

Lower Dolpo

REGION	Trans-Himalaya · Phoksundo
DURATION	17 days
MAX ALTITUDE	4800 m
GRADE	Moderate-Strenuous
SEASON	Mar-May · Sep-Dec
FROM	from \$4,000

Overview

Turquoise lakes and Bön valleys, the shorter way

Tucked against the Tibetan plateau in the far west of Nepal, Dolpo - also known as Dolpa - remains one of the country's last great frontiers: a high, arid, trans-Himalayan landscape of turquoise lakes, wind-scoured passes, and villages that have changed little in centuries.

Cut off from the rest of Nepal by some of the highest terrain in the Himalaya, the region developed for generations in relative isolation, and that isolation is precisely what makes it so rewarding to walk through today. The Lower Dolpo Circuit Trek carries you deep into Shey Phoksundo National Park, Nepal's only trans-Himalayan national park and the largest of its twelve protected areas, tracing a route through some of the highest and most remote permanent settlements in the country.

This is trekking in its most elemental form: walking each day with a small, dedicated crew, eating meals prepared over camp stoves, and sleeping beneath a canopy of stars with nothing but canvas between you and the Himalayan night. There are no lodges or teahouse menus here as there are on Nepal's more popular routes - instead, a guide, cook, kitchen assistant, and a train of pack mules travel with you, carrying camp and supplies from one wild pitch to the next. It is a slower, more self-contained way to travel, and it is what allows the route to reach as far and as high as it does.

Two formidable passes - Numa La and Baga La, both above 5,000 metres - punctuate the journey, testing legs and lungs on long, high-altitude days before delivering you to the shimmering shores of Phoksundo Lake, widely regarded as one of the most beautiful bodies of water in Nepal for the striking turquoise clarity of its glacier-fed water. Along the way, the ancient Bon religion, said to predate Tibetan Buddhism, still shapes daily life in villages such as Ringmo and Dho Tarap, where flat-roofed stone houses, wind-worn chortens, and fluttering prayer flags speak to a culture defined as much by altitude and isolation as by faith. Encounters with local herders, farmers, and monastery caretakers along the trail offer a rare, unfiltered window into a way of life that has persisted largely unchanged for centuries.

The route also carries real ecological weight. Shey Phoksundo National Park shelters the endangered snow leopard alongside blue sheep, grey wolf, marmots, and the Great Tibetan sheep, and its slopes are home to some of the most prized medicinal plants in the Himalaya, including yarsagumba, panchaule, and wild garlic. The landscape itself tells its own story as the trek unfolds, shifting day by day from lush pine forest and terraced barley fields in the lower valleys to the stark, wind-scoured high desert of Upper Dolpo - a transition as dramatic as anywhere in the Nepal Himalaya.

The journey opens gently, with two days exploring Kathmandu's UNESCO World Heritage Sites - a fitting counterpoint to the remoteness ahead, since Kathmandu itself was once the great trading hub

through which routes like this one passed for centuries. From there, flights carry you west to Nepalgunj and on to the small mountain airstrip at Juphal, where the trek itself begins and the pace of the journey changes entirely. What follows is roughly two weeks largely disconnected from the outside world: no roads, minimal phone signal, and a rhythm of life set entirely by daylight, altitude, and the trail ahead. For travelers seeking genuine wilderness, a slower pace, and a part of Nepal that very few outsiders ever see, the Lower Dolpo Circuit offers one of the most complete and rewarding trekking experiences the Himalaya has to offer.

Highlights

- A private, fully customizable trek through one of Nepal's most remote regions
- Exploring the far-flung settlements of Dolpo with little to no crowds along the trail
- Immersing in local culture in villages such as Ringmo and Dho Tarap
- Walking through Shey Phoksundo National Park, rich in Himalayan flora and fauna
- Witnessing the turquoise waters of Phoksundo Lake and the Suligad waterfall it feeds
- Encountering the ancient Bon religion, still practiced by the people of Dolpo
- Crossing two dramatic high passes, Numa La and Baga La, both above 5,000 m

Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrival in Kathmandu - welcome to Nepal (1,400 m / 4,593 ft)

Arrive at Tribhuvan International Airport, where you are met and transferred to your hotel in Kathmandu. The rest of the day is free to rest after your flight, settle in, and get a first taste of the city's streets. In the evening, gather with the trekking team for an introductory briefing and welcome dinner.

- Overnight in a hotel.

Day 2 - Kathmandu sightseeing and trek preparation (1,400 m / 4,593 ft)

A full day exploring Kathmandu's UNESCO World Heritage Sites - Kathmandu Durbar Square, the all-seeing eyes of Swayambhunath Stupa, the vast mandala of Boudhanath Stupa, and the sacred riverside temple complex of Pashupatinath. In the afternoon, turn to practical matters: a full equipment check, last-minute shopping for any missing trekking gear, and a detailed briefing on the route, permits, and days ahead.

- Overnight in a hotel.

Day 3 - Fly from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj (150 m / 492 ft)

A roughly one-hour flight south-west carries you from the hills of Kathmandu down to the warm, subtropical plains of Nepalgunj, close to the Indian border. The change in climate and landscape is immediate - flat streets, bazaars, and a noticeably different pace of life. The afternoon is free to explore the town before an early start the next morning.

- Overnight in a hotel.

Day 4 - Fly to Juphal; trek to Dunai (2,140 m / 7,020 ft)

An early and spectacular 35-40 minutes mountain flight from Nepalgunj to the small airstrip at Juphal, gateway to the Dolpo region, with views over the foothills of Shey Phoksundo National Park as you approach. At Juphal you meet the full trekking crew - guide, cook, kitchen assistant, and pack mules - who accompany you for the rest of the journey. From here, an easy 3-4 hours walk descends along the Thuli Bheri River to Dunai, the district headquarters of Dolpa, set among terraced fields.

- Overnight camping.

Day 5 - Trek Dunai to Tarakot (2,540 m / 8,333 ft)

The trail continues upstream along the Bheri River through a changing landscape of terraced barley fields, pine forest, and scattered farming settlements, roughly 5-6 hours of walking. Tarakot is home to the old Sandul Gompa and the ruins of a historic fort that once guarded this stretch of the trans-Himalayan trade route.

- Overnight camping.

Day 6 - Trek Tarakot to Lain Odar (3,290 m / 10,795 ft)

Leaving the last of the wider farming villages behind, the route climbs through the small settlement of Lawan and follows the Tarap Chu river gorge into increasingly wild, forested terrain - around 6 hours of walking through a landscape of pine, fir, and rushing water, with the trail narrowing as it enters more remote country.

- Overnight camping in the wilderness.

Day 7 - Trek Lain Odar to Sim Odar (3,523 m / 11,558 ft)

A shorter but rugged day, roughly 4-5 hours, threading along a narrow gorge trail carved into the cliffs above the Tarap Chu. This stretch is one of the more dramatic sections of the approach, with the river far below and the valley walls closing in before opening slightly at the Sim Odar camp.

- Overnight camping.

Day 8 - Trek Sim Odar to Dho Tarap (4,100 m / 13,452 ft)

A steady 5-6 hour climb through juniper and birch forest gradually gives way to open, arid highland scenery as the trail crosses into the Dho Tarap valley - a striking transition from green forest to the stark, Tibetan-influenced landscape that defines Upper Dolpo. Dho Tarap itself is one of the highest permanent settlements in the region, its flat-roofed stone houses and fluttering prayer flags marking a clear shift in culture and altitude.

- Overnight camping.

Day 9 - Acclimatization and exploration day at Dho Tarap (4,100 m / 13,452 ft)

A full rest day built in for acclimatization before the high passes ahead. Spend the day exploring the Dho Tarap valley on foot: the red-walled Ribo Bhumpa Gompa and other village monasteries, the community of Tokyu, and the daily rhythms of a Tarap valley settlement where farming and animal husbandry still shape everyday life. It is also a good opportunity to interact with local families and learn more about the ancient Bon religion still practiced here.

- Overnight camping.

Day 10 - Trek Dho Tarap to Numa La Phedi (4,800 m / 15,748 ft)

The trail climbs steadily out of the Tarap valley past Tokyu village, the last settlement before the high passes, gaining altitude through increasingly barren, high-desert terrain. After roughly 5-6 hours you reach Numa La Phedi ('foot of Numa La'), a basic high camp positioned for an early start on the pass the following morning.

- Overnight camping.

Day 11 - Cross Numa La Pass to Danigad (4,512 m / 14,803 ft)

One of the two major pass crossings of the trek. An early start tackles the steep climb to Numa La (South Numa La, 5,310 m), the more accessible of the two Numa La passes and the one used year-round, rewarded with sweeping views over the surrounding Dolpo peaks. A long, demanding descent - roughly 7-8 hours in total - drops down to the camp at Danigad.

- Overnight camping.

Day 12 - Cross Baga La Pass to Yak Kharka (3,995 m / 13,100 ft)

The second high pass of the trek. From Danigad, a further significant climb leads to Baga La Pass

(5,170 m), one of Dolpo's classic trekking passes, before a long descent - around 6-7 hours of walking overall - into the open pastureland of Yak Kharka, a seasonal grazing ground for yak herders.

- Overnight camping.

Day 13 - Trek Yak Kharka to Ringmo (Phoksundo Lake) (3,641 m / 11,946 ft)

A gentler descent of around 5 hours brings you down toward Ringmo village, set beside the turquoise waters of Phoksundo Lake - regarded as one of the most beautiful lakes in Nepal and considered sacred by the local community. The afternoon offers time to walk the lakeshore, visit the nearby Suligad waterfall fed by the lake's outflow, and take in the tranquil setting inside Shey Phoksundo National Park.

- Overnight camping.

Day 14 - Trek Ringmo to Chhepka (2,678 m / 8,786 ft)

The trail drops steadily through pine and birch forest alongside the Phoksundo Khola, passing waterfalls and narrow river gorges as the landscape turns noticeably greener and warmer with every hour of descent - roughly 6 hours of walking in total.

- Overnight camping at Chhepka.

Day 15 - Trek Chhepka to Juphal (2,475 m / 8,120 ft)

The final trekking day retraces the Thuli Bheri valley trail back through Dunai and on to Juphal, around 6-7 hours of walking through familiar terraced-field scenery. An evening in Juphal often includes a farewell dinner with the trekking crew who have accompanied you throughout the journey.

- Overnight camping.

Day 16 - Fly to Kathmandu via Nepalgunj (1,400 m / 4,593 ft)

An early flight from Juphal connects through Nepalgunj back to Kathmandu, returning you from the remote trails of Dolpo to the capital's markets, cafés, and city bustle within a single day. The afternoon and evening are free for a hot shower, laundry, and rest, with the option of a celebratory dinner to mark the end of the trek.

- Overnight in a hotel.

Day 17 - Final Departure

Depending on your onward flight time, the day is free until your transfer to Tribhuvan International Airport for departure - or extend your stay in Nepal independently to explore further.

What's included

- Lower Dolpo & national-park permits
- Licensed guide + camping crew
- Full camping & meals on trek
- All ground transport & domestic flights
- Pre-trip briefing & gear check
- 5% funds village schools & health posts

Not included

- International flights to/from Nepal
- Travel & high-altitude insurance
- Personal trekking & climbing gear
- Nepal entry visa fees

- Tips for guides and porters
- Personal expenses (drinks, wifi, laundry)

Available departures

- 15 Mar 2026
- 02 Apr 2026
- 21 Apr 2026
- 12 May 2026
- 18 Sep 2026
- 06 Oct 2026