

Howard's hints for happy trekking

Don't run out of money

- if you are paying for your own meals and accommodation as you go, allow \$US25 per day per person at least and be aware that prices are rising all the time.
- if you are spending time at altitude, such as above Namche Bazar in the Khumbu, allow twice as much as it rapidly becomes more expensive to have all your food carried up there.
- carry Nepali rupees in cash, changing all you need in Kathmandu or Pokhara before you leave. Travellers' cheques are not accepted, even in Kathmandu. Automated teller machines (ATMs) rely on electricity which can often be interrupted, and on being recharged with cash, which doesn't happen in a strike.
- carry some \$US notes, say \$US300-500 with some small denominations, for emergencies like strikes, needing to change money in remote villages or hiring a car from the roadhead or if you have to walk out due to bad weather.

Don't ever get blisters, they will ruin your trip

- wear in your boots by walking for several hours several times carrying a pack on tracks that go up and down, using the same socks that you intend to trek in.
- at the very first sign of a hot spot on your feet, within five minutes, **STOP**. Cover the hot area with elastic adhesive plaster from side to side, at least 2cm (1") beyond the hot spot using 2.5cm wide Leukoplast or Elastoplast. Smooth the edges and replace socks carefully. You can leave this cover on for the whole trip, my record is 8 weeks, or replace if it becomes frayed.
- if you do this, you will never have blisters.

Don't get sick

- take water purification seriously. Use the UV-ozone water stations in villages where they exist, don't buy bottled water (40% didn't meet WHO Standards in the last survey and it creates rubbish throughout the hills), carry water-purification tablets (Micropur are excellent but require 2hrs for maximum safety) or even better a UV steriliser (eg Steripen Adventurer) which gives you 1 litre ready to drink within 1.5mins. We have seen trekkers, usually young, being very ethnic and gung-ho about "drinking the same water as the villagers"; we've seen them often the next day going violently at both ends which ruins their trip.
- take hand cleanliness seriously. Carry 50mls of hand sanitiser (available in Kathmandu) and use it before every meal, after every toilet visit and before cleaning your teeth.
- carry a first aid kit. If you are in a group or with a guide, check what is in the kit supplied because often they are more for show than dealing with illness or accidents. See suggested kits <http://fedup.com.au/images/stories/nepal/NEPALfirstaidkit.pdf>. Far too often we have had to use our own kit for trekkers with ear infections, typhoid, bacillary dysentery, chest infections and blisters.
- to prevent travellers' diarrhoea, consider taking daily probiotics that contain *Saccharomyces boulardii*, such as Naturopathica GastroHealth4, Travel Bug (available in some airports) or Darolac (made in India, available in Kathmandu pharmacies, cheap and effective). For best results, start 5 days before your trip and continue for 2 days afterwards. You can take up to 3 per day if needed.
- don't ignore symptoms of altitude sickness but be aware that some symptoms, such as sleeplessness and heart palpitations, may be caused by the high levels of MSG, especially

flavour enhancers 621, 627, 631 or 635 in Nepali foods such as soups and stews, rather than by altitude.

- have full travel insurance including helicopter evacuation in an emergency, which is included in most standard policies. If you can't afford insurance, you can't afford to be trekking.

Minimise your pack weight and you will enjoy the walk

- aim for 10% of your body weight and certainly no more than 20%. Throw out anything that is not essential. One of the joys of trekking is keeping your possessions as basic as you can. See a suggested gear list <http://fedup.com.au/images/stories/nepal/NEPALgearlist.pdf>
- it is exploitative to minimise your pack weight at the expense of your porter if you have one. While porters may carry up to 30kg, it is far kinder to aim for a porter load of less than 20kg and have no more than two people per porter.

Deal with fleas

- unfortunately there can be fleas, and bedbugs that really hurt, and even one can spoil your trip. DEET (diethyltoluamide) repellent is always effective. If it's too cold to wash everything, you can sprinkle soda bicarb (sodium bicarbonate), washing soda (sodium carbonate) or talcum powder on yourself, clothes, and in your sleeping bag liner. It suffocates the fleas. But you will have to take these with you as none of these can be bought along the trail.

Follow lodge etiquette

- it is understood that if you are sleeping in a lodge you will eat there. Locals make most of their money from the food, not the room charge, so if you decide to go elsewhere to eat they may increase the room charge. If you decide to cook for yourself, they will certainly increase the room charge and think you are very rude!
- it is impolite to enter the kitchen without being invited. By all means stand in the door and ask if you can come in. If you are invited in, be sensitive about where you sit and only sit by the fire if you are specifically invited to do so. Don't put anything into the fire or disturb it.
- although the menu, if one exists, may have many options, it is polite to talk amongst yourselves and try to all order the same meal so as to reduce stress on the kitchen staff. This approach means that you are all likely to be served at the same time with hot food rather than over an extended period with cold food.

Follow toilet etiquette

- look around. If there is a bin, put your used toilet paper in there, rather than down the hole where it may block the system.
- if using the 'open toilet' (ie beside the track, outside the village) then get well away from the track and any water sources which may become contaminated, dig a hole with your heel, cover your waste well and, in particular, make sure that your toilet paper isn't going to blow around the landscape. Burning it has caused extensive fires; better to bury it well.

Don't give sweets/pens/balloons/books/money to kids on the track

- this turns them into pestiferous beggars. Give them a free English or other language lesson instead. We've met kids with 100's of pens!

Finally, you are a guest in Nepal, in their country and often in their houses. Behave like a guest with a respect for their customs and quirks, treat them with politeness and kindness and you will find them very polite and kind in return.