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The Remote Tibetan Plateau of Nepal

Upper Dolpo Circuit Trek

Duration: 13 Days

Max Altitude: 5,350 m (Nangdala Pass)

Trek Grade: Strenuous / High-Altitude Trekking

Start / End: Kathmandu

Accommodation: Hotel in Kathmandu | Tea houses and lodges during trek

Best Season: March-May | September-November

Group Type: Private or Group Joining



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Overview

The **Upper Dolpo Circuit Trek** is one of Nepal's most remote and culturally rich trekking routes. Nestled in the Trans-Himalayan region, the trek passes through high-altitude deserts, ancient Buddhist monasteries, traditional Tibetan-style villages, and pristine alpine lakes.

The trail begins with a flight or road journey from Kathmandu to **Dunai**, followed by trekking through forests, terraced fields, and dramatic valleys. Highlights include **Phoksundo Lake**, **Shey Gompa**, and the high **Nangdala Pass (5,350 m)**. This trek provides not only spectacular Himalayan scenery but also deep insight into **Dolpo's Tibetan culture and Buddhist traditions**, offering a truly off-the-beaten-path adventure.

Trip Highlights

- Explore **Phoksundo Lake**, Nepal's deepest and most beautiful alpine lake
- Cross the challenging **Nangdala Pass (5,350 m)**
- Visit ancient **Shey and Yangze Gompas**
- Trek through remote high-altitude landscapes and traditional Tibetan villages
- Experience the unique culture, customs, and lifestyle of the Dolpo region
- Enjoy panoramic views of snow-capped peaks, high plateaus, and pristine valleys

Itinerary

Day 1: Travel from Kathmandu (1,400 m) to Dunai (2,140 m). Settle into your lodge and prepare for the trek ahead.

Day 2: Trek from Dunai to Chhepka (2,670 m). The trail passes through terraced fields and traditional villages. Distance: 15 km.

Day 3: Trek from Chhepka to **Phoksundo Lake (3,611 m)**, one of Nepal's most stunning alpine lakes, surrounded by cliffs and pine forests. Distance: 14 km.

Day 4: Trek from Phoksundo Lake to **Thulo Dingt (4,400 m)**. The ascent is steep, crossing high valleys with panoramic Himalayan views. Distance: 10 km.

Day 5: Trek from Thulo Dingt to **Shey Gompa (4,160 m)** via **Nangdala Pass (5,350 m)**. This is the most challenging day, with dramatic landscapes and high-altitude trekking. Distance: 12 km.



Day 6: Trek from Shey Gompa to Saldang (3,770 m), a traditional Tibetan-style village, descending through high plateau terrain. Distance: 9 km.

Day 7: Trek from Saldang to **Yangze Gompa (4,960 m)**, passing remote valleys and Buddhist monasteries. Distance: 8 km.

Day 8: Trek from Yangze Gompa to Tingje Gaon (3,900 m), descending through alpine terrain and passing yak pastures. Distance: 14 km.

Day 9: Trek from Tingje Gaon to Sarung Khola (4,000 m), crossing rugged terrain and high desert landscapes. Distance: 11 km.

Day 10: Trek from Sarung Khola to Dho Tarap (4,080 m), a small settlement known for its remote location and traditional culture. Distance: 13 km.

Day 11: Trek from Dho Tarap to Lohini (3,850 m), descending through alpine valleys and past grazing lands. Distance: 16 km.

Day 12: Trek from Lohini to Dunai (2,140 m), completing the circuit. Distance: 17 km.

Day 13: Return from Dunai to Kathmandu (1,400 m) by road or flight, concluding the trek.

All You Need to Know

1. Visa Process

Nepal's tourist visa fees vary by duration, with common options on arrival being \$30 for 15 days, \$50 for 30 days, and \$125 for 90 days, plus \$3/day for extensions.

2. Guide In Nepal

You will need a guide for tour, trekking, peak climbing as well as expedition.

- Tour Guide: A professional who leads sightseeing tours and provides local information.
- Driver Guide: A driver who also acts as a guide during travel.
- Trekking Guide: An experienced guide who leads trekking routes safely.
- Peak Climbing Guide: A trained guide for high-altitude mountain climbing.
- Expedition Sherpa Guide: A skilled Sherpa who supports and guides challenging expeditions.
- Porter: A helper who carries luggage or trekking gear, sometimes also assisting as a guide.



3. Accommodation

Stay comfortably with options to suit every traveler from budget backpacker stays (USD \$10) to 5★ city hotels (USD \$90) to cozy teahouses with attached bathrooms and camps along the trekking trails.

4. Transportation

Choose from local buses, private cars, shared or private jeeps, domestic flights, and helicopter transfers for convenient travel across Nepal.

5. Permits and entrance fees

Trekking and visiting protected areas in Nepal require permits and entrance fees to support conservation and local communities. Key permits and fees include:

- TIMS (Trekking Information Management System) Card: Required for most trekking regions.
- ACAP Permit (Annapurna Conservation Area Permit): Needed for trekking in Annapurna region.
- KCA Permit (Kanchenjunga Conservation Area Permit): Required for Kanchenjunga treks.
- SAC Permit (Sagarmatha National Park Entry Permit): Needed for Everest region treks.
- Langtang National Park Entry Permit: Required for treks in Langtang region.
- Manaslu Conservation Area Permit (MCAP): Needed for Manaslu trekking.
- Royal Chitwan National Park Entry Fee: For visiting Chitwan National Park.
- Bardia National Park Entry Fee: For wildlife safaris in Bardia.
- A special permit is required in some areas for restricted areas.

Fees vary by nationality and trekking region.

6. Meals

During your trek, meals are usually served in teahouses or lodges, with options for local Nepali cuisine, vegetarian, and international dishes. Breakfast is usually included in accommodation. In the city, you can enjoy a wide variety of restaurants, cafes, and hotel dining.

7. Health & Safety

- Altitude sickness awareness and proper acclimatization are crucial when trekking above 2,500m.
- Carry basic medications and a personal first-aid kit.
- Drink bottled or purified water only.



- Vaccinations (such as Hepatitis A, Typhoid, and Tetanus) are recommended before travel.
- Emergency rescue services are available in major trekking regions.

8. Currency & Payments

- Nepalese Rupee (NPR) is the local currency.
- ATMs are available in major cities but limited in remote areas. Credit cards are accepted in hotels, restaurants, and shops in cities.
- Cash is essential for trekking regions.

9. Communication & Internet

Local SIM cards (Ncell or Nepal Telecom) are easily available at the airport and in cities.

Mobile network coverage is good in cities and popular trekking routes.

Wi-Fi is available in hotels and teahouses, sometimes at an extra cost in remote areas.

10. Cultural Etiquette & Local Customs

Dress modestly, especially in rural areas and religious sites.

Remove shoes before entering temples and homes.

Respect local traditions and festivals.

Ask permission before taking photos of people.

11. Responsible & Sustainable Travel

Avoid single-use plastics and use refillable bottles.

Respect wildlife and natural environments.

Support local communities by using local guides, porters, and accommodations.

Follow “Leave No Trace” principles during treks.

Important Information

- This trek requires a good level of physical fitness, as it involves long walking days, uneven terrain, and gradual ascent at higher altitudes. Participants are strongly advised to prepare in advance through regular exercise, endurance training, and hiking practice.
- Altitude-related illnesses such as Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) can occur above 2,500 m. All itineraries are designed with proper acclimatization days to minimize risk; however, individuals must follow the guide’s instructions and report any



symptoms immediately. If symptoms worsen, descending to a lower altitude is mandatory for safety.

- Weather conditions in the Himalayas are unpredictable and can change rapidly, particularly during monsoon and winter seasons. Trekking schedules may be adjusted due to weather, trail conditions, or safety considerations.
- Luggage limits are strictly enforced, typically allowing 10–12 kg of personal baggage per trekker. Excess luggage can be carried by porters or arranged separately at an additional cost.
- Comprehensive travel insurance covering high-altitude trekking, emergency medical treatment, and helicopter evacuation is mandatory. Proof of insurance must be provided before the trek begins.

