escape the chilly breezes that blow across the saddle. Depending on the phone connection, you may be able to check email at Tengboche Cyber near the bakery.

If there are no rooms at Tengboche, there are more lodges 20 minutes down the Pangboche trail at Debuche.

Day 5: Acclimatisation Day in Tengboche

You will do much better in the high country if you spend another day acclimatising at Tengboche, though this is not mandatory. You can explore the monastery, climb the hill behind Tengboche or take a hike to the gumpa at Debuche. Alternatively, you could take a full-day acclimatisation hike to Pangboche or Phortse at the bottom of the valley, returning to Tengboche in the afternoon.

THE FLYING LAMA

The fifth reincarnate lama of Rongbuk Gumpa in Tibet, Sange Dorje is credited with bringing Buddhism to the Khumbu on supernatural flights around the Himalaya. Quite how the lama transported himself through the mountains is hotly debated. One theory is that he used the technique of wind meditation, invented by the yogi Milarepa in the 11th century. According to legend, the yogi was able to run incredible distances at incredible speeds through intense meditation and careful control of his breathing.



Day 6: Tengboche to Pheriche

3½ hours, 70m descent, 450m ascent

From Tengboche, follow the trail below the bakery through a forest of dwarf conifers and rhododendrons, keeping an eye out for monal pheasants and musk deer. The path soon reaches **Debuche**, a scattering of stone houses among the trees. Rooms are available at the Everest Rhododendron Lodge, which often has a visiting health worker from Khunde Hospital, and at the welcoming Ama Dablam Garden Lodge, set in a copse of pines.

While you are here, drop into the **Debuche Gompa**, which has some impressive old *thangkas* and murals painted on wooden panels. The monastery is just off the main track, near the village stupa. There is also a small **Buddhist nunnery** on the hillside east of Debuche.

The trail continues through a dense rhododendron forest, dripping with Spanish moss. About 15 minutes past Debuche you'll reach **Milinggo**, where the Evergreen Lodge can serve you something hot to warm your fingers on. The path now drops steeply to a wobbly-looking suspension bridge, dangling over the surging white waters of the Imja Khola.

Cross and climb the hillside opposite to a white stupa decorated with Buddha eyes. After a hundred yards, you'll reach a great photo opportunity – a stupa crowns an exposed bluff, mirroring the soaring tower of Ama Dablam at the end of the valley. East of the stupa is a footprint of Khumbu's patron saint Lama Sange Dorje, preserved in stone (see the boxed text, p115).

You'll soon reach a *kani* on the outskirts of **Pangboche** (3860m) where the trail splits. The lower path drops to a cluster of lodges, while the upper trail climbs to the village monastery and school. Most trekkers follow the lower path on the way to Everest Base Camp, and take the upper path on the way back down.

In the upper part of the village, **Pangboche Gompa** (requested donation Rs 100; ☎ 8am–5pm) is the oldest monastery in the Khumbu, founded by Lama Sange Dorje in the 17th century. Until recently, it contained relics that were said to be the skull and hand of a yeti, but these were stolen in 1991 so another chapter of the yeti legend remains unsolved. At least the thieves didn't touch the wonderful murals, statues and Buddhist dance masks.

There is no shortage of accommodation. As you drop down into the lower part of the village, you'll pass the comfortable Eco Panorama Lodge and the Highland Sherpa Lodge, which has a telephone and mountain rescue service. There are six similar lodges in the lower part of the village, and more in upper Pangboche.

At the far end of the village, **Om Kailash Hotel** (☎ 038-540226; r with shared/private bathroom Rs 200/600) has simple rooms with shared or private bathrooms facing down the valley, while the posh **Everest Summit Lodge** (www.nepalluxurytreks.com; s/d from US\$100/150) has reliable hot water, in-room heaters and a cosy raised sun lounge on the roof.

Upper Pangboche has a collection of atmospheric lodges in traditional village houses, scattered around the gompa. All offer similar facilities – we like the Tashe Lodge and Chomolungma Lodge, on the south side of the gompa.

Two trails lead on from upper Pangboche. One path leads south along the ridge to Phortse on the Gokyo trek (four hours; see p125 for more information), and the other runs north past the Hillary school before dropping to meet the main Pheriche trail.

Heading north from Pangboche on either trail, you'll climb above the treeline, entering an arid landscape of scattered boulders and alpine meadows. This is proper tundra (the word is derived from a Finnish term meaning 'treeless plains' and it certainly fits here) and you won't see another proper tree until you drop below the treeline on your way back from Everest Base Camp.

Follow the path of the Imja Khola past an enormous mural of Guru Rinpoche to **Shomare** (4010m), which has five good lodges – Pasang Lodge and Trekkers Lodge are the pick of the bunch. There are more scattered lodges at **Orsho**, where the trail is dotted with memorials to lost climbers.

Beyond Orsho the trail divides. You have two options for the night – you can take the lower, more important-looking trail along the Imja Khola to Dingboche, which has the highest internet cafe in the Khumbu, or follow the higher path to Pheriche, which has medical facilities and several lodges with satellite phones.

Most trekkers choose to stay in Pheriche as the village is 130m lower than Dingboche. The trail climbs to a minor ridge



RECYCLING, HIMALAYAN STYLE

Above Tengboche, you will start to see the detritus of past climbing expeditions being sold on by shops and lodges. Climbing expeditions carry an unbelievable amount of gear – the average Everest team carries 24 tonnes of equipment, loaded onto 600 porters. WE Bowman was only just exaggerating when he talked about 30,000 porters in *The Ascent of Rum Doodle* (see Recommended Reading, p28).

Much of this gear is never used, and leftovers are donated to the porters at the end of the trip. As a result, the lodges and shops of the Khumbu are piled high with hand-me-downs from climbing expeditions. You'll find mountain gear being recycled in all sorts of imaginative ways – elderly women use technical trekking poles as walking sticks, scarecrows wear bright Gore-Tex jackets and old oxygen cylinders are used as dinner bells and monastery gongs.

Almost every lodge north of Tengboche has a cabinet full of bashed and bent tin cans, many without labels, that are sold on to locals and campers. You can find all sorts of oddities in these cabinets – tins of sardines, Italian pasta, French snails, condensed Russian borscht, American granola bars, processed Arabic cheese...you name it.

At one lodge on this trek, we enquired about the possibility of some fruit for pudding. The owner of the lodge unlocked the food cabinet and pulled out three battered and unmarked tin cans of indeterminate age. Giving each one a shake by her ear, she presented us with the menu: 'Apples, peaches and pineapple... I think.'

topped by stupas and memorials to lost climbers and then crosses the small but fast-flowing Khumbu Khola on a small bridge that gets washed away and replaced every other monsoon.

The houses of **Pheriche** (4240m) are scattered along the broad valley of the Khumbu Glacier at the foot of Everest. Icy winds scour down the valley, wicking away moisture and body heat – wrap up warmly and wear plenty of lip balm on this stage of the trek.

Pheriche is a labyrinth of stone walls, but the main trail cuts through the village like a five-lane highway. The dozen or so lodges here are very similar in terms of facilities and atmosphere. The Himalayan Hotel and Panorama Eco Lodge in the middle of Pheriche have cosy sunrooms, and you can play snooker at the Mountain Guides Lodge.

The large **White Yak Mountain Hut** (r Rs 400) has cute rooms with Tibetan trim, Western-style toilets and 24-hour hot water in the shared showers. The long-established Snowland Lodge at the north end of Pheriche has a shop and a reliable satellite phone – international calls cost around Rs 300 per minute. About five minutes south of the main village, Hotel Nagarkot often has rooms when other places are full.

Pheriche is famous as the location of the emergency health centre run by the **Himalayan Rescue Association** (HRA; ☎ 038-540214;

www.himalayanrescue.org; ☎ 9am-noon & 1.30pm-5pm), which is dedicated to the treatment and prevention of altitude sickness. Western doctors are usually in attendance during the trekking season, and there is a free presentation every day at 3pm to educate trekkers about the risks of AMS.

If you do need emergency treatment, a consultation is US\$50 (US\$80 after hours), and the clinic has access to Gamow bags (see p394) and bottled oxygen. HRA is a charitable foundation that depends on donations – you can buy T-shirts and souvenirs at the HRA shop to support its work.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: TENGBOCHE TO DINGBOCHE

3–4½ hours, 70m descent, 580m ascent

Dingboche is a popular alternative overnight stop to Pheriche, but it is 130m higher, which can increase the risk of AMS. Even if you don't stay here, you can visit Dingboche as part of the acclimatisation trek to Chhukung (see the Side Trip, p118). The trek to Dingboche also forms part of the approach route for the ascent of Island Peak (see the boxed text, p119).

Coming from Tengboche, follow the Pheriche trail as far as Orsho, and take the lower path along the west bank of the Imja Khola. The trail drops to a small bridge over the Khumbu Khola at 4130m and then climbs beside the river for about an hour to



the scattered houses of **Dingboche** (4360m). Looking east from the village, you'll see the snowcapped summits of Island Peak (Imja Tse; 6189m), Peak 38 (7591m) and Lhotse (8501m).

In many ways, Dingboche is a more pleasant place to stay than Pheriche – the sun stays here longer each evening and the wind blows gently instead of roaring down the valley. You can also check emails on a reasonably fast connection at the **Dingboche Internet Café** (per min Rs 20; ☎ 7am–8pm), at the Peak 38 View Lodge. The Khumbu Alpine Conservation Council maintains a kerosene depot in Dingboche for trekking groups.

There are many places to stay. In the upper village, Valley View Lodge and Peak 38 View Lodge are typical mountain houses with good views. There are at least 10 lodges down in the lower village – the new and clean Dingboche Guesthouse, Snow Lion Lodge and Peaceful Lodge are all good choices. Set apart from the other lodges, the large **Hotel Family** (☎ 038-40347; r from US\$30) offers rooms with bedding and bathrooms with reliable hot showers.

Day 7: Acclimatisation Day in Pheriche/Dingboche

It is very important to spend an additional night at Pheriche or Dingboche to aid the acclimatisation process. This is the second of the mandatory acclimatisation days on this trek. Many trekkers are happy to spend the day exploring Pheriche and Dingboche (the two villages are just 30 minutes apart), but there are several interesting day hikes in this area.

One enjoyable short walk is the 400m climb to **Nangkartshang Gumpa**, on the ridge north of Dingboche. From this vantage point there are good views way off to the east to **Makalu** (8463m), the fifth-highest mountain in the world. Climbing groups often continue to the summit of Nangkartshang (5090m) as a dry-run for the ascent of Island Peak.

Alternatively, you can follow an epic trail along the Imja Khola to Chhukung – see the Side Trip, below.

SIDE TRIP: CHHUKUNG

5–6 hours, 490m ascent, 490m descent

A more strenuous acclimatisation trek is the full-day hike to Chhukung at the head

of the Imja Valley. The views are stupendous, even by Khumbu standards, but the glacial winds will cut you to the bone without multiple clothing layers. This trek forms part of the approach to Island Peak, one of Nepal's most popular trekking peaks (see opposite).

Starting from Pheriche, pick up the trail to Dingboche on the moraine slope south-east of the village. From the crest of the hill, pause to admire the snow-wrapped peaks of Taboche (6542m) and Chola-tse (6443m) and the north face of Ama Dablam, which is almost unrecognisable from this angle. From the ridge, you can either drop directly down to the lower part of Dingboche, or take a rising path that climbs to the northeast to the upper part of the village.

The upper path passes two *chortens* (the second marks the turn-off to Nangkartshang Peak) before dropping to the Peak 38 View Lodge, following the path of a trickling stream. As the trail climbs above the Imja Khola, the serrated ridge of **Amphu Lapcha** (5845m) soars into view. A perilous pass crosses this knife-edge of ice and rock to the high glaciers of Makalu-Barun National Park.

It's a steady climb over barren moraines to a series of stepping stones over the Niyang Khola and a lonely teashop at **Bibre** (4570m). Here a side trail turns off along the valley of the Niyang Khola towards the **Kongma La** (5535m) and Lobuche – see p131 for description of this route.

About 30 minutes west of Bibre, you'll reach **Chhukung** (4730m), the barest smudge of a village nestling among ridges of moraine. The largest lodge is the well-run **Chhukung Resort** (☎ 038-540153; www.hotel Tibet atnamche.com), owned by the Hotel Tibet in Namche Bazaar. You'll find similar facilities and a welcome cup of hot tea or lemon at the Ama Dablam View Lodge, Panorama Lodge and Sunrise Eco Guesthouse.

Mountains and glaciers surround Chhukung on all sides. Using the village as a base, you can make a challenging day trip to **Island Peak Base Camp** (4970m; six to seven hours return) along the Lhotse Glacier, passing the bloated waters of Imja Tsho. This glacial lake has swelled to dangerous levels because of global warming – see the boxed text, p43.



ISLAND PEAK

At 6189m, Island Peak is one of the smaller trekking peaks, but it is still a challenging two- to three-day ascent using ice axes and crampons. The reward for all this exertion is an unparalleled view of Ama Dablam and the south face of Lhotse. The peak sits at the end of the Chhukung Valley, accessible from Dingboche, and most groups climb to Everest Base Camp first to help with acclimatisation. Most large trekking agencies run group ascents of Island Peak, but each group must pay an additional US\$350 to US\$610 fee to the **Nepal Mountaineering Association** (www.nepalmountaineering.org) for the obligatory climbing permit. See the Trekking Peaks chapter (p345) for more information.

Another popular day trip is the stiff climb up the 5546m **Chhukung Ri** (six hours return) for views over a fairy-tale panorama of peaks, including Ama Dablam, Baruntse (7220m) and Makalu (8463m). However, you should stay at least one night at Chhukung before attempting the ascent. If you don't feel like stopping overnight, it's an easy two-hour descent back to Dingboche or Pheriche.

Day 8: Pheriche/Dingboche to Dughla

2 hours, 400m ascent

If you head straight to Lobuche (4930m), you will almost double the recommended daily gain in elevation. For this reason, we advise breaking the journey overnight at Dughla (4620m) to aid with acclimatisation.

Coming from **Pheriche**, follow the wide trail north along the bottom of the valley. Legions of trekkers, porters and yaks have kicked the turf into awkward ruts and gullies that would test even the most sure-footed mountain goat. Within an hour you'll reach the summer village of **Phulaji Kala** (4343m), with its scattered stone goths (herders' shacks). In this huge bowl of a valley, other trekkers appear as insignificant dots along the trail.

From **Dingboche**, you can cross to Pheriche via the stupas at the top of the ridge, or take an alternative path to Dughla that climbs slowly along the ridge through the village of **Dusa** (4503m). On either trail, there are outstanding views of the twin peaks of Taboche and Cholatse above a desolate, rounded landscape sculpted by vanished glaciers. Ama Dablam appears as a perfect pyramid, while the true summit Kantega is visible far to the left of the prominent saddle seen from Tengboche.

The Pheriche and Dingboche trails meet and drop down to a glacial stream, rising

up the other side to **Dughla** (Tukla), set in a small depression at 4620m. Half of the village was washed away in the 2007 floods, so accommodation is limited to the Pumori Lodge & Hotel (which mainly caters to porters) or the much more inviting Yak Lodge, with a courtyard restaurant, set beneath some impossibly long strands of prayer flags stretching right across the valley. If there are no beds at Dughla, you will have to continue to Lobuche.

Day 9: Dughla to Lobuche

2½ hours, 300m ascent

Again, altitude will limit you to a short ascent. From Dughla, the trail goes directly up the gravelly terminal moraine of the Khumbu Glacier for about one hour. The surrounding terrain is parched and desolate, with fingers of ice and snow dropping down sheer mountain walls on all sides.

The path bears left at the top of the ridge, which is covered with memorials to lost climbers and sherpas. The largest memorial commemorates Babu Chhiri Sherpa, who summited Everest 10 times, but died after falling into a crevasse on his 11th attempt at the peak in 2001. A smaller stone *chorten* stands in memory of Scott Fischer, who perished in the 1996 Everest disaster.

As you cross the ridge, the perfect peak of Pumori (7165m) soars into view. The air is heavy with the scent of ground-hugging rhododendron bushes. To the west, across a shallow gravel gully, you can trace the route of the trail to the Cho La pass (see p132).

After meeting the junction with this trail, make a laboured ascent to the north over loose moraine to the tangle of lodges at **Lobuche** (4930m). Originally a summer village for herders, Lobuche now exists solely to service the trekking industry. It's not the most appealing rest stop, and the bitter cold



THE ITALIAN PYRAMID

Just north of Lobuche, tucked into a side valley at the foot of the Lobuche Glacier, the curiously named **Ev-K2-CNR** (www.ev-k2cnr.org) was constructed in 1990 by Italian mountaineer Agostino da Polenza and the geologist Ardito Desio, who led the first ascent of K2 in 1954. Housed inside a striking glass pyramid, the research station was established to measure the exact height of Everest and K2. Today, it is used for scientific research into mountain conservation, climate change, mountaineering technology and the effects of altitude on the human body. Most people know the station by its nickname, the 'Italian Pyramid'.

Depending on the schedule of the researchers, you may be able to visit and observe the projects. However, be aware that the scientists are working and do not have time to show trekkers around the centre. If the centre is accepting visitors, the doors stay open from 8am to 6pm. Just below the pyramid, the 8000 Inn provides accommodation for researchers – you can expect a gruff greeting from the owners' dogs as you pass by.

keeps most people inside around the dung-fuelled heater.

There is no real difference between the Hotel Sagarmatha National Park Lodge, Alpine Inn, Sherpa Lodge or Up in the Clouds Lodge – where you stay will largely be decided by which lodges still have rooms. One superior choice is the smart and tidy **Eco Lodge** (www.astrek.com/asiantrekking; r from US\$20), set away from the other lodges at the top of the village. The 'eco' part refers to the stone and aluminium used to build the lodge instead of timber. Rooms have shared bathrooms, but carpets make them feel cosy.

Prices at Lobuche are elevated because of the elevation. Rooms cost Rs 200, battery charging costs Rs 300 per hour and phone calls cost upwards of Rs 350 per minute. *Rakshi* and other alcoholic drinks are available, but be aware that effects can be dramatic at this elevation.

You can climb the ridge east of the village for your first views of the Khumbu Glacier, with Everest mostly obscured by Lhotse and Nuptse (7861m). Alternatively, take a stroll north for 20 minutes along the moraine to the fascinating Italian Pyramid (see the boxed text, above).

Day 10: Lobuche to Gorak Shep

2½ hours, 250m ascent

The effects of altitude will really become apparent on the climb to Gorak Shep. Few people sleep comfortably above Lobuche and many people start to suffer headaches and other mild symptoms of AMS on the climb to Gorak Shep. If you are already feeling the altitude, consider making a day

trip past Gorak Shep to Kala Pattar and returning to Lobuche for the night.

The first section of the trail from Lobuche follows the narrow gap between the glacial moraine and the mountain wall, past the turn-off to the Italian Pyramid. To the right, the Khumbu Glacier gurgles and moans under a blanket of ground-up rocks and gravel.

As a result of global warming, the glacier is shrinking away from the moraine wall at an alarming rate. The route of the path changes regularly as the edge of the moraine tumbles onto the glacier – to find the trail, look for cairns of stones left as markers and hoof prints and dung left by yak trains.

After rounding a bend in the trail, you'll get your first views of **Kala Pattar** (5545m). The summit of this dark mound of mountain rubble provides perhaps the best view of Mt Everest in the Himalaya. You can make the ascent of Kala Pattar from Gorak Shep in the afternoon or the following morning, before returning to Lobuche or Dughla.

As you climb, take time to detour to the edge of the moraine to look out over the Khumbu Glacier. This enormous tongue of ice marches down the slopes of Everest at a rate of up to a metre per day, breaking off into brittle seracs – towers of ice – at the Khumbu Icefall.

Eventually, after negotiating the terminal moraine of the Changri Shar Glacier, you'll reach **Gorak Shep**, a flat, sandy bowl at 5160m, at the foot of Kala Pattar. This was the base camp for the 1952 Swiss Everest expedition, but subsequent expeditions



established an advanced base camp just below the Khumbu Icefall.

Like Lobuche, Gorak Shep is a ramshackle collection of lodges, which provide food and space for a sleeping bag but not much more. If no rooms are available, you may be able to sleep on the floor of the lounge, which is often the warmest place thanks to the dung-powered heater. Few people sleep soundly because of the altitude, the cold and the noise of other trekkers coming through the paper-thin walls.

The sandy patch below the lodges is actually the bed of a vanished lake. Arranged around this sandbox are the Himalayan Lodge, Buddha Lodge, Mount Garden Kala Pather Guesthouse and Snowland Highest Inn. At the north end of the village is the **Yeti Resort** (r Rs 500), which has nicer rooms and reliable solar electricity.

Where you stay will largely depend on which lodges have space. If you get a late start from Lobuche, you may have to make do with what you can find. Lodges sometimes shut down from December to February, so enquire at Lobuche before starting the ascent.

You cannot actually see Everest from Gorak Shep as the peak is hidden by the shoulder of Nuptse, but there are grand views over the Khumbu Glacier from the top of the moraine. Dotted around the ridge above Gorak Shep are a number of memorials to expedition members lost during various ascents of Everest. Since 1921 more than 200 climbers, sherpas and porters have perished here, either on the peak or in helicopter crashes at Base Camp. Climbers Rob Hall and Andy Harris, who perished in the 1996 Everest disaster, are both commemorated here.

Most trekkers stop for lunch at Gorak Shep and arrange a room or bed space for

the night, before continuing to Kala Pattar or Everest Base Camp. Because of the exhaustion and lethargy experienced at this altitude, many people only visit one of these two options. If you want to see both, use the afternoon of the first day to visit Base Camp, and climb to Kala Pattar the next morning.

Day 11: Gorak Shep to Everest Base Camp

6 hours return, 200m ascent, 200m descent

The walk to Base Camp from Gorak Shep is a draining scramble over an ever-changing path across the Khumbu Glacier, starting at the north end of the sandpit at Gorak Shep. Look out for tiny pikas (mouse-hares) scurrying between the boulders on the path.

Your destination is a semi-permanent village of brightly-coloured dome tents and prayer flags wedged between rocks at the bottom of the Khumbu Icefall at 5340m. The atmosphere at Base Camp is fascinating, with groups from dozens of different nations playing cards, gambling, eating, reading, strumming guitars and doing everything possible to fill their time while they wait for the green light to climb to the summit. The periodic groans of the seracs in the icefall only add to the tension in the air.

Because of the altitude, Everest cannot be climbed as a continuous ascent, so expeditions have to zigzag up and down the mountain in stages to acclimatise, which leads to a lot of waiting around in Base Camp. For visitors, the focal point is normally the mobile bakery, which uses portable gas ovens to prepare the what could be the best apple pie in Nepal (and that's not just the altitude talking).

Many people have unrealistic expectations of Base Camp and end up being disappointed. Visiting is an interesting cultural



THE EVEREST MARATHON

In case you didn't find walking up the mountains hard enough, every two years in November you can run through the Khumbu on the world's highest marathon. The **Everest Marathon** (www.everestmarathon.org.uk) was first run in 1987, following a downhill route from Gorak Shep to Tengboche and Namche Bazaar. The winners usually complete the 42km (26.2-mile) course in close to four hours, but participants must spend two weeks trekking as part of their training. The race is run by the British trekking agency **Bufo Ventures** (www.bufoventures.co.uk) as a charitable venture and proceeds go to development projects around the Khumbu. There is a long waiting list for one of the 75 slots allocated to non-Nepali runners – contact the agency for the latest dates and fees.

MT EVEREST

Everest has gone by a number of different names over the years. The Survey of India christened the mountain 'Peak XV', but it was later named Everest after Sir George Everest, the surveyor general of India in 1865. It was later discovered that the mountain already had a name – Sherpas call the peak Chomolungma, after the female guardian deity of the mountain who rides a red tiger and is one of the five sisters of long life. There was no Nepali name for the mountain until 1956 when the historian Babu Ram Acharya invented the name Sagarmatha, meaning 'head of the sky'.

Using triangulation from the plains of India, the Survey of India established the elevation of the summit of Everest at 8839m. In 1954 this was revised to 8848m using data from 12 different survey stations around the mountain. In 1999 a team sponsored by National Geographic used GPS data to produce a new elevation of 8850m, but in 2002 a Chinese team made measurements from the summit using ice radar and GPS systems and produced a height of 8844.43m.

So is Everest shrinking? Not exactly: the Chinese calculated the height of the bedrock of the mountain, without the accumulated snow and ice. In fact, Everest is growing and moving north-east at a rate of 6cm a year as plate tectonics drive the Indian subcontinent underneath Eurasia. To complicate things, Nepal still prefers to use the old 8848m elevation (we've gone for 8850m in this book).

experience, but there no views of Everest – the mountain lurks somewhere beyond the icefall – and cloud often rolls down from the peaks, obscuring everything in a grey fog. If you are specifically after a view of Everest, climb Kala Pattar instead.

SIDE TRIP: KALA PATTAR

4 hours return, 200m ascent, 200m descent

Mornings are usually sparkling clear, and this is the best time to climb to Kala Pattar for one of the world's definitive mountain views. For many people this is the highlight of their trek, but cloud can roll in quickly, obscuring the peaks. For the best chance of an Everest photo opportunity, start this trek as soon as it gets light.

The path to Kala Pattar climbs up the grassy ridge above Gorak Shep. You can't miss the path – just look for the long line of Gore-Tex-clad trekkers snaking up the hillside. It takes 1½ to two hours to gain the **summit** (5545m), which is marked by a tangle of wind-lashed prayer flags. As you climb, the peak of Pumori looms dramatically ahead.

Having gained the summit, sit back and be amazed. By climbing 200m, you have placed yourself in front of one of the most astonishing views on earth – a 360-degree panorama of Himalayan giants from Pumori and Lobuche West (6145m) to Nuptse, Lhotse and Everest. Even Gorak Shep seems impossibly distant, a tiny speck next to the frozen river of the Khumbu Glacier.

From this elevation, the true height of Everest becomes clear. The entire south face is clearly visible, as well as Lho La (the pass between Nepal and Tibet, named the Western Cwm by George Mallory in 1921) and most of the West Ridge route climbed by Unsoeld and Hornbein in 1963. On the north side of the peak, you may be able to spot the North Ridge and the first and second steps, prominent obstacles during the first attempts on the mountain in the 1920s and 1930s.

On your way back down to Gorak Shep, detour south to the lower ridge to look down over the two glacial lakes that form the base camp for Pumori.

Day 12: Gorak Shep to Lobuche

2 hours, 250m descent

After a morning climb to Everest Base Camp or Kala Pattar, it can feel like you are wearing ten-league boots as you skip down the mountainside, losing all the altitude you have gained in the last two days. You can easily reach Lobuche in two hours and many people continue downhill to Pheriche or Dingboche. Just retrace your steps along the moraine of the Khumbu Glacier.

Day 13: Lobuche to Pheriche/Dingboche

3 hours, 640m/500m descent

If you stop in Lobuche, you can take your time over the downhill stroll to Pheriche



or Dingboche. Continue down the moraine to Dughla and drop to the bridge over the gushing stream that flows out of the glacier. The path forks on the other side: for Pheriche, follow the low path that drops along the wide valley of the Khumbu Khola; for Dingboche, follow the upper path that runs along the valley wall through Dusa.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: DINGBOCHE VIA KONGMA LA & CHHUKUNG

2 days, 620m ascent, 800m descent

There's no need to rush downhill to Dingboche. If you feel sufficiently energetic, you can make a challenging climb over the 5535m Kongma La, down to Chhukung and on to Dingboche – see p131 for a (reverse) route description.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: VIA CHO LA & GOKYO

2 days, 590m ascent, 710m descent

Many trekkers stitch the Everest Base Camp and Gokyo treks together via the breathless, snowy pass at Cho La (5420m). See p132 for a description of this trek.

Day 14: Pheriche/Dingboche to Tengboche

2½ hours, 550m descent, 70m ascent

Before you continue your descent along the Imja Valley, consider taking a day out of your itinerary for the rewarding hike up the Imja Khola to Chhukung (see p118).

If you prefer to go directly to Tengboche, drop down the valley to Orsho, then follow the west bank of the Imja Khola to Shomare and on to Pangboche. If you haven't already visited the gompa in upper Pangboche, take the path leading uphill where the trail forks about 20 minutes below Shomare. From Pangboche, retrace your footsteps down to the Imja Khola and up through the forest to Debuche and Tengboche.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: PHERICHE/DINGBOCHE TO PHORTSE

5–6 hours, 460m/600m descent, 100m ascent

For a bit of variety on the way downhill to Namche, consider taking a detour through Phortse, a sprawling Sherpa village on a flat-topped ridge overlooking the confluence of the Imja Khola and Dudh Kosi. From Phortse, you can cross the Dudh Kosi

and climb to Phortse Thenga on the Gokyo trail, and then follow the ridge south to Namche Bazaar.

To reach Phortse, climb to upper Pangboche, then head south out of the village along the high trail that starts near the Tashe Lodge. This is a leisurely trek through a rocky landscape dotted with scrub junipers, offering eagle-eye views over the Imja Khola Valley. However, there are few places where you can fill your water bottle – stock up at Pangboche before you set off.

The trail skirts around the ridge and eventually drops down to the potato fields of **Phortse** at 3810m. See p128 for a description of the village and the trail on to Namche.

Day 15: Tengboche to Namche Bazaar

4½ hours, 750m descent, 350m ascent

From Tengboche, retrace your steps down to Phunki Thenga, then climb the ridge towards Namche Bazaar. You can follow the level trail along the ridge to Chhorkung, or take the path that climbs steeply up the ridge above Sanasa to Khumjung. See p111 for a description of the route on to Namche.

Most people celebrate the return to Namche with a slap-up meal, either at their lodge or at Café Danphe, Everest Bakery or Namche Bakery Café (see p107).

Day 16: Namche Bazaar to Lukla

6 hours, 950m descent, 250m ascent

Many trekkers find the descent from Namche to the Dudh Kosi to be the hardest stage of the entire trek. Although the path is all downhill, the unrelenting slope places massive impact on the knees. Using trekking poles will help, as will wearing a knee support bandage. Once you cross the high suspension bridge, the path runs mostly level to Jorsale and then climbs to Monjo, where you must show your TIMS card and your national park receipt.

It's an easy run through Benkar and Phakding to Lukla. You should be at the airport in Lukla the afternoon before your flight to reconfirm your reservation – your seats may vanish if you do not reconfirm. There is usually a bit of a party atmosphere among trekkers who are finishing their trek here and several bars in Lukla offer happy-hour deals, pool tables and late-night drinking.



As an alternative to flying back to Kathmandu, consider walking southwest to Shivalaya (see p133) or southeast to Tumlingar (see p236).

GOKYO

Duration 12 days

Max Elevation 5360m

Difficulty medium-hard

Season October to December and February to May

Start/Finish Lukla (p98)

Summary Everest too busy? They try this fine alternative, which climbs the valley to the west of Everest to the village of Gokyo and five sacred lakes on the moraine beside the Ngozumpa Glacier.

GOKYO – TIMES

The following are trekking times only; stops are not included.

Day	Section	Hours
1	Lukla to Cheplung	1:15
	Cheplung to Phakding	1:15
2	Phakding to Benkar	1:30
	Benkar to Monjo	1:00
	Monjo to Namche Bazaar	3:00
3	Rest day	
4	Rest day	
5	Namche Bazaar to Khumjung	1:00
	Khumjung to Phortse Thenga	1:30
6	Phortse Thenga to Dole	1:30
7	Dole to Lhabarma	0:30
	Lhabarma to Luza	0:30
	Luza to Machhermo	0:30
8	Machhermo to Longponga Tsho	2:30
	Longponga Tsho to Gokyo	1:00

The crowds, commercialism and nightly competition for beds is driving many trekkers away from the more famous Everest Base Camp trek into the arms of the lovely Gokyo trek. This two-week spectacular climbs almost as high as the Everest Base Camp trek and offers similarly jaw-dropping Everest views, but the trails are less crowded, the lodges quieter and the villages along the trail have a reason to exist over and above serving dal bhat to legions of hungry trekkers.

The trail follows the Everest Base Camp route as far as Sanasa, above Namche Bazaar, and then follows the Dudh Kosi to its source – a series of emerald-green lakes along the moraine of the Ngozumpa Glacier. Beside the largest of these lakes in a basin of snow peaks, Gokyo village is a more satisfying destination than Gorak Shep, not least because it is a proper Sherpa village, complete with huge herds of yaks.

From Gokyo, you can climb Gokyo Ri (5360m) for a heart-stopping view over Everest, Lhotse, Cho Oyu and Makalu, or continue north along the valley to the highest of the sacred lakes. Either way, the sense of communing with nature is more profound than on the Everest Base Camp trek. The flip side of this is that the lodges are more basic and the dinner menus more monotonous. You'll also miss out on most of the Khumbu's famous Buddhist monasteries.

You can combine both treks by walking to Gokyo then crossing the 5420m Cho La pass to Lobuche (see p132 for details).

THE TREK (SEE MAPS PP94–7)

Days 1 & 2: Lukla to Namche Bazaar

For details of the walk between Lukla and Namche Bazaar see the description of the Everest Base Camp trek (p102).

Days 3 & 4: Namche Bazaar

Don't rush. The climb to Gokyo is extremely steep and it's easy to go too high too fast and succumb to altitude sickness. Only after a minimum of three nights in the Namche-Khumjung region is it safe to begin this trek. But don't worry – there are lots of things to do. As well as exploring the village, you can make a thoroughly rewarding trek to Thame (see p109), take a day hike through Shyangboche, Khunde and Khumjung (see p111) or stroll up to the museum and visitor centre at Chhorkung (p108). Alternatively, sit back with a book and a cinnamon roll at one of the bakeries in Namche. Hiking will help acclimatisation more than the cinnamon rolls, however.

Day 5: Namche Bazaar to Phortse Thenga

2–3 hours, 530m ascent, 290m descent

Heading north from Khumjung, you can take the easy path via Chhorkung (p114)



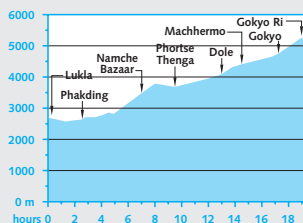
or the steeper trail via Khumjung (p111). Whichever path you take, you will reach Sanasa, below Khumjung on the west side of the Dudh Kosi River.

A signpost on the lower trail claims that you can reach Gokyo in seven hours, but you will almost certainly succumb to altitude sickness unless you spread the ascent over four days. If you come on the high path via Khumjung, there's no need to drop down to the village – just continue level on the trail above the Sanasa junction.

The path crosses the lower slopes of Khumbila (5761m), the mountain that rises above Namche. Sherpas worship this mountain as abode of the patron god of the Khumbu region. The Sherpa name Khumbu Yul Lha translates as 'God of the Khumbu territory'. On *thangkas* (cloth paintings) and monastery murals, Khumbu Yul Lha is depicted as a white-faced being riding on a white horse.

As you climb up the side of the ridge, the full extent of the deforestation around Namche becomes apparent. Looking across the valley, you should be able to pick out the houses of Tengboche on the ridge below the spire of Ama Dablam (6856m) and the walled fields of Phortse sprawling across a flat-topped ridge below the snow-dusted peaks of Taboche (6542m) and Cholatse (6443m).

Gokyo



WARNING

It is easy to ascend faster than the recommended guidelines on the Gokyo trek, so be sure to take the recommended rest days and be alert for the symptoms of AMS.

KNOW YOUR YAKS

Everyone knows the name of those big hairy cows seen all over the Himalaya – they're yaks, right? Actually, it's not that simple. The term yak should really be reserved for the pure-blooded, long-haired bull of the species *Bos grunniens*; female animals are called *nak* by Sherpas and *dri* by Tibetans. Most of the 'yaks' seen around the Khumbu are actually *dzopkyo* (male) or *dzum* (female) – the offspring of pure-blood yaks bred with cows or Tibetan bulls, which the Sherpas call *lang* and Nepalis call *khirkoo*. The phrase 'yak cheese' is actually an oxymoron.

The track contours around the ridge to a knot of teahouses and a stupa clinging to the edge of a small pass at **Mong La** (3975m). The village is said to be the birthplace of Lama Sange Dorje, the saint who introduced Buddhism to the Khumbu (see the boxed text, p115).

Mountain winds curl across this exposed hillside – look out for golden eagles spiralling in the thermals. There are three lodges here: the Snowland View Lodge above the stupa is the most comfortable. North of Mong La, the trail drops steeply on switchbacks through pine forests for one hour, with intermittent views towards Phortse.

From the simple Phortse Thenga Lodge, a side trail drops down to the Dudh Kosi at **Phortse Thenga** (3680m), where the large, red-roofed River Resort offers the best accommodation in the area. Rooms are also pretty respectable at the Phortse Thenga Trekkers Lodge across the bridge. The large flat area in front of the resort is a great place to camp.

A side trail crosses the river at Phortse Thenga and rises through a forest (that often hides musk deer) to **Phortse** (3810m) on the lower slopes of Taboche. Two trails continue from Phortse: one runs northeast around the ridge to Pangboche on the Everest Base Camp trek (p116) and the other climbs northwest along the valley of the Dudh Kosi towards Gokyo (see p128).

Because of the increase in elevation, it is not recommended that you stay the night at Phortse on your way up the valley. However, you can pass through Phortse on the way back from Gokyo, via the path on the east bank of the Dudh Kosi.



Day 6: Phortse Thenga to Dole

1–2 hours, 410m ascent

With the peaks rising dramatically above, you may feel a temptation to go charging up the mountain to the snowline. Resist. You are already ascending faster than the ideal rate, and if you go too high too quickly, you could end your trip with an emergency evacuation down the mountain, or worse.

It is a short, easy morning hike from Phortse Thenga to Dole, the next village along the west side of the valley. With so little walking time, you might choose to spend the morning washing and drying clothes in the warmth and comfort of Phortse Thenga before you head off.

If you stayed at the top of the village, continue along the same high trail; if you stayed by the riverbank, take the path that runs straight uphill above the River Resort. The first stage passes through a dense forest of tall, old pines and moss-covered rhododendrons.

The army post and national park checkpoint at **Tongba** (3950m) are not currently in use, though this could change in future. The path squeezes past some enormous boulders and crosses a series of rocky cascades, rising past the stone summer houses of herders from Khumjung.

You should feel comparatively rested when you reach **Dole** (4090m; pronounced 'doe-lay'), set at the mouth of the Phule Khola in a wide, densely forested valley. There are good views south towards Khumbila and north to Taboche from several high points around the village. The pastoral setting and superior lodges make Dole a good place to stop for an extra rest and acclimatisation day.

The village is split in two by a small stream. Trekking groups favour the large Yeti Inn and Cho-Oyu Lodge on the northern side of the stream, which both offer large gardens and lots of old fashioned trekking-lodge camaraderie. Individual trekkers may prefer the relative peace and quiet of the Alpine Cottage Lodge, Himalayan Lodge, Namaste Lodge and Trekkers Inn on the southern side of the stream.

Day 7: Dole to Machhermo

1–2 hours, 320m ascent

Day 7 is another short day to limit your rate of ascent. From Dole, it's a steep climb out of the forest to an increasingly barren

hillside, covered in tundra grasses and dotted scrub junipers. Across the valley, you should be able to make out the path of the trail south from Gokyo to Phortse.

Continue past a *chorten* past the village of **Lhabarma** (4330m), often marked on maps as Lhafarma or Lopharme. The agreeable Mountain View Tophill Lodge at the bottom of the village has a telephone; the Holy Days Inn at the top of the village has very basic facilities. Below Lhabarma are the scattered stone shepherds' huts of Gyele at 4110m.

Most of the villages on the upper stages of the trek are seasonal. Families from further down the valley set up camp in the summer with their herds of yaks, cows and goats and retreat in winter when the snow and lack of running water make it impractical to live here. Even in spring and autumn, it's wise to fill your water bottle whenever you have the opportunity.

From Lhabarma, the trail climbs gently past a large *chorten* to **Luza**, tucked into a side valley at 4340m. The Paradise Lodge is probably overstating its charms, but the large Khantega View Lodge has good rooms and year-round water supply from a small stream. There are several flat areas where you can camp, including in the grounds of the lodges.

The trail continues to climb along the side of the valley, over a series of sandy hummocks. You'll soon reach a *chorten* and fluttering prayer flags on the outskirts of **Machhermo** (4410m), tucked into a wide, flat-bottomed valley below the terminal moraine of the Ngozumpa Glacier. Locals claim that a yeti killed three yaks and attacked a Sherpa woman here in 1974, so keep your eyes open if you pop to the loo after dark.

At the north end of the village is the International Porter Protection Group **rescue post** (www.ippg.net), staffed by international volunteer medics. As well as providing emergency treatment to trekkers and porters, the centre strives to educate trekkers about the dangers of AMS. The strange repetitive beating noise you'll hear throughout the village is made by farmers pounding yak dung into powder, to be used as natural fertiliser on the fields around Khumjung.

Machhermo has five lodges, all large, timber-lined and set in big, stone-walled



gardens. The courtyard-style Tashi Dele Lodge and the more traditional Himalayan Lodge and Snowland Lodge are on the west bank, while smaller Trekkers Lodge and Yeti Lodge are on the eastern bank, along with the impressive **Namgyal Lodge** (☎ 038-540038; www.machermo-namgyal-lodge.com), set in a lovely courtyard hung with prayer flags.

Day 8: Machhermo to Gokyo

3–4 hours, 350m ascent

On Day 8, you leave the foothills and enter the desolate tundra of the high mountains. Climb steeply up a scrubby slope to a collection of *chortens* on the hilltop, then follow the ridge. On the way, there are good views south to Kantega (6685m) and north towards Cho Oyu (8201m), the sixth-highest mountain in the world.

You'll soon come to the tiny settlement of **Pangka** (4390m), squeezed against a mound of sand and rubble at the end of the Ngozumpa Glacier. A side trail cuts east to the village of Nha on the far side of the Dudh Kosi Valley – you'll take this path if you decide to descend to Namche via Phortse on the way downhill from Gokyo (see p128).

The ridge in front of Pangka provides some welcome shelter from the wind, but not, sadly, from the snow. In 1995 an entire trekking group was killed here by an avalanche. The only lodge left, the rudimentary Fanga Viewpoint Hotel, lies well away from the old avalanche path.

Leaving Pangka, the trail dips then climbs rapidly into a rocky cleft on stone steps beside one of the streams that feeds the Dudh Kosi. This portal releases you onto the lateral moraine of the Ngozumpa Glacier, the longest in the Himalaya, which begins 20km north on the slopes of Cho Oyu.

Wedged between the mountain wall and this crumbling mound of sand and gravel are six sacred lakes, which reflect the peaks in their calm, mirrored surfaces.

You'll pass the first lake, **Longponga Tsho** (4650m), immediately after crossing the bridge. For reasons that are not entirely clear, a family of Brahminy ducks has been living here for years. Just past the lake, a small side trail cuts east across the glacier towards Tagnag and the Cho La pass to Lobuche (see p132 for a description of this route).

The trail now becomes almost level as it crosses a barren landscape of lichen-encrusted boulders and dwarf rhododendron bushes, growing in whatever shelter they can find between the rocks. You'll soon reach the second lake, **Taboche Tsho** (4710m), before rolling into the village of **Gokyo** (4750m) on the shores of the third lake, known as **Dudh Pokhari**.

The setting is magical – the village is squeezed between a wall of moraine and the lake, which is backed by a basin of fang-like peaks. When the wind dies, the mountains are perfectly reflected in the surface of the lake. Although it isn't obvious from the shore, the lake is actually a brilliant emerald green, something that becomes apparent when you see Gokyo from above on the trek to Gokyo Ri (see the Side Trip, p128).

There are seven lodges at Gokyo, but most of the owners divide their time between looking after trekkers and looking after huge herds of yaks. Every morning and evening, the narrow stone lanes of the village are overrun by shaggy beasts of burden as the herds are driven out onto the pastures. Many of the lodges close down in winter as the herders move their animals to lower pastures to escape the bitter winter cold.



CRAVINGS...

It is not the altitude or the exertion or the cold that wears down many trekkers – it's the food. If you are used to a Western diet with lots of meat and dairy products, eating lentils, potatoes and rice three times a day can be quite a shock to the system. Trekkers have been known to carry all sorts of luxuries to liven up the daily dose of dal bhat – cheese, salami, chilli powder, ketchup, beef jerky and even dried truffles – but sooner or later, most people start craving the high-fat, high-taste foods of home. Don't believe us? Well, try this simple test. Repeat out loud the words: 'Two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, tomatoes, onions in a sesame seed bun' and watch as every conversation in the lodge turns to the foods people would love to be eating right now instead of rice and lentils.

The **Gokyo Resort** (r Rs 300) is the largest lodge here, spread over several buildings at the top of the village. However, you'll find the cosiest atmosphere and the best views at the Cho Oyu View Lodge and Lakeside View Lodge down on the lakeshore. Both lodges have raised sun lounges with big windows facing on the lake, and little box rooms downstairs. The other lodges have similar facilities, but less impressive views from their sunrooms.

Day 9: Gokyo & Around

Most trekkers spend a few days in Gokyo, strolling around the lake and hiking up to some of the mountain viewpoints nearby. The most popular walk is the stiff two-hour climb to Gokyo Ri, but you can also hike north to the other lakes strung out along the moraine of the Ngozumpa Glacier.

If you want some high adventure, consider the testing trek over the Cho La pass to Lobuche (on the Everest Base Camp trek) or the steep climb over the Renjo La pass to Thame (west of Namche Bazaar). Together, these treks form part of the stunning Three Passes trek – see p130.

SIDE TRIP: GOKYO RI

4 hours return, 570m ascent, 570m descent

As Gorak Shep has Kala Pattar, so Gokyo has Gokyo Ri. The 5360m-high hill on the north side of the Dudh Pokhari is an epic vantage point, offering the kind of view over Everest that is normally reserved for balloonists or mountaineers. The path to the peak crosses the stream at the north end of the village and climbs for two hours to a cat's cradle of prayer flags at the top of the hill.

From the summit, there are panoramic views of Cho Oyu, Everest, Lhotse, Makalu, Cholatse and Taboche, with the Ngozumpa Glacier cutting across in front like a massive tear in the landscape. From this lofty eyrie, Gokyo is a tiny dot on the side of the moraine, and the Dudh Pokhari is a giant green puddle, without a single reflection on its mirror-flat surface.

As with Kala Pattar, the best views are just after dawn, and the clouds tend to roll in by mid-morning. The prevailing wisdom is to start up the mountain at first light, even if it looks cloudy. You'll often beat the fog to the top of the hill and have a perfect view over the top of the cloud banks.

SIDE TRIP: THE SACRED LAKES

5 hours return, 200m ascent, 200m descent

The six languid pools that surround Gokyo are the source of the river you have followed since Lukla, and both Hindus and Buddhists regard them as sacred. During Janai Purnima (the Sacred Thread Festival), which usually falls in August, hundreds of lowland Nepalis make the pilgrimage to Gokyo to ritually immerse themselves in the icy waters.

You can trek north from Gokyo along the moraine all day with only a small gain in altitude. However, the Ngozumpa Glacier is melting and pulling away from its moraine, so sections of the path are regularly falling into the glacier. The easiest path to follow climbs onto the ridge near a cluster of ruined huts, avoiding the confusing tracks on the surface of the moraine.

The first lake you will come to is **Thonak Tsho** (4870m), a steely grey pool surrounded by enormous boulders and patches of ice (allow 1½ hours from Gokyo). On the shore is a boulder the size of a three-bedroom house. The trail climbs the hill on the north shore and runs level along the moraine to the fifth lake, **Ngozumpa Tsho** (4980m), set beneath the icy shoulder of Cho Oyu (allow another 1½ hours).

On the edge of the moraine to the east is a small hill festooned with prayer flags, known locally as **Scoundrel's Viewpoint** (5000m). From this grassy pimple, you'll see the gleaming ice-wall of Cho Oyu and the upper expanse of the Ngozumpa Glacier; to the east are unobstructed views of the north face of Everest, as well as Nuptse, Lhotse and Makalu.

Only campers tend to see the sixth lake, **Gyazumba Tsho** (5419m), gripped by fingers of ice at the foot of Cho Oyu. The increase in elevation and the length of the walk make it impractical to trek here and back in one day.

Day 10: Gokyo to Phortse

5–7 hours, 900m descent

Rather than retrace the upward route, you can enjoy a change of scenery by following the east side of the Dudh Kosi Valley. Leave the trail you followed uphill at Pangka and cross the stream to a couple of *kharkas* (pastures) at **Nha** (4400m), then climb and turn south along the ridge.



LOCAL HERO

Everyone knows about the development projects founded by Sir Edmund Hillary, but fewer people have heard about the work done by Tony Freake, an English trekker who has made it his personal mission to raise the standard of living for the inhabitants of Phortse. Taking the principle that development should be administered by local people, his first project involved sending funds and plans for the construction of a boarding house for teachers at the village school in 1989. Three years later, the Phortse Community Project travelled to Phortse to build the village health centre, using donations from the Eton College Mountaineering Club.

In 1996 the Eton mountaineers raised £25,000 for the construction of Phortse Gompa, which was built using traditional techniques and materials, with the blessing of the head lama of Tengboche. In 1999 a new primary school was constructed and in 2004 the village got its first year-round water supply. One year later, a hydroelectric plant on the Konar Khola brought electricity to the village for the first time. 'Papa Tony' was awarded the Sir Edmund Hillary Medal in 2008 for 'remarkable service in conservation of culture in remote mountainous regions'. You can read more at www.ianhills.net/phortsecommunityproject.

The trail is obvious and straightforward, with just a few awkward sections around stream crossings and landslides. There are crude lodges at **Thore** (4300m) and **Thare** (4390m), and a flat area for camping at **Konar** (4000m), but facilities are very basic compared with what you have experienced elsewhere on the track.

Eventually, the trail dips into a gully and emerges at the top of **Phortse** (3810m), just below the gompa. This village lies off the main trekking circuit and as a result it feels more like a proper Sherpa village and less like a theme park for trekkers. The stone houses of Phortse are scattered among walled potato fields on a gently sloping ridge below Taboche peak, high above the confluence of the Imja Khola and Dudh Kosi.

At the top of the village, **Phortse Gompa** was built in 1996 by a team of English and Sherpa volunteers (see the boxed text, above). There are seven lodges in Phortse – all are working farms, so staying here is more like a homestay than a typical trekking-lodge experience. Top picks include the Peaceful Lodge, Tham Serku Lodge, Namaste Lodge and Phortse Guesthouse at the bottom of the village.

When you decide to move on from Phortse, there are two possible routes. You can drop down to Phortse Thenga on the trail at the southwest corner of the village, and continue to Namche Bazaar, or follow the high path at the northeast corner of the village to Upper Pangboche and on to Everest Base Camp – see p123.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: GOKYO TO LOBUCHE VIA THE CHO LA

2 days, 710m ascent, 590m descent

If you plan to link the Gokyo and Everest Base Camp treks, you must cross over the 5420m Cho La pass. If you plan to cross from Gokyo to Lobuche, break the journey at **Tagnag**, a two-hour walk southeast from Gokyo across the Ngozumpa Glacier. From here, you can cross the pass and drop to Dzonglha in around five hours, reaching Lobuche two hours later. See p132 for a detailed description of the route.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: GOKYO TO THAME OVER THE RENJO LA

2 days, 550m ascent, 1520m descent

Rather than retracing your steps to Namche Bazaar, you can climb over another lofty pass, the 5345m Renjo La, dropping down to Thame in two days and reaching Namche Bazaar a day later – see p132 for a detailed description of the route.

Day 11: Phortse to Namche Bazaar

3–5 hours, 700m descent, 300m ascent

A shady trail descends from Phortse through the forest to the bridge at **Phortse Thenga** and rejoins the original route from Namche Bazaar. Whether you follow the easy path via Chhorkung or the high path via Khumjung, you should be able to reach Namche by early afternoon.

Day 12: Namche Bazaar to Lukla

5–7 hours, 1000m descent, 300m ascent

For details of the walk to Lukla see p103.



THREE PASSES

Duration 20 days

Max Elevation 5535m

Difficulty hard

Season October to November and March to May

Start/Finish Lukla (p98)

Summary The ultimate Everest circuit, rising from Lukla to Chhukung, crossing the Kongma La to Lobuche and Everest Base Camp, continuing over Cho La to Gokyo, then crossing the Renjo La to Thame and Namche Bazaar. Only for the truly adventurous.

In the last few years, improvements on the high mountain trails have made it possible to walk a complete circuit of the Khumbu from Lukla. This is an epic journey that will take you over some of the highest mountain passes in the world. It stitches together the best of the Everest Base Camp and Gokyo treks and two of the most rewarding side treks in the lower Khumbu.

Crossing the 'three passes' is not technically difficult, but all these trails climb above 5000m, so acclimatisation is essential. If you do not take the recommended acclimatisation days, you *will* feel the effects of AMS on these treks. The trail passes through remote areas where there are no emergency facilities – never trek alone and consider hiring a guide who can communicate with local people if you get into trouble.

It is possible to walk this trek in either direction, but acclimatisation is easier if you travel from east to west – from Lukla to Dingboche, then Chhukung, crossing the 5535m Kongma La to Lobuche, climbing to Everest Base Camp and Kala Pattar, crossing the 5420m Cho La pass to Gokyo, then straining over the 5345m Renjo La to Thame, Namche and Lukla. Now *that's* what we call trekking!

In good weather, you should be able to cross all three passes without axes, ropes and crampons, but snow can create difficult and potentially dangerous conditions on all of these trails. All the passes are crossed in one long day, with no facilities along the way – bring plenty of snacks and water (or the means to purify more water from streams). At any time of year, down jackets

and windproofs are strongly recommended. Make sure your porters are also properly equipped. All three passes can be closed by snow from December to February – check before you set off.

THE TREK (SEE MAPS PP94-7)

Days 1-7: Lukla to Chhukung

In order to be properly acclimatised for the steep climb over the Kongma La, it is imperative to take this trek slowly. Take two days for the journey to Namche Bazaar

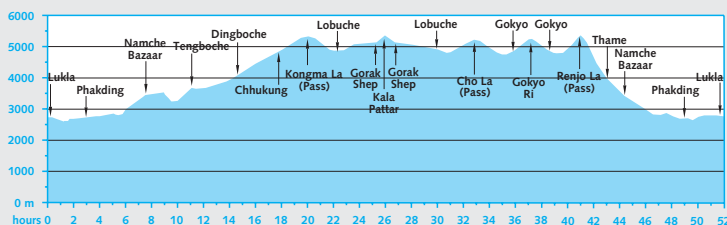
THREE PASSES – TIMES

The following are trekking times only; stops are not included.

Day	Section	Hours
1	Lukla to Cheplung	1:15
	Cheplung to Phakding	1:15
2	Phakding to Benkar	1:30
	Benkar to Monjo	1:00
	Monjo to Namche Bazaar	3:00
3	Rest day	
4	Namche Bazaar to Sanasa	1:00
	Sanasa to Phunki Thenga	1:30
	Phunki Thenga to Tengboche	1:30
5	Rest day	
6	Tengboche to Pangboche	1:15
	Pangboche to Orsho	1:15
	Orsho to Pheriche/Dingboche	1:00
7	Pheriche/Dingboche to Chhukung	2:30-3:00
8	Rest day	
9	Chhukung to Kongma La	5:00
	Kongma La to Lobuche	4:00
10	Lobuche to Gorak Shep	2:30
	Gorak Shep to Base Camp (return)	5:00-6:00
11	Gorak Shep to Kala Pattar	2:00
	Kala Pattar to Lobuche	3:00
12	Lobuche to Dzonglha	3:00
13	Dzonglha to Cho La	3:00
	Cho La to Gokyo	5:00
14	Rest day	
15	Rest day	
16	Gokyo to Renjo La	4:00
	Renjo La to Lungden/Marulung	3:00-4:00
17	Lungden/Marulung to Thame	2:00-3:00
18	Thame to Namche Bazaar	3:00
19	Namche Bazaar to Monjo	3:00
	Monjo to Benkar	1:00
	Benkar to Phakding	1:30
20	Phakding to Cheplung	1:15
	Cheplung to Lukla	1:15



Three Passes



and give yourself three nights at Namche to prepare your body for the steep ascent. Use the time to visit Chhorkung, Shyangboche, Khumjung and Khunde to maximise your fitness for the pass.

On days five and six, you should be ready to continue to Tengboche and Dingboche. On day seven, climb to Chhukung. This section of the route forms the first part of the Everest Base Camp Trek – see p101 for a full description.

Day 8: Rest Day in Chhukung

A second night at Chhukung is strongly recommended before setting off for the pass. You can use the time to visit Chhukung Ri or climb to the base camp for Island Peak. See p118 for details.

Day 9: Chhukung to Lobuche over the Kongma La

9 hours, ascent 800m, descent 620m

To cross the Kongma La in single day, you must start at first light from Chhukung. There are no facilities along the way, so carry plenty of water (or the means to purify more) and bring a packed lunch from your lodge in Chhukung.

There are two possible trails – you can climb the hill northwest of Chhukung over the moraine of the Nuptse Glacier, or walk back down the valley to Bibre, and follow a high trail above the Niyang Khola. Ask your lodge for directions to the start of the path. On the first stage of the trek, there are great views back across the valley to Island Peak and the jagged ridge of **Amphu Lapcha** (5845m).

The two trails meet on the hillside above Bibre after about 1½ hours. From here, it's a grinding ascent along the east side of the

Niyang Khola Valley, beneath a menacing wall of black rock. At the head of the valley, the path turns west, scrambling its way up a slope littered with boulders. Climbing groups camp below the cliffs at the bottom of the slope before attempting the ascent of **Kongma Tse** (Mehra Peak; 5820m).

After passing a bluff with striking bands of white strata, the you'll enter a wide basin, dotted with small frozen lakes. Beyond the largest lake, the trail rises over loose scree, gaining the **Kongma La** (5535m) about five hours after you left Chhukung. A cairn, mummy-wrapped in prayer flags, marks the pass. Behind you is a lunar landscape of icy lakes and frozen ridges; ahead the landscape tumbles down to the Khumbu Glacier. Look for the Italian Pyramid (see the boxed text, p120) beneath the rocky crag of Awi Peak (5245m).

The final descent is the most difficult stage of the trek. Ignore the faint path running directly downhill to the tiny pool below the pass and keep to the right, dropping down the scree for two hours to more solid ground on the edge of the moraine. The final stage across the glacier is not too taxing – follow the footprints and stone cairns and climb the moraine on the far side, where a clear trail runs north to Lobuche.

See p119 for a description of the facilities at Lobuche.

Days 10 & 11: Lobuche to Gorak Shep, Base Camp & Kala Pattar

After scampering over the pass, you may feel you've earned a rest, but the twin challenges of Everest Base Camp and Kala Pattar await. In the morning, head to Gorak Shep and on to Base Camp, returning to Gorak Shep to



sleep. The next day, visit Kala Pattar and descend to Lobuche to rest in preparation for the scramble over the Cho La.

For a description of this stage of the trek, see p120.

Day 12 & 13: Lobuche to Gokyo over the Cho La Pass

2 days, 710m ascent, 590m descent

A high and breathless trail links Khumbu and Gokyo over the 5420m Cho La pass, sneaking over a knife-edge ridge between Cholatse and Kangchung (6063m). It takes two days to cross the Cho La in either direction, and the only accommodation is at Dzonglha and Tagnag, which lie six to seven hours apart on opposite sides of the pass.

In good weather conditions you can cross the Cho La with no specialist equipment, but warm clothing is essential. While researching this book, we crossed the pass while snow was falling with no mountaineering gear, but an ice axe might provide added peace of mind. The pass is not suitable for yaks or heavily laden porters at any time of year.

On Day 1, pick up the trail that cuts southwest over the flat-bottomed depression below Lobuche (the junction is at N 27° 56.234', E 086° 48.402'). The path skirts around the ridge, staying mostly level before dropping into a wide valley at the foot of Cholatse. Stop overnight at the village of **Dzonglha** (4830m), where the welcoming Green Valley View Guesthouse and Himalaya View Lodge offer rooms for Rs 300 and dorm beds for Rs 50.

Start early from Dzonglha if you want to beat the clouds to the pass. The first stage is a gentle stroll between snowy peaks that seem almost close enough to touch. The trail runs east past a series of ominous-looking black boulders beneath the looming peak of Cholatse. At any stage on this walk, you can turn around to see **Ama Dablam** (6856m) framed perfectly at the end of the valley.

Your destination is a low point on the rock wall at the end of the valley, but the route only becomes apparent as you approach the face. After crossing several streams, the trail rises, passing to the right of two claw-shaped peaks. Make a steep, exhilarating scramble over boulders wedged against the edge of a soaring granite buttress.

As you gain the ridge, the broken face of the Cho La Glacier rises ahead. Unless

there is fresh snow, you can pick out the route across the icefall using the footprints of other trekkers. Eventually, about three hours after setting off, you will reach **Cho La** (5420m), marked by a tangle of prayer flags at the edge of the glacier.

From here, there are vertigo-inducing views southeast toward Cholatse and Ama Dablam and west towards the Ngozumpa Glacier, Pharilapche (6017m) and Kyajo Ri (6186m). The descent into the Gokyo Valley is long and tedious, crossing a seemingly endless scree slope that is a minefield of loose stones and hidden ice. Look for the small stone cairns that mark the way. After what seems like an age, you'll reach the grassy hillside below the rockfall.

It's an easy walk on to **Tagnag** (Dragnag; 4700m). The landscape gets greener and the temperature warmer as you drop through a narrow gorge to the edge of the village. You can thaw out your fingers with a bowl of soup at the Tashi Friendship Lodge, Chola View Lodge or Chola Pass Lodge, which all offer decent rooms to trekkers attempting the pass in the opposite direction. Allow three hours to reach Tagnag from the pass.

The final stage to Gokyo drops over the moraine wall and crosses the groaning Ngozumpa Glacier. The trail changes every season as the ice shifts and melts – stone cairns and footprints mark the way. As soon as you climb onto the opposite moraine, you'll meet the trail to Gokyo. One more hour will take you past Taboche Tsho and then into the village.

This trek is no harder in the opposite direction. Just stay in Tagnag on the first night and cross the pass to Lobuche on day two.

Days 14 & 15: Gokyo

After all that climbing, you deserve a rest. Take a couple of days in Gokyo to visit Gokyo Ri for that awesome Everest view, or hike up the valley past the Gokyo lakes for another sneaky peak at the world's highest mountain from Scoundrel's Viewpoint. See p128 for a description of the facilities in Gokyo and some ideas for side trips.

Days 16 & 17: Gokyo to Thame over the Renjo La

2 days, 550m ascent, 1520m descent

It takes two days to reach Thame from Gokyo and the only accommodation en



route is at Marulung or Lungden. In winter, either or both of these lodges may be closed – enquire in Gokyo before you set off. It is theoretically possible to reach Thame in one day if you start walking at dawn, but this is a gruelling, 10-hour slog.

Apart from suitable clothing for icy conditions, this trek does not require any special equipment, but it can be difficult and even dangerous after heavy snow. The path is not suitable for yaks or heavily laden porters at any time.

Before you set off from Gokyo, stand on the lakeshore and trace the route to the pass. The path climbs gently up the flank of Gokyo Ri and then zigzags precariously up a finger of grey scree above the northwest corner of the lake, crossing the ridge to the right of the pyramid-shaped peak.

You'll need an early start to make it to Marulung or Lungden in one day – start off on the trail to Gokyo Ri and take the lower path that climbs gently above the north shore of the lake. The final stage to the pass involves an almost vertical climb on a perilous-looking path that switches back and forth like a python with indigestion.

About four hours after leaving the stone houses of Gokyo, you will gain the **Renjo La** (5345m), where an eye-popping vista awaits. If the skies are clear, you'll see the rooftops of Gokyo glinting distantly on the shore of the lake beneath the grey smear of the Ngozumpa Glacier, and the sawtooth peaks of Everest, Lhotse, Cholatse and Taboche.

Continuing on from the pass, the trail winds down a stone staircase, then scrambles over loose scree to reach the south bank of **Angladumba Tsho**, the small, serene lake below the pass that faces another razor-toothed buttress of snowy peaks. A wide and obvious dirt path drops below the lake along the north side of the valley. Arrows cut into the turf mark the route down to Lungden.

The final descent to **Lungden** (4350m) follows a narrow valley clogged with giant boulders. There is almost nothing to the village, but the Renjo Pass Support Lodge offers rooms, warmth and sustenance. If the lodge is closed, or you still have some energy, you can walk on for 40 minutes to **Marulung** (4200m) on the east bank of the Bhote Kosi, where the stone-block Namaste Lodge offers rudimentary accommodation.

The descent from Marulung to Thame follows a route used for centuries by the traders who ferried salt and grain across the Nangpa La into Tibet. However, foreigners are not permitted to trek north of the turn-off to Marulung, and you must check in with the army post in Thame Ting when you reach the end of the valley.

Below Marulung, cross to the western side of the Bhote Kosi and descend to **Tarnnga**, where the trail drops into the valley of the Langmuche Khola. This stream drains down from Dig Tsho, the glacial lake that burst its banks in 1985, causing devastating floods along the Dudh Kosi Valley.

It's a gentle stroll down the valley to Thame Ting, then a short descent over the moraine to Thame. See p109 for a description of the lodges in this village.

Trekking in the opposite direction is generally discouraged, as the trek involves a 1000m increase in altitude over two days.

Days 18–20: Thame to Lukla

From Thame, you can descend to Namche Bazaar in one day. Treat yourself to a slap-up dinner and a beer – you deserve it! A day later, you will be sitting in Lukla, ready to board your flight back to Kathmandu the next morning.

For a description of this stage of the trek, see Days 1 and 2 of the Everest Base Camp Trek (p102).

SHIVALAYA TO LUKLA

Duration 6 days

Max Elevation 3530m

Difficulty medium

Season October to May

Start Shivalaya (p98)

Finish Lukla (p98)

Summary Follow in the footsteps of early explorers on the old expedition route to Everest, passing through dense forests and Buddhist hill villages far from the madding crowds. This is a great acclimatisation trek to prepare for Gokyo or Everest Base Camp.

Most people fly into Lukla to start the trek to Everest Base Camp or Gokyo, but you'll be much fitter and better acclimatised if you walk in via the week-long trail from Shivalaya. The trek starts with a long bus



SHIVALAYA TO LUKLA – TIMES

The following are trekking times only; stops are not included.

Day	Section	Hours
1	Shivalaya to Khasrubas	2:00
	Khasrubas to Deurali	2:00
	Deurali to Bhandar	1:00
2	Bhandar to Kinja	3:00
	Kinja to Chimbu	2:00
	Chimbu to Sete	1:30
3	Sete to Goyom	2:00
	Goyom to Lamjura Bhanjyang	2:30
	Lamjura Bhanjyang to Junbesi	2:00
4	Junbesi to Salung	2:00
	Salung to Ringmo	1:15
	Ringmo to Trakshindu La	1:00
	Trakshindu La to Nunthala	1:45
5	Nunthala to Jubing	2:30
	Jubing to Khari Khola	2:00
	Khari Khola to Bupsa	1:00
6	Bupsa to Khari La	1:30
	Khari La to Puiyan	1:30
	Puiyan to Surkhe	2:00
	Surkhe to Lukla	1:30

ride from Kathmandu to Shivalaya – if you miss the direct bus, you can travel to Jiri (see p89) and walk to Shivalaya in around three hours.

The trail to Lukla passes through classic Middle Hills country that is blissfully free from the crowds that mob the trails further north. You will also avoid the stress of booking a plane ticket to Lukla only to find on the day of departure that your flight has been delayed or cancelled due to fog.

Facilities on this trek are basic but adequate. There are no internet cafes and few telephones, but most villages have lodges offering plain rooms with shared bathrooms above a restaurant serving a predictable menu of noodles, fried potatoes and dal bhat. Beer and *chhang* are widely available; electric sockets are harder to find. Bring a spare battery for your camera just to be safe. Throughout this region, rooms cost Rs 50 to Rs 100 person.

Even though the trek begins at just 1860m, it climbs to 3530m at the Lamjura Bhanjyang, and drops as low as 1500m at the Dudh Kosi crossing east of Nunthala. The road to Jiri shaves several days off the

old approach trek from Lamosangu, but this is still a long, hard trek with many steep hills.

Once you reach Lukla, you can continue to Everest Base Camp or Gokyo, or attempt the tough 20-day trek over the Three Passes. When you get back to Lukla at the end of your trek, you can fly back to Kathmandu, or walk for another nine days on the little-used trail east to Tumlingtar (see p236).

THE TREK (SEE MAPS PP90–3)

Day 1: Shivalaya to Bhandar

4½–5½ hours, 900m ascent, 600m descent

Buses arrive into Shivalaya too late to start walking the same day, so you will have to stay at one of the village lodges – see p98 for a description of the facilities in Shivalaya.

The first day of walking starts with an exhausting 1½-hour climb to the schoolhouse at **Sangbadanda** (2180m), where local hotels sell bottled cold drinks from buckets of cold water. An unfinished dirt road runs east from Sangbadanda to the cheese factory at Thodung, rejoining the main trail at Deurali (see the boxed text, opposite).

The direct route to Deurali climbs a muddy gully up the end of the spur, past the pocket-sized Sushila Lodge and Sherpa Guesthouse. This is a tedious climb, crossing back and forth across an overgrown 4WD track. On the way, you'll pass a number of houses with wide porches and a striking orange-and-white colour scheme, built by lowland Nepalis.

The next opportunity for a tea break is the Thodung Sherpa Lodge at **Khasrubas** (2330m). For the next hour or so, the trail runs mostly level towards the head of the canyon. After crossing a couple of flat wooden bridges, you'll begin the steep ascent to the Deurali pass on a winding forest trail.

The path finally emerges onto the wide saddle at **Deurali** (Deorali; 2705m), which is covered by a grid of *mani* walls inscribed thousands of times with the Tibetan Buddhist mantra '*om mani padme hum*' (hail to the jewel in the lotus). From here on, you will see increasing evidence of Buddhist Sherpa culture. Looking east from the pass, there are grandstand views down to Bhandar and the valley of the Likhu Khola.

The lodges at Deurali are worth dropping into for tea, even if you don't stay the



night. The Lama Guesthouse and Highland Sherpa Guesthouse are bright and welcoming, with outdoor terraces that get lots of morning sunshine. Any of the lodges can provide a guide for the two-hour trip to the cheese factory at Thodung (see right). If you'd rather go it alone, the path starts on the unfinished 4WD track that runs north from the saddle.

On the far side of the pass, the main trail plunges straight down the hillside. Ignore the muddy path running south along the ridge near the Dendi Hotel – the correct path drops straight down into the valley on steep stone steps, passing scattered lodges at Ramechhap and Bhandar Bhamti. After an hour, you will reach the outskirts of **Bhandar** (Chyangma; 2200m), the current end point of the road from Shivalaya.

At the time of writing, there was no bus service to Bhandar, but trekkers have reported being able to hitch a ride (for a fee) on the trucks that carry freight between Jiri and **Ratna Jyoti Bazaar**, a new settlement of well-stocked shops about 10 minutes uphill from Bhandar. There are lodges here, but the new village feels like something from the Wild West, and most trekkers prefer to stay downhill in Bhandar.

The old village at Bhandar lies below Ratna Jyoti Bazaar, set among rolling fields and meadows. The path from Deurali winds downhill past a string of small lodges to the modest **Bhandar Gumpa**, which is fronted by two mismatched stupas, one squat and square and the other tall and topped by a beehive-shaped tower. Around the paved square below the gumpa are the tasteful Ang Dawa Lodge, Shobha Lodge, Buddha Lodge and Himalaya Lodge, all offering decent rooms and good trekker food.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: THODUNG CHEESE FACTORY

5–6 hours, 900m ascent, 600m descent

Rather than climbing on the direct route to the pass at Deurali, you can make an interesting side trip to **Thodung** (3090m), the site of Nepal's first cheese factory, built by the Swiss in the 1950s. The factory is still churning out Wallace and Gromit's favourite snack, using milk from cows and yaks (or rather *naks* – see the boxed text, p125) and the Emmental technique. Staff may be willing to show you around, but announce your presence before entering as there are several guard dogs.

The path to Thodung leaves the Shivalaya–Deurali trail at Sangbadanda and climbs to the hilltop, before dropping down to Thodung. You can then continue to Deurali and drop down the hill to Bhandar.

Day 2: Bhandar to Sete

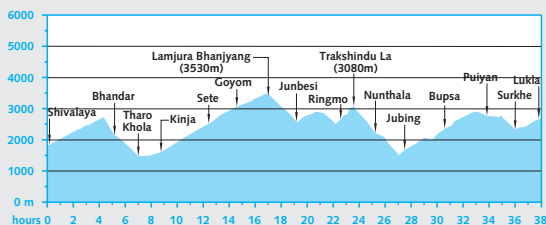
6–7 hours, 650m descent, 1050m ascent

Two paths lead on from Bhandar. The old trail drops on grassy steps to **Dokharpa** (2000m) and then tumbles down into the valley, crossing the Likhu Khola at **Tharu Khola** (Gorunda; 1480m).

Locals and porters prefer to use the new trail that stays high on the ridge, dropping to the stream a few hours further east. There are few lodges on this path, but many local farmers have opened *bhattis* along the trail. The new path can shave an hour off the trek to Kinja going downhill; coming uphill, you can count on around four hours on either path.

The long line of porters should point you in the right direction for the new path to Kinja. Pick up the trail downhill from the lodges in Bhandar, to the right of the

Shivalaya to Lukla



second 4WD track. The path winds past farmhouses into a gully, dropping down to meet another large 4WD track on steps beside a wide stream. Ask for the 'new path' to Kinja if you are unsure of the way.

Follow the dirt road east – it will soon turn into a winding footpath that runs level along the north side of the valley. In time, the dirt road will run all the way to Kinja, shaving another two days off the Lukla trek.

After an hour or so on this high path, you will see the old path dropping to a suspension bridge at the bottom of the valley. Stay high on the valley wall then descend to a second suspension bridge across the stream.

The final stage is a leisurely stroll along the east bank of the Likhu Khola, crossing one last suspension bridge to reach **Kinja** (1630m), a bustling bazaar at the confluence of the Likhu Khola and Kinia Khola. During the Maoist uprising, Kinja was a hotbed of Communist sentiments, but there seems to be little tension today.

Kinja has seven lodges, most of them large and prosperous. In the middle of the village, the Sherpa Guesthouse offers comfortable rooms and a courtyard garden full of exotic plants; the restaurant here serves Swiss favourites like rosti as well as the usual mountain fare. Other good lodges include the 'best and cheaper' Sonam Lodge, and the New Everest Lodge, where the restaurant has yak cheese, apple cider and banana lassis on the menu.

Leaving Kinja, the trail begins a steep ascent towards the Lamjura Bhanjyang, switchbacking up the almost vertical slope

above the village. After about two hours of climbing, you'll reach **Chimbu** (2170m), which has a large school and several lodges, including the New Sherpa Rest House, opposite a tree-shaded *chautara* (resting place for porters) and the Hilltop Himalayan Lodge, in a yard full of colourful flowers in pots.

Several trails lead on from Chimbu but the main trail climbs west from the school. Occasional *mani* walls will show you are on the right track as you ascend between farms and teahouses to the friendly village of **Sete** (Seke; 2520m). Behind the beehive-shaped stupa is a small but ancient *lhakhang* (Buddhist temple), but the building is used today as a storage shed.

There are four farmhouse-style lodges. The Solu Khumbu Sherpa Guesthouse has good views over the valley, the New Everest Lodge has a peaceful location in the fields near the stupa, and the Sherpa Guide Lodge and Sunrise Lodge have flat grassy gardens for campers.

Day 3: Sete to Junbesi

6–7 hours, 1280m ascent, 1220m descent

Have a good breakfast before you leave Sete – the first half of the day is a long and draining climb to the 3530m Lamjura Bhanjyang pass. There are few villages along the way, and the trail picks its way through a dripping, moss-cloaked forest of gnarled rhododendron, magnolia, maple and birch trees.

About an hour above Sete, the trail reaches **Dagchu** (2820m), a makeshift settlement of porter-style lodges near two small ponds (the best rooms are at the Mountain Trekker Lodge). From here, the route to the



SHERPAS

Above Sete, the trail enters the homeland of the Sherpas, a Buddhist tribe who migrated to Solu Khumbu from the Tibetan plateau around the 15th century. Sherpas still follow similar customs to the Buddhists of Tibet and they speak a language derived from Tibetan that has no written script. The Sherpas call themselves 'Shar-wa' meaning 'people from the East'. The tribe can be divided into eighteen ancient clans, but most Sherpa men take their names from the day of the week on which they were born – Lhakpa (Wednesday), Phurba (Thursday) etc.

The term 'sherpa' is applied to porters throughout Nepal, but only the people of Solu Khumbu and Helambu can properly be called Sherpas. Ever since the climbing expeditions of the 1950s, the Sherpas have been famous for their skills as mountaineers and high-altitude porters. In fact, they have a unique advantage in this regard – thanks to hundreds of years of living at high altitude, the blood of Sherpas is chemically more efficient at carrying oxygen than the blood of people from the lowlands.

GOMPAS AROUND JUNBESI

With its attractive lodges and bazaar atmosphere, Junbesi is a good place to take a rest day and there are some interesting side walks to Buddhist monasteries in the surrounding hills.

South of Junbesi, and reached via a side trail off the path from Sete, **Serlo Gompa** is one of the few gompas in Solu Khumbu to be founded by a Sherpa lama. Sangye Tenzing was a Solu native who studied in Tibet and fled back to Junbesi after the Chinese invasion, founding this small but attractive gompa in 1959. The monastery buildings were renovated in 2008 using donations from local Buddhists; inside, you can see some large, finely painted *thangkas* (cloth paintings).

Just above Junbesi, near the Apple Garden Guesthouse, a small trail leads south along the Junbesi Khola to the village of **Thumbuk** (2500m), where the small Thumbuk Gompa sits atop a small rocky bluff. The four monks who live here have recently benefited from a solar electricity project, installed by the charity **Renewable Energy Development International** (www.redi-org.com).

In the opposite direction, the valley of the Junbesi Khola runs north towards **Thubten Chholing** (3000m), a huge Tibetan Buddhist monastery founded by the revered lama Trulsik Rinpoche, who fled to Nepal from Rongbuk Gompa in Tibet with a large group of *anis* (nuns) and monks in the 1960s. Since then, many more refugees have fled to Thubten Chholing en route to join the Dalai Lama at Dharamsala in India. The small monastic cells dotted around the hillside are reserved for private meditation by resident monks and nuns.

The monastic complex provides a home for 350 nuns and 150 monks and there are relics from the original Rongbuk Gompa preserved inside the main gompa building. The original monastery was planned to be a temporary structure, but as Western support for the Free Tibet movement faltered, the monks became resigned to their predicament and constructed a substantial new gompa in 2001.

The trail to Thubten Chholing starts in front of the Junbesi gompa and follows the west bank of the Junbesi Khola upstream past a *chorten* and health post. Cross to the east bank by the powerhouse at **Mopung**, then climb the ridge to the gompa. The monastery dogs can be quite aggressive – announce yourself at the gate so the monks can rein them in before you enter.

About 30 minutes uphill from Thubten Chholing on the west bank of the stream is the village of **Phugmochhe** (3100m), which has another small gompa and a Sherpa art centre.

pass ascends a narrow spur over the roots of scrub rhododendrons, passing along a narrow, muddy chute.

The deforestation in this area is shocking – in many places the forest cover has been stripped to the ground by herders clearing land for temporary grazing meadows. After another hour of climbing through this hacked landscape, you'll pass several lodges at **Goyom** (3060m), spread over three small settlements in the forest.

You won't find five-star comfort, but the lodges are decent enough if the weather looks intimidating on the pass. The Sherpa Lodge and Tashi Delek Lodge are set around courtyards in the highest cluster of houses. About 300m further up the spur, the Lamjura Sherpa Rest House has the eight lucky Buddhist symbols painted on its windows.

The climb to the pass is long, tiring and often bitterly cold. Most people make the crossing at lunchtime, when the hills are blanketed by cloud, but if the skies are clear

there are distant views to the white-tipped peaks above Rolwaling. You may hear the rumble of planes passing low overhead on the final approach to Lukla airstrip.

At 3530m **Lamjura Bhanjyang** is the highest point on the trek between Jiri and Namche Bazaar, marked by an untidy cairn wrapped with prayer flags and *kata* (ceremonial scarves). A short distance along the ridge, the lonely Himalaya Lodge offers tea and rooms for porters and trekkers; the owners run day treks to a remote viewpoint at 4500m with clear views towards Everest.

From the pass, the trail makes a long, slow descent to the bottom of the valley through fragrant fir and rhododendron forests. You'll pass several isolated lodges surrounded by meadows on the way down the hill, including the Tashi Tagyed Lodge in Thagtok Kinza and the Shanti Chetra Lodge at Thaktobhug.

The path below Thaktobhug is a cascade of moss-free stones moving through a damp,



primordial forest. At the tiny village of **Taktor**, there's another opportunity to grab a drink at the unpolished Suman Lodge.

Occasional *mani* walls and *chautaara* mark the path onwards through fields and forests to a large *chorten* and a giant *mani* boulder topped by a weather vane. Continue on a mostly level path to the village of **Serlo**, where a side trail turns off to Serlo Gumpa – see the boxed text, p137.

To the north, look for the looming peak of **Numbur** (6959m), which soars above a still, sacred waters of Dudh Kunda. This peak is worshiped as the guardian deity of Solu, hence its Sherpa name – Shorong Yul Lha ('God of the Solu').

The final stage to **Junbesi** (2680m) passes some coloured mantras carved into a rock face and drops steeply through terraced fields. This sprawling village of large white houses with carved Tibetan-style windows and overhanging eaves is set among scattered orchards above the Junbesi Khola. The lodges here make an excellent base for short treks to Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the surrounding valleys – see the boxed text, p137.

In the middle of Junbesi, the **Tashi Thongmon Gumpa** was founded in the 16th century, but the monastery buildings have been destroyed several times by fire, most recently in 1914. The gumpa was given another facelift in 2007, and it has some vividly colourful murals and statues inside. The path to the monastery starts near the Junbesi secondary school and climbs past the village library.

By a large yellow-topped stupa in the middle of the village, the Junbesi **school** is one of the largest Hillary schools, with more than 300 pupils attending classes from primary through to high school. For information on other things to see around Junbesi, pop into the informal visitor information centre at the back of the school.

There are nine lodges in Junbesi, all in village homes with big gardens and carved windows. The Sagarmatha Lodge by the school has a pleasing, wood-lined interior and decent trekker grub. You can also find good rooms at the tasteful Ang Chhokpa's Lodge, Ang Domi Lodge and Junbesi Guesthouse near the gumpa. The popular Apple Garden Guesthouse is set in an orchard garden, above the village on the Sete trail.

Day 4: Junbesi to Nunthala

5½–6½ hours, 900m ascent, 1250m descent

At the bottom of Junbesi, the trail crosses the Junbesi Khola on a wooden bridge at 2560m, reaching an important **trail junction** (N 27° 34.831', E 86° 32.915'). The right-hand trail leads downhill to the small airstrip at Phaplu and Salleri, the headquarters of Solu district. A good road links Salleri and Phaplu, and both villages have lodges and hotels.

The route to Khumbu leads steeply uphill into the trees, looping in and out of side valleys that are used for grazing by herders from Junbesi. The landscape here is almost European – with all the pines and cows it could almost be a scene from a Milka chocolate wrapper.

Make a steep, draining climb to the ridge-top village of **Phurteng** (Phurtyang Beni; 2900m). Compensation comes in the form of your first glimpse of Everest, tucked between the snowy crowns of Thamserku (6608m), Kantega (6685m), Kyashar (6770m), Kusum Kangru (6367m) and Mera Peak (6476m). Facing the view, the Everest View Sherpa Lodge and Thamserku View Lodge are simple village houses with OK rooms, decent food and yak cheese for sale. A small side trail turns south from Phurteng towards Salleri and Phaplu.

Beyond Phurteng, the trail turns north and descends through meadows and copes of pines to the hamlet of **Salung** (2860m), which has a handful of homely teahouses, including the Everest Panorama Lodge. From the village, there are sweeping views south towards Salleri and the Phaplu airstrip. You can walk down the airstrip on the path that branches off to the south by the village noticeboard.

Heading to Nunthala, it's an easy descent through pines to a large suspension bridge over the Dudhkunda Khola at 2510m. From the river, the trail snakes up through meadows for 30 minutes to **Ringmo** (2720m), a small Sherpa village dotted with apple, peach and apricot orchards. As you might expect, the village produces lots of fruit products – jams, pickles, dried fruit, cider and delicious apple brandy are available from all the lodges in town, though the tall, imposing Apple House pioneered the movement.

There are five other lodges in Ringmo, dotted along the main trail. Hotel Yak and Nak has a nice fruit garden and good



valley views and both the Centre Sherpa Lodge and Numbur View Cheese Factory Lodge sell yak cheese as well as fruity alcoholic drinks and preserves.

In the middle of the village is a stupa surrounded by a circular wall – a side trail to Salleri and Phaplu turns downhill to the right (south), while the Nunthala trail runs directly uphill.

Above Ringmo, the trail climbs steeply through pine and rhododendron forest to a long *mani* wall in the hamlet of **Pangoma**, where a signposted side trail branches north towards **Dudh Kunda**, a remote lake set at 4500m beneath the mountain wall of Numbur (6959m). Many Buddhists and Hindus make a pilgrimage to the lake for Janai Purnima (the Sacred Thread Festival, usually in August) to ritually immerse themselves in the icy waters. For more details, see p141.

Above the turn-off, the trail climbs to a striking beehive stupa surrounded by *mani* walls, and on to a broad, flat pass marked by a white *chorten* and several wooden tea-houses at **Trakshindu La** (3071m), where a second trail runs north along the ridge to Dudh Kunda.

A few minutes beyond the pass, on the eastern side, the trail passes the isolated **Trakshindu Gompa**, one of the largest and most impressive monasteries in the Khumbu. Set in a complex of monks' cells, the monastery features fine murals and provides a home for 17 novices. Although parts of the monastery seem ancient, the gompa was actually founded in 1946 by a monk from Tengboche.

On the trail below the gompa, the slightly austere Mountain View Lodge was once owned by the late Babu Chhiri Sherpa, who climbed Everest 10 times, spending a record-breaking 21 hours on the summit in 1999. Tragically Babu died after falling into a crevasse at Camp 2 in 2001. You can also stay at the Panorama Guesthouse just above the gompa.

Below Trakshindu the trail descends through a conifer and rhododendron forest that is alive with birds, lured here by the plentiful wild strawberries. You'll pass a few scattered shepherds' huts and *bhattis* as you drop down through the forest to the fields of **Timbu** (Taibu; 2590m).

Below this small village, the trail crosses a picturesque stream on a suspension bridge

and then dissolves into a clutter of loose rocks as it reaches **Nunthala** (Manidingma; 2220m). The village is a single street lined with lodges, and a large signboard marks a number of short day hikes around the valley if you fancy taking a rest day here to explore.

There are eight lodges, all with similar facilities – the Moonlight Lodge has a pretty flower garden and Himalayan Trekker Lodge has a terrace restaurant where you can watch porters coming and going through the village. Set apart from the other lodges at the start of the village, the Shangrila Guesthouse has a quiet block of rooms in a huge, peaceful garden.

Day 5: Nunthala to Bupsa

5–6 hours, 800m descent, 900m ascent

From Nunthala the descent continues to the Dudh Kosi ('Milk River'), so named for the chalky sediment carried down by the river from the Ngozumpa Glacier near Gokyo. The first stage drops steeply for an hour through mixed forest and farmland to **Phuleli**, where the shack-like Binod Hotel can rustle you up a cup of *chiya* (Nepali tea).

The trail switchbacks onwards through scrubby, fern-filled forests, eventually emerging at a small group of *bhattis*. It's a short walk to the 109m-long suspension bridge that crosses the Dudh Kosi at 1510m – the marigold garlands on the bridge are a sign that you are entering an area inhabited by Hindu Rais.

After crossing the Dudh Kosi, the trail turns north through fields of barley, wheat and maize to the sprawling Rai village of **Jubing** (Dorakbuk; 1680m). Telltale signs of Rai culture include the heavy gold earrings and glass bead necklaces worn by local women; the whitewashed, mud-covered stone houses; and the traditional bamboo pipes that bring water into the village.

Lodges here seem to be hung up on the word 'green' – you'll find decent rooms at the Green Bamboo Lodge and Green Garden Lodge, which compete for trade at the top of the village. Downhill, the Gorkhali Lodge has an appealing alfresco dining area in a gazebo in the garden.

Heading east, the trail climbs past a lone lodge at **Chyokha** and rises to a saddle on the edge of **Khari Khola** (Khati Thenga; 2010m), which shares its name with the stream at the bottom of the next valley. A yellow



signboard in the middle of the village suggests a number of possible walks along the Khari Khola Valley if you feel like stopping here for a rest day.

Perched on a prominent ridge above Khari Khola, reached by a steep flight of stone steps, is the **Pema Namding Gumpa**, which was constructed in 2008 by lamas from the Nyingma Institute in Sikkim in India, using money donated by Buddhists from Nepal, India, Holland, New Zealand and the USA. Inside are riotously colourful statues of Guru Rinpoche, Sakyamuni and Avalokitesvara.

There are more lodges in Khari Khola than there are paying guests – a legacy of the days when this trek was the main access route to Everest. By the gumpa steps are the tidy stone Hilltop Guesthouse and Khari Khola Guesthouse. There are seven more lodges strung out along the trail as it drops through the village – we rate the Hansel & Gretel-style Solukhumbu Guesthouse, the Namaste Lodge, with its dining room full of motivational posters, and the smart and tidy Boudha Lodge by the stupa.

Follow the trail down through the wheat fields to the simple, whitewashed Holiday Home, where a side trail turns east along the valley towards Mera Peak (see the boxed text, p238). The Khari Khola is crossed by a drooping suspension bridge at 1930m, with several water-powered mills that grind the corn grown on both sides of the valley.

On the other side, the path makes a steep climb to **Bupsa** (Bumshing; 2360m), set among cascading wheat and maize terraces below a dense oak forest. At the bottom of the village is a tiny *lhakhang*, founded in 1892 and restored in 2006 using donations from the Ireland-based **Moving Mountains Trust** (www.movingmountains.org.uk).

The lodges in Bupsa are painted in a rainbow of colours and all offer good facilities. Take your pick from the Hotel Yellow Top (yellow timbers), Hotel International Trekkers (green timbers), Everest Guesthouse (lilac timbers) and Kwangde View Lodge (white timbers and slate-clad walls). Another good choice is the large LT Sherpa Guide Lodge at the top of the village.

Day 6: Bupsa to Lukla

6–7 hours, 1000m ascent, 650m descent

Above Bupsa the trail leaves the wheat fields and climbs steadily through dense forests,

reaching the small settlement of **Kharte** (Khare) near the trail junction for Pangum on the Lukla to Tumlingtar trek (see p237). Watch your footing on this root-clogged section of trail. You'll find typical trekking-lodge rooms and filling Sherpa meals at the Tashi Delek Lodge and Tashi Taki Lodge.

From Kharte, the trail treads uphill for 1½ hours to the pass at **Khari La** (2840m), where the lonely Sonam Lodge offers soaring views over the valley. As you climb, note the caves with soot-charred roofs – these are used as overnight stops by porters hauling goods uphill to the market in Lukla.

From the pass, the path dives into an almost primordial oak forest that brings to mind the Lost Valley of the Dinosaurs. After crossing an old landslide, where a second trail runs southeast towards Pangum (see p237), the trail meanders between moss-choked branches and the rotting stumps of fallen forest giants, soon reaching a square metal bridge across the Puiyan Khola.

A short, steep climb through the forest will take you into **Puiyan** (Poyan; 2770m), where a crude rocky trail branches east for four days to Mera Peak (see the boxed text, p238).

The lodges in Puiyan are split into two groups. In the bottom part of the village, below the school, are the inviting yellow Trekkers Lodge, with its pretty flagstone terrace, and the similar Himalayan Lodge and Apple Pie Lodge. For more privacy, try the rainbow-coloured cottages at the Beehive Lodge. There are more lodges uphill, near the Mera turn-off.

Above Puiyan, you'll get your first views of the Dudh Kosi canyon, which gushes down beneath the watchful eye of Khumbila (5761m), the rocky peak above Namche Bazaar, which is worshipped as a guardian deity by Khumbu Sherpas. The path climbs steadily through patchy forest to several more lodges at **Chewabas** (Chheubas) – the best is the three-storey Everest Trekkers Lodge, with the eight lucky Buddhist signs painted on its windows.

The views really start to shine as you climb above Chewabas to **Paiya La** (2805m). The trail contours around the ridge to **Pakhepani**, where Mountain View Lodge serves up warming soups and inspiring views. On this section of the walk, be careful about walking too close to the edge – there are many sudden drops, often hidden by



vegetation, and the loose stones on the edge of the path can tip you unexpectedly off the trail.

From Pakhepani, the trail plunges downwards on a muddy path through forest, beneath the flight path to Lukla airstrip. You'll probably be joined by mule trains carrying wheels of yak cheese and other goods from the villages around Lamjura. About an hour below Pakhepani, the isolated Khumbila View Lodge does indeed offer views to the peak of Khumbila from its walled terrace.

Eventually, after what seems like an age, you'll arrive at the pretty village of **Surkhe** (Surkey; 2290m), tucked into a hanging valley above the Dudh Kosi. Surkhe makes a fine tea stop and there are several good lodges, including the tidy Tham Serku Lodge, with its pot plant-filled restaurant, and the chalet-like Everest Trail Lodge, set in a garden just above the stream.

If you decide to stop here instead of Lukla, avoid Friday and Saturday nights – porters heading to and from the Lukla market start to travel at first light, causing noise and confusion in every lodge.

From the north end of Surkhe, the trail climbs above the stream on crude stone steps for about 20 minutes to a junction by a small stream and a *mani* wall (N 27° 40.569', E 86° 43.113'). To reach Lukla, climb for an hour on the stone staircase to the right, emerging at the bottom of the airstrip.

After the quiet villages so far on the trail, Lukla feels like Capital City. At the height of the trekking season in October and November, as many as 700 new trekkers arrive in Lukla every day to start the walk north to Everest. See p98 for a description of the facilities in this busy trailhead village.

Theoretically, you could fly straight back to Kathmandu from Lukla, but most people continue north to view the high Himalaya in the Gokyo and Khumbu valleys. Some of the most popular options are covered by the other treks in this chapter.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: BUPSA TO CHEPLUNG

6–7 hours, 1000m ascent, 650m descent

If you plan to continue north to Everest Base Camp or Gokyo, you can bypass Lukla and continue on a lower trail to Cheplung.

From Bupsa follow the trail to the Lukla junction just beyond Surkhe, but take the lower trail up the spur to a suspension bridge by a thin, sinuous waterfall. The path winds up between streambeds and boulders to a line of stupas and *mani* walls that marks the beginning of **Mushe** (Nangbug), where the homy Danfe Lodge sits quietly in a walled garden, close to a small stone helipad.

This tiny village blends almost imperceptibly into **Chaurikharka** (Dungde; 2650m), another peaceful place to break for the night before you head on to Namche Bazaar. You'll find decent rooms and a warm welcome at the Everest Guesthouse, the Chaurikharka Guesthouse and the Buddha Lodge near the cluster of *chortens* in the middle of the village.

Above Chaurikharka, the path rises steadily between giant boulders to meet the main Lukla–Namche Bazaar trail at Cheplung – see p102 for a description of the facilities in this small village.

OTHER TREKS

DUDH KUNDA–PIKEY CULTURAL TRAIL

This new trek winds through the hills of Solu from Phaplu via Pangoma to the glacial lake at Dudh Kunda (4500m), which shivers beneath the mountain wall of Numbur (6959m). From Pangoma it takes seven to nine hours to reach the camp site by the lake, and a further three to five days to trek through Thupten Chholling to Junbesi. Do not attempt to reach the lake in a single day if you have not acclimatised above 4000m (for example, if you are descending from the Everest region). The turn-off in Pangoma is just uphill from the Quiet View Lodge – if you reach the Gauri Shankar Lodge, you've gone too far.

The 1:125,000 *Jiri-Pikey-Everest* map from Nepa Maps shows the two-week loop from Phaplu airstrip to Dudh Kunda and on to the Everest viewpoint at Pikey Danda (4065m), passing through mountainous country that has so far seen few international trekkers. For suggested itineraries, follow the links to specific treks in the Everest region at www.welcomenepal.com.



