



Restricted Area

Trek Guide

Nepal's permit-controlled valleys

Routes in Mustang, Nar Phu, Kanchenjunga and Manaslu compared by duration, altitude, difficulty and the permits each one needs.



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Every route in this guide is one we run ourselves. Durations are full package days, from the day you land in Kathmandu to the day you fly out, matching the itineraries on himalayaguidenepal.com.



Introduction to restricted area treks

What restricted means, and why it is worth the paperwork

Nepal controls access to a number of valleys along its northern border with Tibet. You cannot enter them without a Restricted Area Permit issued by the Department of Immigration, and you cannot apply for that permit yourself: it must come through a registered trekking agency with a licensed guide assigned to your trip.

Why these restricted valleys are different

- Access has been controlled for decades. Upper Mustang opened to trekkers only in 1992, and Manaslu in the early 1990s.
- That control is the reason Tibetan Buddhist culture here has changed so little while the same culture changed elsewhere under tourism.
- Permit fees and guide rules keep numbers low and put money directly into the communities inside the zone.
- Landscapes you will not see on the classic routes: the eroded desert canyons of Mustang, the cliff villages of Nar Phu, and the glaciers of Kanchenjunga.



Who these restricted routes suit

Most restricted routes suit trekkers who have already done Everest, Annapurna or Langtang and want something quieter. Upper Mustang and Tsum Valley are the gentle exceptions and suit fit first-timers with good cardiovascular fitness.

Infrastructure is catching up slowly even in restricted regions

Roads and new lodges are reaching several of these valleys. The window to walk them as they were before the roads is still open, but it will not stay open forever.



All restricted area treks at a glance

Nineroutes,sidebyside

Use this table to shortlist, then check the permit section before you commit. Durations are full package days, from the day you land in Kathmandu to the day you fly out, matching the itineraries on himalayaguidenepal.com.

Trek	Area	Days	Highest point	Difficulty
Tsum Valley Trek	Manaslu	12	3,700 m	Moderate
Nar Phu Trek	Annapurna	13	Kang La 5,306 m	Challenging
Manaslu Circuit Trek	Manaslu	14	Larkya La 5,106 m	Strenuous
Upper Mustang Tea House Trek	Mustang	16	about 4,230 m	Moderate
Kanchenjunga Base Camp Trek	Kanchenjunga	16	Pangpema 5,143 m	Challenging
Annapurna Two Passes Trek	Annapurna	19	Thorong La 5,416 m	Challenging
Manaslu Tsum Valley Trek	Manaslu	19	Larkya La 5,106 m	Strenuous
Kanchenjunga Circuit Trek	Kanchenjunga	20	Pangpema 5,143 m	Challenging
Damodar Kunda Trek	Mustang	20	4,890 m	Challenging



How to read the difficulty column

One grading key runs through every Himalaya Guide Nepal region guide. **Easy:** tops out below 3,500 m. **Moderate:** up to about 4,800 m with no pass above 4,500 m. **Strenuous:** a pass above 4,500 m or time above 5,000 m. **Challenging:** two or more high passes, a trekking peak, or remote camping. Section "Difficulty and altitude guide" explains each grade.

Our Manaslu Region Trek List covers the Manaslu and Tsum routes in full, including the Short, Luxury, Two Passes and Ultimate versions.



How restricted area permits work

The process, the fees, and what gets checked

The process of getting restricted area permits

- You book with a registered agency and we assign a licensed guide. The permit is built around that guide registration.
- We apply to the Department of Immigration with your passport details. Pre-arrival processing using your visa details is now available, so the permit can be ready when you land.
- The permit is tied to your passport number and specific dates. Checkpoints inspect the originals, not photos on your phone.
- Group-size rules for restricted permits have been revised recently. We confirm the current position in writing when you book.

Restricted Area Permits by area

Area	Restricted Area Permit (2026)	Also needed	Access
Upper Mustang	US\$500 for the first 10 days, then US\$50 per day	ACAP	Fly or drive Pokhara to Jomsom
Manaslu	US\$100 per week Sep – Nov, US\$75 Dec – Aug	MCAP, plus ACAP on exit	Drive to Machha Khola
Tsum Valley	US\$40 for 7 days Sep – Nov, US\$30 Dec – Aug, then US\$7 per day	MCAP	Drive to Machha Khola
Nar Phu	Weekly fee, confirmed at booking	ACAP	Drive to Koto
Kanchenjunga	Weekly fee, confirmed at booking	KCAP	Fly to Bhadrapur, drive to Taplejung

Fees are the rates published for 2026 and can change without notice. Conservation area permits are NPR 3,000 each. We arrange every permit and quote the exact total for your dates.



Licensed guide rule

Since April 2023, foreign trekkers in Nepal's national parks and conservation areas must walk with a licensed guide arranged through a registered agency. Restricted areas have always required one. We provide licensed guides for solo travellers and groups of every size, and we confirm the current rules in writing when you book.



Upper Mustang Tea House Trek

The walled kingdom of Lo

Upper Mustang was the independent kingdom of Lo for centuries, closer in language and culture to Tibet than to the rest of Nepal. Its walled capital, Lo Manthang, was founded by King Ame Pal in the 14th century. Nepal ended the kingdom's special status in 2008, but restricted access has kept the region looking much as it did.

DURATION
16 days

DIFFICULTY
Moderate

START AND FINISH
Jomsom, via Pokhara

HIGHEST POINT
Chogo La / Marang La about 4,230 m

BEST SEASON
Mar – Nov, including monsoon

GROUP SIZE
2 – 10

Day by day Upper Mustang Tea House Trek Breakdown

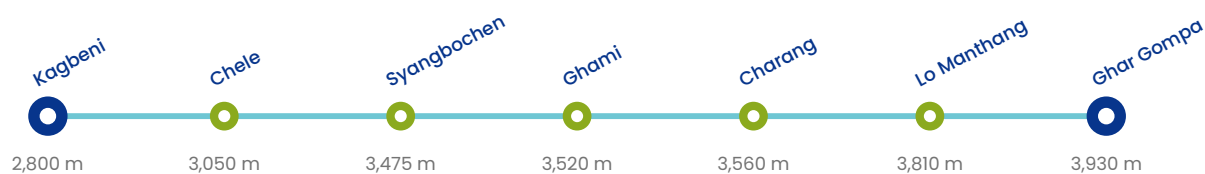
Day	Route	Sleep at	Walking
1 – 2	Arrive Kathmandu, trek preparation	1,350 m	–
3	Drive to Pokhara	820 m	6 – 7 hrs drive
4	Fly to Jomsom, trek to Kagbeni	2,800 m	3 – 4 hrs
5	Kagbeni to Chele	3,050 m	5 – 6 hrs
6	Chele to Syangbochen	3,475 m	6 – 7 hrs
7	Syangbochen to Ghami	3,520 m	5 – 6 hrs
8	Ghami to Charang	3,560 m	4 – 5 hrs
9	Charang to Lo Manthang	3,810 m	4 – 5 hrs
10	Explore Lo Manthang	3,810 m	2 – 3 hrs
11	Lo Manthang to Ghar Gumpa	3,930 m	5 – 6 hrs
12	Ghar Gumpa to Ghiling	3,570 m	5 – 6 hrs
13	Ghiling to Chele	3,050 m	6 – 7 hrs
14	Chele to Jomsom	2,800 m	6 – 7 hrs



Day	Route	Sleep at	Walking
15	Fly Jomsom to Pokhara	820 m	–
16	Return to Kathmandu	1,350 m	–



Altitude profile of Upper Mustang Tea House Trek



Tiji festival

Each spring, usually in May, Lo Manthang holds the three-day Tiji festival of masked dances. Lodges fill months ahead, so tell us early if you want your dates to overlap.



Damodar Kunda Trek

Sacred lakes beyond Lo Manthang

Damodar Kunda is a group of glacial lakes at about 4,890 m, north-east of Lo Manthang, sacred to Hindu pilgrims. The route goes deeper into Mustang than any teahouse trek and uses tents where there are no lodges.



DURATION
20 days

DIFFICULTY
Challenging

ACCLIMATISATION
Lo Manthang

HIGHEST POINT
Damodar Kunda 4,890 m

ACCOMMODATION
Lodges and tents

PERMITS
Upper Mustang RAP and ACAP

Expect long days across open, wind-scoured plateau with no villages for stretches, and water carried between camps. It suits trekkers who have done Upper Mustang or a similar high, dry route and want the expedition version.



Nar Phu and Annapurna Two Passes

A hidden valley above Manang

North of the Annapurna Circuit, a narrow gorge above Koto leads to the villages of Nar and Phu: stone houses, chortens, and herding life that has changed little in centuries. The valley was opened to trekkers only in 2003.

Nar Phu Trek

Up the gorge from Koto to Phu, an acclimatisation day there, then Nar, and over Kang La (5,306 m) to Ngawal on the Circuit trail above Manang.

DURATION
13 days

DIFFICULTY
Challenging

HIGHEST POINT
Kang La 5,306 m

ACCLIMATISATION
Phu village



Annapurna Two Passes Trek

Nar Phu and Kang La, then the Annapurna Circuit from Manang over Thorong La (5,416 m) to Muktinath. Two high passes, one restricted valley and the classic circuit in one trip.

DURATION
19 days

DIFFICULTY
Challenging

HIGHEST POINT
Thorong La 5,416 m

PASSES
Kang La and Thorong La

Not a beginner route

Kang La is steep on both sides and often holds snow. Both routes need prior altitude experience and a flexible day for weather.



Kanchenjunga treks

The third-highest mountain on earth, in Nepal's far east

Kanchenjunga (8,586 m) stands on Nepal's eastern border with Sikkim. It opened to trekkers in 1988 and remains one of the least visited major treks in Nepal, through rich forest and remote Limbu and Sherpa villages to glaciers beneath the north and south faces.

Kanchenjunga Base Camp Trek

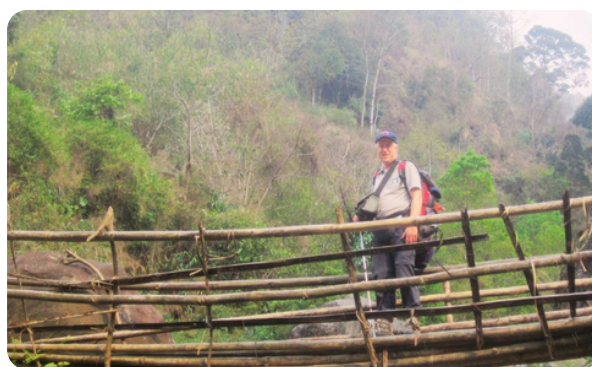
From Taplejung up the Tamor valley to Ghunsa for acclimatisation, then on to Pangpema, the North Base Camp (5,143 m). What was once a camping trek now runs on simple teahouses with local meals.

DURATION
16 days

DIFFICULTY
Challenging

HIGHEST POINT
Pangpema 5,143 m

PERMITS
Kanchenjunga RAP and KCAP



Kanchenjunga Circuit Trek

Both base camps in one loop: North Base Camp first, then across the Sele La high crossings to Oktang and the South Base Camp, returning via Tortong.

DURATION
20 days

DIFFICULTY
Challenging

HIGHEST POINT
Pangpema 5,143 m

BASE CAMPS
North and South

Getting there takes time

Most groups fly Kathmandu to Bhadrapur and drive a long day to Taplejung. Lodges are basic and far apart, and a rescue takes longer than in the Khumbu, so insurance with helicopter cover is essential.



Manaslu and Tsum Valley

The most popular restricted area, in brief

The Manaslu Circuit is the most walked restricted route in Nepal, and Tsum Valley is the gentlest. Both start with a drive to Machha Khola. Our Manaslu Region Trek List covers them day by day.



Trek	Days	Highest point	Difficulty	In one line
Tsum Valley Trek	12	3,700 m	Moderate	Monasteries and Milarepa's caves, no high pass
Manaslu Circuit Trek	14	5,106 m	Strenuous	Around the eighth-highest mountain over Larkya La
Manaslu Tsum Valley Trek	19	5,106 m	Strenuous	Both valleys and the pass in one trip



Trekking in the monsoon

The rain-shadow advantage

Upper Mustang and Damodar Kunda sit north of the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri ranges, which block most of the monsoon rain. From June to August, when the southern trails are wet and cloud-covered, Mustang stays mostly dry.



- Afternoon wind and dust are the main weather, not rain.
- Barley fields are green and the villages are busy with the farming season.
- Jomsom flights can still be delayed by cloud over the Kali Gandaki, so allow a buffer day in Pokhara.
- The road to Jomsom can be cut by landslides lower down during heavy rain.

If summer is your only window

Upper Mustang is the one trek we recommend with confidence from June to August. Nar Phu is a partial rain shadow, and Kanchenjunga and Manaslu are best avoided in the monsoon.



Trek comparison by category

The short answer, depending on what you want most

BEST FOR CULTURE Upper Mustang Tea House Trek The walled city of Lo Manthang and its monasteries.	BEST FOR FIRST-TIMERS Tsum Valley Trek Restricted-area culture below 3,700 m, with no pass.
BEST FOR ADVENTURE Kanchenjunga Circuit Trek Both base camps of the third-highest mountain.	BEST FOR MONSOON Upper Mustang Tea House Trek Dry trails while the rest of Nepal is wet.
BEST HIDDEN VALLEY Nar Phu Trek Cliff villages and a 5,306 m pass, just off the Circuit.	BEST CLASSIC Manaslu Circuit Trek The most complete restricted trek in two weeks.



Difficulty and altitude guide

What the grades actually mean on the ground

Grade	Daily walking	Top altitude	What it feels like
Easy	4 – 6 hours	Below 3,500 m	Good trail, village nights, no acclimatisation days needed
Moderate	5 – 7 hours	3,500 – 4,800 m, no high pass	Long days, thin air at the top, one acclimatisation stop
Strenuous	5 – 8 hours	A pass above 4,500 m or time above 5,000 m	Cold nights, pre-dawn starts, one or two very long days
Challenging	6 – 9 hours	Two or more high passes, a peak, or remote camping	Snow underfoot, basic facilities, prior altitude experience needed



Remoteness is part of the difficulty

On restricted routes the grade tells only half the story. Lodges are further apart, menus are shorter, rescue takes longer, and weather can close a pass for days. Plan more slack than you would on Everest or Annapurna.

Altitude considerations

- Above 3,000m, keep sleeping – altitude gains to roughly 300 to 500 m per night.
- Plan a full acclimatisation day for about every 1,000 m of altitude gained.
- Drink far more than feels necessary, three to four litres a day.
- Mild headache, poor appetite and broken sleep are common. A worsening headache, breathlessness at rest, confusion or loss of balance are not, and mean descending straight away.
- Talk to a travel doctor about altitude medication before you leave home, and tell your guide about any medication you carry.

Descent is the treatment

No drug, oxygen bottle or rest day replaces going down. Every itinerary we run has descent options identified in advance, and every guide carries a first aid kit and a way to call for help. Helicopter evacuation depends on weather, which is why travel insurance covering evacuation to the maximum altitude of your trek is a condition of joining any trip in this guide.



Best time for restricted area treks

Area by area

Area	Best months	Avoid	Notes
Upper Mustang	Mar – Nov	Dec – Feb	Rain shadow, trekkable in the monsoon. Tiji festival in May
Damodar Kunda	May – Oct	Dec – Mar	High and exposed, needs settled weather
Nar Phu	Oct – Nov, Apr – May	Dec – Feb	Kang La snowbound in winter
Kanchenjunga	Oct – Nov, Mar – May	Jun – Aug	Long approach, heavy monsoon rain in the lower valleys
Manaslu and Tsum	Sep – Nov, Mar – May	Dec – Feb for the Circuit	Tsum stays possible later into autumn



Preparation and practical tips

From our guides who walk these valleys

Book early Restricted Area Trek

Permits need lead time, and Upper Mustang in peak season fills early. We start the permit application as soon as your dates are confirmed.

Money and accommodation During Restricted Area Treks

Nothing above Jomsom on the Mustang routes, or above Machha Khola on the Manaslu routes, accepts cards. Carry cash for the whole trek. Lodges are simpler than on the classic routes, and teahouse rooms above 3,500 m are never heated: bring a sleeping bag rated to minus 10 to minus 15 Celsius.

Documents For Restricted Area Treks

Carry permit originals and your passport in a waterproof pouch, plus two photocopies of each. Checkpoints on every route verify papers in person.

Travel insurance For Restricted Area Treks

Your policy must cover trekking to the maximum altitude of your itinerary and must include helicopter evacuation and repatriation. Many standard travel policies stop at 3,000 or 4,000 m. Read the altitude clause, not the summary.

Physical preparation During Restricted Treks

- Start eight to twelve weeks out. Consistency beats intensity.
- Uphill walking with a loaded pack is the most useful training there is. Flat cardio alone does not prepare you for the stairs.
- Add two or three cardio sessions a week, and one long walk of four hours or more at the weekend.
- Break your boots in properly. Blisters end more treks than altitude does.
- If you have a heart, lung or blood pressure condition, get medical clearance before booking.



Packing essentials For Restricted Area Treks

Tick as you pack. Aim for 10 to 12 kg in the porter bag

CLOTHING	FOOTWEAR AND GEAR	HEALTH AND EXTRAS
☐ Base layers, 2 sets ☐ Fleece or midlayer ☐ Down jacket ☐ Waterproof shell jacket ☐ Waterproof trousers ☐ Trekking trousers, 2 ☐ Trekking shirts, 3 ☐ Warm hat and sun hat ☐ Buff or neck gaiter ☐ Liner and insulated gloves ☐ Underwear and sports bras ☐ Trekking socks, 4 pairs	☐ Broken-in trekking boots ☐ Camp shoes or sandals ☐ Gaiters, for pass routes ☐ Trekking poles ☐ Daypack, 30 to 35 L ☐ Duffel bag for the porter ☐ Dry bags or pack liner ☐ Sleeping bag (see rating below) ☐ Sleeping bag liner ☐ Headtorch and spare batteries ☐ Microspikes or crampons, pass routes only	☐ Sunscreen, factor 50 ☐ SPF lip balm ☐ Category 4 sunglasses ☐ Personal medication ☐ Blister kit and tape ☐ Rehydration salts ☐ Water bottles, 2 to 3 L ☐ Purification tablets or filter ☐ Quick-dry towel ☐ Wet wipes and hand sanitiser ☐ Power bank, 20,000 mAh ☐ Universal adapter ☐ Passport, permits, insurance ☐ Cash in Nepali rupees

Restricted-area additions

A buff and sunglasses for the wind and dust of Mustang, lip balm and moisturiser for the dry air, water purification for long gaps between villages, and extra passport photocopies for checkpoints.



Quick trek selection guide

Start with what you want, then check the days

First restricted trek, no pass?

Tsum Valley Trek, 12 days

Trekking in June to August?

Upper Mustang Tea House Trek, 16 days

Want ancient culture above all?

Upper Mustang Tea House Trek, 16 days

Want a hidden valley and a pass?

Nar Phu Trek, 13 days

Want two big passes?

Annapurna Two Passes Trek, 19 days

Want the most remote big mountain?

Kanchenjunga Base Camp or Circuit

Want the classic restricted circuit?

Manaslu Circuit Trek, 14 days

One question that settles most of doubts you have about restricted treks

Have you trekked above 4,000m before? If not, choose Tsum Valley or Upper Mustang. Nar Phu, Kanchenjunga and the Manaslu passes are far better on a second or third Himalayan trip.



Final restricted area trek list

One page. Print it, or keep it on your phone

Trek	Days	Highest point	Difficulty	Best season	Main highlight
Tsum Valley	12	3,700 m	Moderate	Autumn, spring	Mu Gompa, Milarepa caves
Nar Phu	13	5,306 m	Challenging	Oct – Nov, Apr – May	Cliff villages, Kang La
Manaslu Circuit	14	5,106 m	Strenuous	Autumn, spring	Larkya La
Upper Mustang	16	4,230 m	Moderate	Mar – Nov	Lo Manthang
Kanchenjunga Base Camp	16	5,143 m	Challenging	Autumn, spring	Pangpema north face
Annapurna Two Passes	19	5,416 m	Challenging	Oct – Nov, Apr – May	Kang La and Thorong La
Manaslu Tsum Valley	19	5,106 m	Strenuous	Autumn, spring	Both valleys and the pass
Kanchenjunga Circuit	20	5,143 m	Challenging	Autumn, spring	North and South base camps
Damodar Kunda	20	4,890 m	Challenging	May – Oct	Sacred lakes beyond Lo

Ready to pick one?

Send us your dates and the two routes you are weighing up, and we will come back with a day-by-day itinerary, a firm price and the current permit position. WhatsApp +977 9851193013 or info@himalayaguidenepal.com. We would rather talk you onto the right trek than sell you the famous one.

Altitudes, durations and seasons reflect our standard itineraries and commonly published figures, which vary a little between maps and signboards. Conditions on the ground, permit fees and regulations change. Confirm current details with us before you travel.





Plan your trek with people who live here

Himalaya Guide Nepal is a Nepali-owned trekking company based in Kathmandu, running guided treks and peak climbs across Everest, Annapurna, Manaslu, Langtang, Ruby Valley and Nepal's restricted areas. This guide covers the Annapurna region. Every itinerary in this guide can be adjusted to your dates, pace and budget.

himalayaguidenepal.com | WhatsApp +977 9851193013 | info@himalayaguidenepal.com

