



The Annapurna Circuit is one of the most popular hikes in the Nepalese Himalaya, encircling 3 of the 10 highest mountains in the world and quite a few very bloody high peaks to boot. The full trek is roughly 220 km from start to finish and will take 3 to 4 weeks to complete. The circuit is classified as a teahouse trek, which means that each night you'll stay in a hotel in the many villages dotted along the trail, no camping required. The circuit starts at 820m and then rises to Thorung La, which at 5416m is one of the highest mountain passes in the world. The altitudinal range means that you can traverse temperate forest one week and alpine desert the next.



Annapurna Circuit in Nepal is classified as a teahouse trek, so no camping is needed.

How to get there

Malaysian and Singapore Airlines fly to Kathmandu from Kuala Lumpur and Singapore respectively. From Kathmandu, you will need to find your way to the trailhead at the mostly unremarkable town of Besisahar.

A public bus is one option. The pace is ancient but it's also the cheapest. Also, consider the more comfortable Greenline tourist bus. You'll get free WI-FI and water, and also a catered lunch stop for about A\$30-35.

Tip: if you take the Greenline, you'll need to get off at the bustling highway town of Dumre and arrange further transport to Besisahar.

The most expensive is a private vehicle, which would be the quickest option.

Whichever you go with, the 173 km journey will take at least 6-7 hours. The roads are busy with various forms of transport and accidents on the narrow mountain roads are common.

Preparation

Fitness

You'll need to be reasonably fit to hike the entire length. Sure, you won't need to pack the crampons and ice axes, but there are many steep ascents and descents with areas of uneven ice and snow-covered terrain.

Be prepared for and understand the effects of altitude on the body before you decide to do this trek. Altitude sickness can ruin your hike, even if you consider yourself reasonably fit. It's best to visit your doctor to ensure you're in good health before you book your trip.

Nevertheless, some long distance hikes with a loaded backpack over hilly terrain would be ideal preparation. You can read more about training for a multi-day hike here.



You'll need to be fit enough to tackle a typical long distance hike at a high altitude.

To porter or not to porter?

Whether you hire a porter to carry your stuff will be dependent on your budget, fitness level and the type of experience you want to have.

For those that want a walking guidebook, hire someone that knows the names of the various



summits and the history behind them. I used a porter on this trek, and I think mine got sick of me asking!

Porters will also gladly arrange meals, accommodation and transport for you and are great company too.



Whether you hire a porter or not depends on the kind of trip you want to have.

When to visit

Winter is the dry season in Nepal (December to February). Skies are usually bright, clear and sunny.

Their winter is very cold, but with proper clothing and equipment, you'll be comfortable to enjoy the starry skies and mountain peaks. A small price to pay for a bit of frozen toothpaste! You'll also enjoy relatively snow-free trails, as the circuit receives most of its precipitation during the summer monsoon.

The monsoon season (June to September) is not recommended if you want clear, unobstructed views of the mountains. But the landscape will be a verdant green and the waterfalls are at their majestic best.

Spring (March to May) and autumn (September to November) offer the best compromise but be prepared for crowded teahouses, long waits for food and less solitude with nature.

Do I need a visa for Nepal?

Yes, Australians need a visa to enter Nepal. If you're travelling to Nepal for tourism you can get one upon arrival at [Tribhuvan International Airport](#) which you can pay for in major currencies.



The dry season is a good time to visit, as you'll still get clear skies.

What to bring

Gear will depend on the time of year, but this is a rough guide:

- [Merino base layers](#), a fleece jumper, wind jacket and down jacket, especially if trekking between October and April. Softshell pants are optional – I saw a guy hiking in jeans!
- Beanie, gloves, and [buff](#) if it's cold
- Diamox for altitude sickness and Imodium for the inevitable upset stomach.
- [Water purification tablets](#) to treat water, minimising the need to buy bottled water. Do not drink untreated water in Nepal! For more on safe hydration, check out this article [here](#).
- A sturdy, fitted [backpack](#).
- [Hiking boots](#) – that you've worn in. [Blisters are no fun](#) and can seriously detract from the enjoyment of, well, everything really.
- [Hiking socks](#)



- Sun protection – for high UV and snow glare. This means hats, sunglasses, lip balm, etc.
- Maps and guidebooks – you can't really get lost on the Annapurna Circuit, but the trail occasionally diverges and you have a choice of route.
- Sleeping bag – buy one that is rated for the season you intend to visit in, but you could probably get away without one in summer. The tea houses generally provide other bedding.
- Hiking poles
- Compact microfibre towel
- Head torch – essential for most of Nepal where power outages are frequent.
- Hand sanitiser, wipes and toilet paper – worth their weight in gold.



Make sure you bring the guidebooks that you can navigate.

Costs for food and accommodation

Over the three weeks of trekking, I averaged A\$25 a day for food and accommodation at the time of writing this. This does not include porter fees, any souvenirs you want to pick up, or transport to and from the trail. Bring cash with you to pay for things along the way. Meals and snacks are available along the trek, but you can bring your own snacks if you don't mind carrying the extra weight.

Permits you'll need

You will also need to purchase the Trekkers Information Management System (TIMS) and Annapurna Conservation Area Permit (ACAP) permits in Kathmandu before you set off. Both will set you back about A\$25 if trekking individually, or about half that if trekking in a guided group.



Food and accommodation will set you back around A\$25 a day.

Suggested itinerary

Segment 1 - Besisahar to Dharapani (40 km)

The start of the trail! From a starting elevation of 820m, follow the Marsyangdi River steadily upwards through quaint, rural villages and farmland. Settle into a routine of dhal bat (rice and lentil soup), milky coffee and school children holding your hand as you walk.

Opt to stay in Upper Chamje and order the Snickers roll (basically a Snickers bar cooked in hot pastry) and relax among the simal trees and waterfalls. You won't be disappointed!

Nearing Dharapani (1900m), the canyon walls narrow and you will truly feel like you are up in the Himalayas.





The start of the journey will take you through farmland and small villages.

Segment 2 - Dharapani to Manang (50 km)

Shortly after Dharapani, you'll catch your first glimpse of the snow-capped peaks of the Annapurna Massif, including Manaslu (8163m), eighth highest in the world.

There is a definite chill in the air as you pass through the ancient villages of Thanchouk (2400m) and Koto (2600m), unchanged for centuries.



The first glimpses of the snow-capped peaks.

After stocking up on any essentials in the regional capital Chame (2670m), I recommend the upper route to Manang (though there is a lower). It is one of the most beautiful sections of the circuit, with panoramic views of Annapurna II (7937m), Annapurna III (7555m) and Gangapurna (7454m).

After a lung-busting 300 metre ascent, stop for some momos (Tibetan dumplings) in Ghyaru (3730m) and overnight in the ancient village of Ngawal, huddled against the mountains on a wind-swept plain.

Manang (3500m) is one of the bigger towns on the trek, and you'll be spoilt for choice in terms of accommodation. Absolutely stay here for 2 nights for acclimatisation, especially if you opt to take the lower route from Chame.



Eat some delicious momos (dumplings) along your way.

Segment 3 - Manang to Muktinath via Thorung La (31 km)

The stretch of scenery between Manang (3540m) and Letdar (4200m) is absolutely exemplary, and the type of epic mountainscapes that inspired me to hike the Annapurna Circuit.

Higher up, there is a conspicuous lack of trees, people, flowing water and oxygen. Some parts of the trail look like the surface of Mars.



The higher you get, the less plant life you will see on this trek.

Indeed, the lonely outpost of Gunsang (3950m) is the last permanently inhabited village before the other side of the pass.

You're almost at the top! The night before crossing Thorung la, you can either stay in Thorung Phedi (4450m) or High Camp (4925m). I recommend staying in High Camp if you are feeling good, as this way there is a shorter 600-metre climb to the pass the next day.



This part of the trek showcases some incredible mountain scenery.

Segment 4 - Muktinath to Tatopani (62 km)

Muktinath (3760m) is the perfect place to rest your weary bones after a 1600 metre descent from Thorung La. In addition to being an extremely auspicious pilgrimage site for Buddhists



and Hindus, many trekkers will end their journey here and Jeep it to Pokhara.

But the Annapurna Circuit has still much to offer! Kagbeni (2810m) is a small, almost medieval village with rustic mud houses and narrow, cobbled alleyways. Kagbeni deserves at least 2 nights to explore its unlimited charm.

After Kagbeni, you will gradually lose altitude and enjoy the soupy, oxygen-rich air. The village of Marpha is another highlight, with its white-washed walls, famous apple pie and a prominent Buddhist monastery.

In Kalopani (2530m), there are several more fancy teahouses where you can enjoy such luxuries as iced coffee, cocktails and fast-ish semi-reliable WI-FI. Go on, you've earned it! Kalopani is also one of the only places on the circuit where Dhaulagiri (8167m) and Annapurna I (8091m) can be seen simultaneously.



Kagbeni is a small village you should take the time to explore on your trek.

Segment 5 - Tatopani to Naya Pul (28 km)

Tatopani (1190m) will probably feel quite warm compared to the last couple of weeks trekking. The town is famous for its hot springs, making it the perfect place to soothe tired muscles.

But, you aren't quite done with climbing just yet. Ghorepani (2860m) is a hard slog up multiple flights of stairs, but it is set amongst the misty forest, ferny canyons and superb rhododendrons (best-seen flowering in spring).

Instead of going directly to Naya Pul from Ghorepani, take the forested ridge to Ghandruk, a quaint old village where'll you be afforded incredible views of Machhapuchhre (6993m) and many peaks of the Annapurna Massif.



You'll have some spectacular views of Machhapuchhre from the village of Ghandruk.

Why you should do this trek

The Annapurna Circuit has to rank as one of the best treks in the world, mostly because it offers relatively easy access to some of the highest mountains in the world. The trek is light on the wallet, especially if you intend to walk unassisted, and the depth and range of scenery is unrivalled.

Is Annapurna Circuit on your bucket list? If so, why?