

# Trip Preparation Guide

This document deals with all preparations needed in order to create a safe and enjoyable trip. These include: 1) Visa rules for Nepal, Bhutan, China/Tibet, Sikkim and India; 2) Medical kits and other medical preparations; 3) International travelling and insurance; 4) Additional information; 5) Responsibility for the environment. Since this Trip Preparation Guide is general, so, it is understood that readers will look for relevant pages or sections only.

## **1. Visas**

### **Nepal Visa**

Visas for Nepal can be obtained at TIA upon arrival to Kathmandu. Please visit this website to learn more about what is needed: <http://www.nepalimmigration.gov.np>.

### **Bhutan Visa**

Karnali Excursions will arrange this visa on your behalf.

### **China Visa**

Please visit this website- <http://www.visaforchina.org/> to make application for your Chinese Visa at the nearest Chinese Embassy in your home country.

### **Tibet Visa**

Karnali Excursions will arrange this visa on your behalf. Please be reminded that travelling in China/Tibet is always difficult and that plenty of time should be given to all aspects of your intended trip. Situations may suddenly change, and that may prevent/change any previously planned journeys to take place.

### **Sikkim Visa and Travel Permit**

Karnali Excursions will arrange these on your behalf.

### **Indian Visa**

Please visit this website- <http://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/> to make application for your Indian visa at the nearest Indian Embassy in your home country.

## **2. Medical kits and other medical preparations**

With a heightened interest in adventure travel to international destinations more and more travelers return from vacations with exotic diseases that may be beyond the scope of an emergency physician's daily practice in the West. However, most of the possible illnesses you could encounter while in Asia could be eliminated with adequate pre-travel education and preparations. In the circumstance when prophylactic treatment and lifestyle modification fail, physicians need to know what to look for and where to find information on exotic diseases. Further information can be quickly and easily accessed through the [CDC Yellow Book](#), an online resource providing country-specific information.

### **Pre-travel preparation**

Preparation is paramount to a healthy and successful adventure. Forward planning, appropriate preventive measures, and careful precautions can substantially reduce the risks of adverse health consequences. Although the medical profession and the travel industry can provide a great deal of help and advice, the traveler is responsible to ask for information, to understand the risks involved, and to take the necessary precautions for the journey. *In addition, consideration should be given to any underlying medical condition of each traveler – as medications and emergency planning should be established prior to leaving.*

Travelers should ascertain the associated travel health information for their specific itinerary several months in advance of departure. This should include general health information such as vaccine requirements, prophylactic medications, disease outbreaks, political environment, and medical resources.

Although often overlooked, dental, and for women, obstetric/gynecologic (OB/GYN), check-ups are advisable before prolonged travel to developing countries, and especially to remote areas. This is particularly important for people with chronic or recurrent dental or OB/GYN problems.

### **Basic health travel kit**

A medical kit is an essential item that should be carried by all travelers to developing countries or where local availability of such resources remains in doubt. The kit should include standard first-aid items, simple medications for common ailments, and any items specific for each traveler's needs. In addition, consider having a list of medications along with a medical attestation signed by a physician authenticating the need of those medications for personal use.

Standard toiletry items sufficient for the entire travel period are recommended.

### **First-aid items should include the following**

- Antiseptic wound cleanser
- Antihistamines
- Adhesive bandages/bandages
- Eye drops/rewetting drops
- Hand antiseptic
- Insect repellent
- Insect bite treatment
- Medical tape
- Nasal decongestant
- Oral rehydration salt (ORS)
- Scissors and safety pins
- Simple analgesics (e.g., ibuprofen, acetaminophen)
- Sterilized gauze/dressing
- Thermometer (oral/rectal)
- Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) preventive and treatment medicines (e.g., Acetazolamide, Dexamethasone, Nifedipine)

### **Additional considerations include the following:**

- Anti-diarrheal medication
- Antifungal medication
- Malaria prophylaxis
- Personal medications (current medical illnesses)
- Sleeping medications/sedatives (not recommended in the high altitude)
- Water purifier/disinfectant

*However, Karnali Excursions does provide first aid kits on every trek that will be with the team at all times, carried by a staff member who has had first aid training.*

### **Vaccinations and Immunizations**

It is essential that you are well-educated on what vaccinations might be required/needed for the areas of your visit. Vaccinations are a vital part of any preparatory process. Once the regions of anticipated travel are identified, scheduling a visit to one's doctor or a travel medicine provider is essential—ideally 4-6 weeks before the trip because most vaccinations require a period of days or weeks to become effective.

The [CDC](#) separates vaccines into 3 categories: routine recommended and required.

#### **Routine vaccinations**

Routine vaccinations are the immunizations that are routinely provided as a part of one's normal health maintenance. These vaccines are necessary for protection from diseases that remain common in many parts of the world, although infrequently in the United States. If you are uncertain if you are up-to-date on routine immunizations, check with your medical provider.

#### **Recommended vaccinations**

Recommended vaccinations are predicated on a number of factors including one's travel destinations, planned activities, season, previous immunizations, urban/rural location, one's age, and current health status. In general, these vaccinations are recommended to protect travelers from illnesses present in other parts of the world and to prevent the importation of infectious diseases across international borders.

Special considerations for aging, immune compromised, pregnant, immigrant, chronically ill, students, and disabled travelers are essential.

#### **Required vaccinations**

Check what vaccinations are required for the areas you will visit.

Further medical information can be found at [www. http://emedicine.medscape.com](http://emedicine.medscape.com)

## **Acute Mountain Sickness**

High altitude cerebral edema; altitude anoxia; altitude sickness; mountain sickness; high altitude pulmonary edema.

Acute mountain sickness is an illness that can affect mountain climbers, hikers, skiers, or travellers at high altitude (typically above 8,000 feet or 2,400 meters).

### **Causes, incidence, and risk factors:**

Acute mountain sickness is due to a combination of reduced air pressure and lower oxygen levels at high altitudes.

The faster you climb to a high altitude, the more likely you will get acute mountain sickness.

Your symptoms will also depend on the speed of your climb and how hard you push (exert) yourself.

You are at higher risk for acute mountain sickness if:

- You live at or near sea level.
- You had the illness before.

### **Symptoms**

Symptoms range from mild to life-threatening, and can affect the nervous system, lungs, muscles, and heart. In most cases, the symptoms are mild. Symptoms generally associated with mild to moderate acute mountain sickness include:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea or vomiting
- Rapid pulse (heart rate)
- Shortness of breath with exertion

### **Symptoms generally associated with more severe acute mountain sickness include:**

- Bluish discoloration of the skin (cyanosis)
- Chest tightness or congestion
- Confusion
- Cough
- Coughing up blood
- Decreased consciousness or withdrawal from social interaction
- Gray or pale complexion
- Inability to walk in a straight line, or to walk at all
- Shortness of breath at rest

## **Signs and tests**

Listening to the chest with a stethoscope (auscultation) reveals sounds called crackles (rales) in the lung, which may be a sign of fluid in the lungs.

## **Treatment**

Early diagnosis is important. Acute mountain sickness is easier to treat in the early stages. The main treatment for all forms of mountain sickness is to climb down (descend) to a lower altitude as rapidly and safely as possible. You should not continue climbing if you develop symptoms.

Extra oxygen should be given, if available.

People with severe mountain sickness may need to be admitted to a hospital. Acetazolamide (Diamox) may be given to help improve breathing and reduce mild symptoms. This drug can cause increased urination. Make sure you drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol when taking this drug.

If you have fluid in your lungs (pulmonary edema), treatment may include: Oxygen and a high blood pressure medicine called nifedipine.

A type of drug called a phosphodiesterase inhibitor (such as sildenafil) Lung inhalers beta agonists.

A breathing machine, in severe cases – 'gammo bag'

Dexamethasone (Decadron) may help reduce swelling in the brain (cerebral edema). A gammo bag is a portable hyperbolic chamber which allows trekkers to simulate conditions at lower altitudes without actually moving from their location on the mountain. These devices are very helpful if bad weather or other factors make climbing down the mountain impossible.

## **Expectations (prognosis)**

Most cases are mild, and symptoms improve promptly when you climb down the mountain to a lower altitude.

Severe cases may result in death due to lung problems or brain swelling.

In remote locations, emergency evacuation may not be possible, or treatment may be delayed. This can have a negative effect on your outcome.

## **Possible complications**

Coma

Fluid in the lungs (pulmonary edema) Swelling of the brain

## **Sharing your condition**

It is important that you inform other people in your group and your leader if you have or had symptoms of acute mountain sickness, even if you felt better when you returned to a lower altitude.

If you or another climber have any of the following symptoms you should inform your leader:

- Severe breathing problems
- Altered level of alertness
- Coughing up blood

Climb down the mountain immediately and as safely as possible.

### **Prevention**

Keys to preventing acute mountain sickness include:

- Climb the mountain gradually.
- Stop for a day or two of rest for every 2,000 feet (600 meters) above 8,000 feet (2,400 meters).
- Sleep at a lower altitude when possible.
- Learn how to recognize early symptoms of mountain sickness.

If you plan on quickly climbing to a high altitude, ask your doctor about a medication called acetazolamide (Diamox). This drug helps your body get used to higher altitudes more quickly, and reduces minor symptoms. It should be taken the day before you climb, and then for the next 1 to 2 days.

If you are at risk for anemia, ask your doctor if an iron supplement is right for you. Anemia lowers the amount of oxygen in your blood.

### **While climbing:**

Drink plenty of fluids.

Avoid alcohol.

Eat regular meals, high in carbohydrates.

You should avoid high altitudes if you have heart or lung disease.

## **3) International traveling and insurance**

### **International Traveling**

When booking a flight through your chosen agent ensure that they have suitable insurance to cover you while flying.

Be aware of the small details regarding your rights in terms of cancellations due to bad weather, missed connections or domestic problems with local in- country flights and weather problems that could delay your mountain trek.

## **Personal insurance**

Your own travel and trekking insurance must cover you for any sort of rescue. Helicopter rescue is very expensive and in some instances might not be permitted if you have no proof of cash-less insurance.

Establish the responsibilities of your agent and yourself in case of emergency. Be clear on where the financial responsibilities lie. There could be many hidden expenses that you might not be aware of, so seek clarification on all aspects of your insurance coverage. In most cases, in the case of an emergency, once you have left the itinerary all the incurred expenses from then on will be your responsibility including covering the cost of any staff detailed to look after you.

Make sure you carry *all* of your insurance details with you at all times while on your trek or tour.

## **4) Additional information:**

### **1. Airport pick up and transfers**

Unless you are a frequent traveler, especially to developing areas of the world, you will experience an immediate 'culture shock' on arriving in the 'Arrival Area' of the airport. Everything will appear rather chaotic and with a lack of any form of discipline. This is why Karnali Excursions provides airport pickup and transfer.

When you arrive to your destination in Asia, take a few minutes to orientate yourself in the relative safety of the terminal building, and look for your travel guide or hotel sign board. Try to attract the attention of the staff member holding the sign board and they will escort you through the mass of porters.

Do not produce large currency notes for tipping and never accept that anyone will bring you change!

### **Giving tips**

Tipping is a newly accepted custom in most developing areas. Hotel, restaurant, touring and trekking organization staff members often make up for relatively meager wages with tips. But, it should only reward good work. Don't tip for short taxi rides in town or any service person you've bargain with. Groups might give a reasonable amount per day to a tip pool to be divided among the staffs, generally relative to rank, for good service. Remember to differentiate between the ranks of field staffs. On extended treks with a large support team, usually the Sirdar (boss) and the cook get the most and then reduce the amount descending through the ranks, kitchen boys, guides, porters, to the spare boy and fuel porter.

### **Dress and attire**

Baggy pants or calf-length skirts with a loose top are appropriate trekking and touring wear for women. Men should wear a shirt at all times. Men's knee-length hiking shorts are fine for trekking but not when visiting temples, monasteries or homes.

Nudity is particularly offensive. Whether bathing in a stream or at a village tap, men should wear shorts or underwear, women can wrap in a loongi (sarong) and douse themselves with water as the village women do. Only sport a swimsuit if well secluded from village eyes. Public affection is likewise frowned upon.

### **Artifacts and antiques**

It is illegal to export anything older than 100 years. Please do not take any religious objects (prayer stones, statues, temple ritual objects, prayer flags, etc.) away from sacred sites and discourage others from doing so.

### **Taking photos**

Most mountain people don't mind being photographed, but some do. Ask first, especially if photographing ceremonies or older people, girls and children (ask mothers). Paying for a picture reinforces a hand-out mentality so is not acceptable. Try instead to establish a friendly rapport with a few words or gestures.

### **Beggars**

Do not give candy, pens, trinkets or money to children but instead donate to a school, monastery or hospital. Local people often give a smaller currency to the handicapped and religious mendicants; you can do the same.

### **Bargaining**

Bargain for souvenirs and trekking services but respect posted prices in restaurants and lodges. Ask around to establish a fair price: paying too much adds to inflation and paying too little denies the merchant of a fair return. Essential items are usually fixed price.

### **Offensive gestures**

- . To show appreciation and respect, use two hands rather than one when giving or receiving something, even money.
- Remember not to point with a single finger but use a flat extended hand especially to indicate a sacred object or place.
- Among Hindus, avoid touching women and holy men. The traditional palms-together "Namaste" greeting is preferable.
- Don't eat with your left hand or eat beef among Hindus.
- Try not to step over or point your feet at another person, a sacred place or a hearth.
- Remove your shoes when entering a home, temple or monastery (and leather items in Hindu temples) and avoid smoking and wearing scant dress in religious settings.
- Do not offer food from your plate, nor eat from a common pot, and avoid touching your lips to a shared drinking vessel.



### **Offering medical attention/advice**

If you are an experienced medical practitioner, it is not wise to give medicine to sick hill people on the trek unless you can watch his or her reaction. Most hill people, especially in more remote areas have never been exposed to Western medicine and may react unpredictably. Encourage villagers to wash cuts with soap and boiled water, and to see their closest clinic for medical treatment. Also be aware that once you have passed through then the local person is unlikely to have the financial resources for follow up treatment or medication. Paying for life- saving surgery or treatment will not be sufficient in itself, it will require after treatment care and medication that in most cases cannot be afforded by these people.

### **Safety cautions**

Never trek alone; if you run into trouble or take a tumble no one will know. Trekking with an agency assures the greatest security.

Watch your gear carefully in lodges and on the trail. Don't be showy with expensive items, and always lock your room or baggage.

Never eat unpeeled fruit or vegetables unless you know they've been adequately soaked in solution. Drink only after water is boiled or iodized. Always wash your hands before eating.

### **Hotel situation**

There are many rooms and hotels available in all major tourist destinations but these will vary according to the locality within the town and the standard of service provided. It is always worth checking out several hotels before deciding, unless your agent has arranged your accommodation for you.

It should be remembered that especially in Nepal the electricity is not always reliable and there are many times when the voltage reduction shuts the system down, either by accident or by planning. It is always advisable to take a torch with you and have it hand at all other times if you intend being out after dark.

If you find getting around a new town difficult always take the hotel brochure or card with you so a taxi driver can help you find your accommodation again. Always insist on going in a taxi where the tariff is accounted for by the meter. Rickshaws can be fun but make sure the driver is not out to impress you with his fitness and speed, rickshaws weren't built for speed.

### **Lodging while trekking**

#### **Lodge accommodation**

Lodges are usually run by a local family and normally have a small room that accommodates 3 people. There is also a shared restaurant and basic toilet facilities. Solar heated showers are available in some lodges and at a small extra cost and with an early request! As one gets higher and into more remote valleys, the lodges are more basic. In some high altitude treks crossing high passes may result in trekkers having to spend a few nights with basic facilities.

### **Lodge food**

The lodges will provide food for three basic meals, breakfast, lunch and dinner, each day. Breakfast and dinners are ordered at the restaurant attached to the overnight lodge. But on trek the lunches are ordered at a trail-side tea-house around mid-day or prepared by the trekking staff. Most lodges serve local meals - rice, lentil soup and curried vegetables or meat - soups, noodles, momos (meat or veg-stuffed steamed dumplings), pancakes, chapati breads, etc. Many also offer other continental style dishes. Three basic courses will be provided.

It is important to establish what your agent is providing in the way of meals before you set out on your trek. Desserts, drinks, and special items listed on the menus may not be included. *It is best to bring Iodine water purification tablets or other systems for purifying drinking water during the trek. Boiled and/or filtered water and bottled water are available at extra cost.*

### **Electricity**

Electricity power suspends in Nepal frequently. Thus, it is wise to recharge all your electrical devices whenever there is power. 220 volts and electric plugs with 2 or 3 round holes are used in Nepal.

## **5) Responsibility for the environment**

Eco-tourism is more than a catch phrase. It refers to the practices and sound measures associated with protecting the environment, customs, and cultures of the local people. Eco-trekking may cost a little more but the benefits for the environment and the people are far-reaching with many tangible benefits.

Mountain environments are fragile, not only in terms of flora and fauna but also in terms of cultural beliefs and customs of the indigenous people. There are different attitudes, beliefs and approaches in the developed world than in the developing world, so a sincere sensitivity needs to be the responsibility of the traveler/visitor. It is very easy to cause offence, desecrate religious sites and offend local customs. Special care also needs to be taken not to contaminate local water supplies on your trek or tour.

Karnali Excursions is aware of the environmental issues involved in protecting the areas visited in Nepal, and in other countries. We attend to the small but important details of toilet arrangements, cooking fuel and rubbish disposal.

Karnali Excursions follows the following guidelines and encourages you to do the same:

- We carry all your trash (including toilet paper, unless you thoroughly burn it on the spot) to your campsite, lodge or hotel for proper disposal.
- Sanitary napkins are packed out, and batteries should be carried back to your home country for safe disposal.
- We provide a toilet tent, set up at least 50 meters (150 feet) away from any water source on certain treks, otherwise the latrines at guesthouses and tea houses are used.
- When bathing or washing clothes near streams, use biodegradable soaps and a pan for rinsing. Do not tip soapy water into the stream.
- Limit your hot showers to those heated by solar energy, by hydroelectricity or by the back-boiler methods.
- Bring adequate clothes rather than relying on lodge fires for heat and never ask your trekking staff for a bonfire.
- Assures that porters will be provided shelter, clothing and footwear for high altitude treks, saving wood otherwise burned to keep warm.
- Avoid creating new trails across switchbacks, meadows and in high fragile areas.
- Make sketches or take photos rather than collect flowers, plants and seeds.
- Do not purchase items made from wild animal skins or furs.
- Take care while walking through farmland and always stay to the uphill side of livestock on trails.
- The more you know about the areas you plan to visit, and how to care for yourself and the environment, the more enjoyable will be your, 'Journey of a Lifetime!'