

# Nepal's best trek

In the 100th edition of *Adventure Travel*, Nepal's tough yet spectacular Dhaulagiri Circuit was named our number one trek in the world. **John Hayes** couldn't resist the challenge, but does he think we got it right? Read on to find out...



## LET'S GO

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### Getting there

A Dhaulagiri Circuit trip starts from Kathmandu followed by an internal flight to Pokara and a bus trip to Darbang. The return involves two flights, from Jonsom to Pokara and from Pokara back to Kathmandu. However, the weather at the beginning and end of my trip meant all the internal flights were cancelled and the journey was completed by bus. This was a shame because the bus journeys are slow, dangerous and uncomfortable and the flight from Jonsom is supposed to be spectacular.

Direct flights from the UK to Kathmandu don't exist but various airlines fly there with just one change. A daytime change at the new airport at Dehli seems to be the preferred option with most operators. The Saturday night Jet Airways ([www.jetairways.com](http://www.jetairways.com)) flight out of London has become a trekker's special.

### When to go

Nepal has two walking seasons: October/November and March/April. There are pros and cons for both. In October/November it's usually clearer but colder (particularly in November), and in March/April it's warmer but with more cloud. April is closer to the Dhaulagiri climbing season so if you go then you should see expeditions preparing to summit at the base camps.

### What to take

The route is not technically difficult and recent improvements carried out by the Nepalese army have made some of the most exposed paths safer, but a certain amount of technical gear is required just in case. Conditions on my trip meant that I didn't need the crampons, harness, karabiners and prussic loop but, with the deep snow, the plastic boots were essential. I also got to use an ice axe on the climb up Dhampus – my first and possibly last experience with one – and I was impressed with the effect. You also need a helmet as there are stretches of path that get bombarded with stones as the frozen moraine melts in the mid-day sun.

Keeping warm is key to an enjoyable trip and given the amount of time you spend in a tent, you can't afford to skimp on a sleeping bag. I have learnt from very cold experiences that you get what you pay for with sleeping bags and that not all four-season bags are the same. It's also the case, acknowledged by the recommendations you see on some of the labels, that women feel the cold more than men and need bags with higher insulation values.

Unlike on treks around the Khumbu valley, such as Everest Base Camp, the meals on the Dhaulagiri Circuit are consumed inside a mess tent rather than the shelter of a teahouse. Although a Nepalese teahouse at altitude is not necessarily warm (the Nepalese don't appreciate the thermal advantages of shutting doors), they beat a mess tent, especially if a yak dung fire has been lit. So like the sleeping bag, a decent down jacket is also a must.

Jagged Globe and other operators will provide a kit list and a hire service. Perhaps my only grumble with Jagged Globe is that I had to hire kit in the UK, get it delivered, carry it to Heathrow and then send it back to them on my return. Given the size of some of the items (the plastic boots are enormous) this is a major challenge and it would be easier if, like some other operators, it provided the service from Kathmandu. Kathmandu, time permitting, has everything a trekker needs, although the origin of some of the items is questionable. There are also shops where gear can be hired (try Shona's in Thamel near the famous Kilroy restaurant), although in return for convenience and a low price expect to find the kit showing signs of extensive previous use.

### Experience

Although the Dhaulagiri Circuit is suitable for anyone who's fit and happy to cope with uncertainty and adventure, I do think that a bit of experience helps and I wouldn't recommend Dhaulagiri as a first trip at altitude. Plus it's so good that the other great Nepalese trips might be a bit of an anti-climax if you do Dhaulagiri first!

### Cost and operators

My trip was with Jagged Globe and the price, including flight, was £2,495 ([www.jagged-globe.co.uk](http://www.jagged-globe.co.uk)). Other UK-based operators running the trek include KE Adventure Travel ([www.keadventure.com](http://www.keadventure.com)) and The Mountain Company ([www.themountaincompany.co.uk](http://www.themountaincompany.co.uk)), although these don't include the Dhampus Peak option. All trips to Nepal are 'fulfilled' by a local Nepalese company and an experienced traveller could book direct with one of these companies. Most companies include a European guide although Jagged Globe also provides the option of a 'self-guided' trip where the trekker assembles the party (a couple or a group of friends) and Jagged Globe book all the local services (porters, cooks and sherpas).

something you should skimp on. For the first time I took Diamox, which might make some purists frown, but I slept much better and in particular didn't suffer from Cheyne-Stokes respiration (when your body forgets how to breathe) in the way I had on previous trips. Interestingly both doctors, veterans of high altitude trips, also took it.

I went with Sheffield-based Jagged Globe, a new company for me, and was impressed. Its attention to detail was particularly reassuring – checking my insurance and making sure I had the right gear – which I guess reflects the risk it associates with this trek.

The White Mountain: Dhaulagiri (8,167m)



Photo: Andy Twigg

The trip is given the toughest grade in the company's three-grade trekking classification system. Also key to the success of a trip like this is the quality of the local partner. Jagged Globe has a long relationship with Summit Trekking (a company with Dutch origins that also owns the Summit Hotel in Kathmandu, probably the best hotel there), and the quality of the crew was excellent. I was impressed by the speed with which a helicopter was called in to take a sick porter out from the Hidden Valley campsite. You can't mess about with things like this.

I can't say whether or not the Dhaulagiri Circuit deserves a number one accolade, but if you've already walked the better-known Nepalese classics and want to challenge yourself just that bit more, you should definitely do it. **AT**