

THE moving mountains PROJECT

The Annapurna Region, Nepal

The Annapurna region of Nepal is a land so gorgeous, it's long been the ultimate trekking dream for hikers. Here, the sacred peaks of Annapurna, Machapuchare and Dhaulagiri, shining with snow year round, tower over ancient rhododendron forests, icy rivers, and temperate jungles where tigers still roam. Plenty of trekkers come here for all this beauty – but few stray off the tourist routes. That's where The Moving Mountains Project is different. Our Nepal treks visit off-the-beaten-track villages in the Annapurna region. Walkers stay in village communities - sometimes in people's homes - so there's time for real interaction with Nepalis. We eat with families, and on a rest day we might be invited to help them on projects around the village. We visit a village weaving workshop, a cheese making project, and have the chance to partake in cultural activities and festivals. We stay at a yak farming project on the flanks of Annapurna, and the high point of our trek is a visit to sacred Khayer Lake (4500m) surrounded with shrines, and with the peak of Annapurna towering above.

How we Move Mountains in the Annapurna Range

The Moving Mountains Project is fortunate to work with what's surely one of Nepal's most dynamic and energetic Village Development Committees. Encompassing 13 villages in the Myagdi District, this committee is lead by Mahabir Pun 2007 winner of the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay award for Community Leadership. Pun has been working tirelessly in Nangi and surrounding villages for many years, setting up the village's thriving high school, as well as a micro hydropower scheme, a village plant nursery for reforestation, a health post, a library; and most ingenious of all, a wireless internet network that connects Nangi and eight surrounding villages with the outside world. Using donated computer parts, Pun set up a computer department in Himanchal High School so that students can learn computer skills. Villagers also use this to communicate with distant villages, benefit from tele-medicine services, and there are even opportunities for online teaching in distant villages where there's no school as yet. There are now 350 students from kindergarten to year 12 at Himanchal High School and boarding facilities have been built for students from other villages. Vocational training in sewing, paper making, carpentry and other trades are also being developed. Amongst the long term goals here is to set up by 2015, a college for four-year study courses for students from Nangi and surrounding mountain villages. Only with a strong foundation of village-based income generating schemes will this be possible. Walks organised by The Moving Mountains Project, which will donate all after-expenses profits, will be an important part of this income generation. For more information please see: www.himanchal.org

The Walk

This 16 day journey is different from most tourist trekking, because it's about more than just the walk. We take time in villages, rather than simply passing through, and

in our small groups, are welcomed as friends. There are opportunities for homestay with villagers in their houses, where we'll experience the simplicity of life here, as well as villagers' generosity. We visit current development schemes, and will have the chance to talk with villagers about how they see their future. Although cultural exchange is strongly emphasized, this is by no means tame trekking. Some walking days are demanding, with several hard climbs. Most walking is at a moderate altitude of between 2000-3000m, and we walk between 15 and 20kms a day. Once we make the ascent from the town of Beni, we will be walking within sight of Annapurna (8091m), Dhaulagiri, (8167m), Nilgiri (7061m). Our high point is the yak-farming settlement of Khopa at 3660m where there are magnificent views of Annapurna, Annapurna South, Dhaulagiri, Nilgiri, and the Khali Gandaki valley. Those who wish can make the ascent from here to sacred Khayer Lake at 4500m, on the very flank of Annapurna. In order to keep our walks small and personal, we've decided not to use long trains of porters. You'll need to be able to carry a rucksack with your own sleeping bag and clothes, water bottle, and personal effects. If you pack wisely you can keep the weight of your bag down to 12 or 14kgs.

Itinerary

Please arrange to arrive in Kathmandu at the latest, the afternoon before trip departure. You will be met at the airport and transferred to your hotel.

Day 1:

Depart Kathmandu this morning for Pokhara. This is a pleasant 7-hour journey by high-standard bus through the green rural valleys of the Trisuli and Seti Rivers. Breakfast and lunch stops to break the journey. Afternoon boat trip on Phewa Tal, Pokhara's beautiful lake. Overnight in Tibetan-run hotel in Pokhara.

Day 2:

Morning at leisure to discover Pokhara, and wander down to the shores of Phewa Tal. Afternoon taxi ride to Beni – 3 hours. Overnight in simple hotel in Beni, on the banks of the Khali Gandaki River.

Day 3:

Beni (817m) to Nangi (2200m). There's no other way to put it: this walk is a hard uphill slog. We take it slow and steady, stop plenty and are rewarded by our first spectacular views of the snow-capped Annapurna range. An interesting walk through rural villages of different cultural communities. We reach Nangi this evening. Overnight in guest round houses built by villagers.

Day 4:

Rest day in Nangi. We'll be shown around the village by our guides, see village development projects – or we can wander by ourselves. Optional afternoon walk to nearby waterfall. Homestay in villagers' homes tonight.

Day 5:

Nangi to Swanta (2400m)

Depart Nangi through giant rhododendron forest and jungle where tigers still roam. Cross path of Annapurna Circuit at Phalate, then ascend to Swanta where we overnight in small community guest house.

Day 6:

Rest day in Swanta. Meet villagers and work with them in the fields or on handicraft projects. Visit village school which your walk will help fund. Overnight in homestay

accommodation in villagers' homes.

Day 7:

Swanta (2400m) to Khopra (3600m). A hard but beautiful climb through lush forests. As we near the treeline, we may see yaks from the yak farming project (another initiative of our Village Development Committee) where we'll overnight at the small stone lodge. Magnificent mountain views as we near Khopra. Overnight here, and we will have dinner with the yak farmer here who also manages the relay station for the villages' wireless network.

Day 8:

For those who wish, we depart early for the walk to Khayer Lake at 4500m. This is a long, hard day: usually about 11 hours walking for the return trip. We are rewarded in our efforts work by magnificent mountain views along our route, and arrival at this beautiful, often mirror-calm lake surrounded by mountains and shrines, visited only rarely by pilgrims and seldom seen by outsiders. Annapurna is right above us here. Rest day in Khopra for those who prefer.

Day 9:

Khopra to Narchyang (1425m). A long descent today, with inspiring views over Dhaulagiri and the Khali Gandaki Valley – the deepest gorge on Earth. Overnight homestay in Narchyang, an isolated Magar village on the edge of the Khali Gandaki valley.

Day 10:

Depart for Paudwar. Today we have awe-inspiring views of the Kali Gandaki valley and small villages steeply below us, as we traverse around the hillside between Narchyang and Paudwar. We visit village cheese making scheme – unique in the area – and buy some cheese for our remaining picnic lunches.

Day 11:

Paudwar to Ghorepani. Today we will see tourists! We walk part way on the Annapurna Circuit trail to the pretty but touristy town of Ghorepani. You'll be able to contrast this to the places you've seen, buy things in the bazaar – and enjoy a hot shower.

Day 12:

Ghorepani to Poon Hill. We'll view dawn and sunrise over the mountains from Poon Hill, and come back down to our hotel with a rest day.

Day 13:

Ghorepani to Nangi

We walk through exquisite rhododendron forests punctuated by wide mountain views back to Nangi.

Day 14:

We'll retrace our steps today, back down to Beni. We take our final glimpse of the Annapurnas. Taxis from Beni to Pokhara. Celebratory group meal in Pokhara to mark end of trek.

Day 15:

Morning flight to Kathmandu. Afternoon optional trip to World Heritage site of Bhaktapur in Kathmandu Valley.

Day 16:

Transfers to airport and fly home – or stay on for own independent travel in Nepal.

Note: We reserve the right to alter the itinerary. Each day's itinerary will be decided by the guide, dependent on weather conditions and the fitness of the group.

The spirit of Moving Mountains Project walks

Walks with the Moving Mountains Project are different. We want the experience we offer to be a world away from typical tourist treks. Being a not-for-profit trekking outfit already sets us apart. We are also unique in that we walk in small groups with a maximum of just six walkers. On our walks we aim for deep "mountain immersion" which means feeling the isolation and harshness of the high mountain environment, as well as the warmth and inspiration of real cultural exchange. We can't promise that you won't see other tourists, but you can be sure you'll be experiencing a much more authentic mountain Nepal than them. The spirit of our treks means that we journey as a team. Our small group of walkers and our guide works together. We aim to have no "them and us" divisions between walkers and staff. We eat together, hike together and laugh together. Although our guides, and many Nepalis, speak excellent English, walkers are encouraged to learn a few words of Nepali before the trek to help them get the most out of the adventure. We want you to be moved by the experience of walking with us.

Equipment

For a comfortable trek you'll need well worn in, sturdy boots, a rucksack with a comfortable harness, a warm sleeping bag, down jacket or similar very warm jacket, waterproof jacket, waterproof overpants, gloves, hat, wool or polypropylene thermals, lightweight, quick drying trousers sun hat, sun glasses, sun screen. A comprehensive gear list will be sent when you book. We will be in indoor accommodation each night so we won't need tents. We hope not to use porters as we want to keep our walks small. We do recognize that working as a porter can bring useful income to poor families, however, and we may use porters on some days, depending on the fitness of our walkers.

Weather

The trekking season in the Himalayas is in the dry months of October-April. In this season, there's little rain and days are warm and sunny (15-25°C). Under clear skies, at high altitude, nights can be very cold – up to -5°C, though rarely less than 0°C.

Fitness and preparation

This walk is moderate level trek with some hard days. We do an average of 15kms each day, walking for six to eight hours on full days, depending on terrain. We do have two days of very strenuous, sustained uphill. Like all Himalayan mountain walks, most days have significant climbing or descending, usually on stone steps and paths. Strong legs are essential. In preparation we recommend that hikers undertake an hour of strenuous, sustained aerobic exercise such as running, swimming or bike riding, four or more times a week in the months leading up to the trek. This can't be gentle exercise: to get a good aerobic fitness-building workout you need to elevate your heart rate and be out of breath. It's also essential to have solid walking experience: we recommend having done several multi-day, backpack-carrying hikes prior to this trek. Some long day walks or weekend walks – particularly in the walking boots you plan to bring on the trip - are also recommended as part of preparation for a Moving Mountains trek in Nepal.

Costs

AUD \$2300

Cost is inclusive of all travel and trekking arrangements in Nepal, all meals on trek and all trekking services including guiding, and pre-placement of equipment by porters.

For further information and booking, please contact us at:

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