

Nepal – A Wildlife Adventure

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1-2	Fly London to Kathmandu
Day 3	Kathmandu
Day 4	Sarankot
Day 5-13	Trekking
Day 14	Sarang Ghat (Rafting)
Day 15-17	Chitwan National Park
Day 18-20	Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve
Day 21-22	Kathmandu; fly London

November

Grading

Grade B. Trekking is Grade B

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code OMN02).

Highlights

- Exceptional birding/mountain landscapes
- Possible Tiger, One-horned Rhino and Nilgai
- See historical sites in Kathmandu
- A long list of excellent Himalayan birds.
- Led by a local Naturetrek stalwart



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N.B. Please note that the itinerary below offers our target programme. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available. Most importantly on a trek, our overnight stops must be flexible to allow for the overall speed of each particular group and to accommodate 'on trek' sightings, which can mean that we ultimately choose to spend more time in some areas than others.

Day 1

In Flight

We depart from London this afternoon on board Qatar Airways flight to Kathmandu, via Doha.

Day 2

Kathmandu

We arrive in Kathmandu in the late morning and transfer to our hotel, generally the Hotel Yak & Yeti or the Hotel Shangri-la. The rest of the day is free for relaxation, and perhaps a first venture into the old city in search of its fine restaurants.

Day 3

Kathmandu

Today we will spend walking on the forested slopes of Phulchowki, at 2,740 metres the highest peak in the valley. Marble quarrying is sadly affecting the area but it still remains a wonderful spot for wildlife – birds, plants and mammals. We will drive up Phulchowki in the morning, ascending as far as the snow will allow. Here we should get good views of the snow-clad Great Himalaya, including the Annapurna range, Langtang and many of Nepal's other high peaks (provided the weather is clear!). We will then spend the rest of the day walking down the mountain through its fine temperate and subtropical forest, with a picnic lunch en route. Amongst an abundant birdlife we will encounter a variety of colourful laughing thrushes, babblers, bulbuls, flowerpeckers, flycatchers, sunbirds, tits and warblers. Such avian specialties as Himalayan Bluetail, Fire-tailed Sunbird, White-collared and Grey-winged Blackbirds, Long-tailed Minivet, White-tailed Nuthatch and Orange-bellied Leafbird may all be seen, and there is a chance also of encountering some of the more elusive species such as Himalayan Cutia, Kalij Pheasant, Red-billed Leiothrix and Black-faced Leaf Warbler.

Mammals are, of course, more elusive. However, stealthy progress may reward us with views of some of the more common diurnal species. The cheeky Rhesus Macaques that scavenge a living around the villages are far from shy; their far more elegant cousins, the Grey Langurs, are more wary, and more likely to be encountered in outlying fields or amongst the canopy of the forest. The reclusive Assamese Macaque is still more wary and infrequently encountered. Higher up the mountain, the Himalayan Orange-bellied Squirrel is the most likely mammal to be found, preferring the oak and rhododendron forests. The exquisite Yellow-throated Marten is also worth looking for, being regularly seen here; whilst the Indian Muntjac, though regularly heard on the mountain, is less easy to see. Such animals as Leopard and Red

Panda have been seen on rare occasions in the past by our groups but you should consider yourself very lucky to encounter one of these sought-after species!

If you would prefer to spend this day doing a sightseeing tour of the city and temples of Kathmandu we will be pleased to arrange this for you (but this must be booked with us prior to your departure from London and will cost £195 for any single traveller and £150 per person for 2 or more). The tour may include Nepal's largest Hindu temple at Pashupatinath, the Buddhist "stupa" (shrine) and Tibetan settlement at Boudhinath, and the fine temples and palaces of Patan's Durbar Square. It also includes lunch in one of the traditional restaurants.

Day 4

Drive/trek to Ghandruk

We leave early, driving westwards along the Chinese-built road to Pokhara, first climbing out of the Kathmandu Valley, and then for much of the way following the Trisuli River, before climbing a little to reach Pokhara. The journey takes six to seven hours but will be broken by stops for birding and photography. In the afternoon we set out on trek, spending our first night at Ghandruk. Here, depending on the weather, we will have superb views of the Annapurna range and will be ideally placed for spectacular sunrise photography. Should we arrive late in Pokhara, we will overnight in a hotel, starting instead on our trek early tomorrow morning.

Day 5

Ghandruk to Tadapani (2630m) (Trekking)

Leaving Ghandruk we will have fine views back to Phewa Lake, and of Machapuchhare (the Fish Tail Mountain) and the Annapurna range. Here, on the thermals that rise above the ridge, are many birds of prey, particularly eagles and vultures (it is even possible to see all of Nepal's eight species of vulture from this one ridge) and at this time of year migrating eagles and falcons may appear amongst them. From here, and indeed in many places along the trek, we will see an impressive panorama of terraced fields, reaching hundreds of metres up and down the mountainsides. The lower terraces are usually for rice, the higher ones for barley, wheat, potatoes, buckwheat and millet. We follow the ridge for some hours through subtropical forest, looking amongst the smaller birds – warblers, tits and babblers – for the beautiful Green Magpie and White-crested Laughing-thrushes. As we progress at a relatively gentle pace towards Tadapani, we have good views of Annapurna South and Machapuchhare.

Day 6

Banthati (2,160m) (Trekking)

Taking us through terraced farmland, scrub and alder groves, the trail allows us ample opportunity to further acquaint ourselves with the common hill birds, and with some of Nepal's colourful butterflies. We cross the Bhurugundi Khola and start on a very steep climb, a direct ascent of 457 metres to Ulleri. This is the hardest climb of the trek. From Ulleri the trail ascends more gently through cultivated land and degraded forest to village Banthante, where we will have lunch.

Day 7

Ghorepani (2,874m) (Trekking)

Today, after breakfast we will walk through lofty rhododendron forest gradually uphill to Ghorepani at 2,743 metres. It is this marvellous forest that is one of the highpoints of our trek, for it is full of many species of rosetin, laughing-thrush, accentor, tit, treecreeper, woodpecker, sunbird, babbler and warbler. Here we find our first Himalayan Bluetails, and may encounter an interesting animal or two: Muntjac, Common Langur (Hanuman) Orange-bellied Squirrels, Yellow-throated Martens and even Red Pandas have all been seen here.

We will arrive on lunch at Ghorepani this spectacular area allowing you to relax or explore as you wish. However, for those with energy to spare, there may be a chance to climb Poon Hill in the evening (or next day in the morning); the view as the sun sets over the giant snow-clad peaks of the Annapurna Himal is quite outstanding.

Day 8

Banthante (Trekking)

In the early morning we will climb Poon Hill to see the sunrise. From Ghorepani we head east. Today's walk is short and spectacular, along the top of the Gandrung ridge which is thickly forested with fir, spruce, oak and rhododendron and sits immediately beneath the snowy form of Annapurna South. We use the afternoon to explore. This is a good opportunity to look for the birds and mammals of Nepal's high forests, and a chance to search for some new and unusual species such as Satyr Tragopan, Golden-breasted Fulvetta, Black-headed Shrike-babbler, Rufous-vented Tit and White-browed Rosefinch.

Days 9

Tadapani (Trekking)

We take time on the first morning to continue our "off-trail" search of the forest, and to capitalise on the splendid mountain views all around us. Walking on, through yet more uninhabited forest, we at last reach the large village of Gandrung, 1,950 metres,. This is a Gurung village of closely built slate-roofed houses surrounded by terraced fields, again with excellent views of Annapurna South. We will have our second rest day in this area.

Days 10

Ghandruk (Trekking)

Today we trek back down to Ghandruk, where we first commenced our memorable hike.

Day 11

Tolkha (Trekking)

Leaving Ghandruk we descend a steep stone staircase to cross the Modi Khola by a wooden bridge and climb again to Landrung, another large Gurung village at 1,646 metres. From here the climb becomes relatively easy, with a few ups and downs. We pass through terraced fields and light Alder forest before we climb another 91 metres, to a small village called Tolkha.

Day 12/13

Thulo Kharka (Trekking)

Today is our last full day of trekking. We pass over the old trail joining Tolkha and Dampus. This less travelled path gives us undisturbed chances to look for birds and other wildlife. The damp temperate broadleaf forest contains many forest species, from the shy wren-babblers and tesia to the magnificent sunbirds, minivets and laughing-thrushes. It is also our final chance to see the Black-faced Warbler if we have missed it on Phulchowki and previously on trek. On Day 13 we will explore the area of Thulo Kharke, giving us a chance to rest up and enjoy this lush area.

Day 14

Rafting, Sarang Ghat

We rise early this morning in order to descend, beneath eagles and vultures, to Phedi on the Yamdi Khola. Here we must say good-bye to our porters and trek staff, and our private vehicle will be waiting to carry us to the Seti River where we will meet our raft crews.

We will have lunch prepared by the rafting guide/chef and after receiving instruction from our crews, we will take to our rafts for half a day on the river. Small rapids are frequently negotiated – and several larger ones as well – but there will also be plenty of time to relax and enjoy some birding as the Seti River carries us down a deep and beautiful subtropical valley towards the lowlands of Nepal. Plumbeous Water Redstarts, White-capped River Chats, Blue Whistling Thrushes, forktails and kingfishers will be our companions on the river. Overhead we will watch for the birds of prey that use the valley: Crested Serpent Eagles, Crested Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, Steppe Eagles and many others. Whilst perhaps the bird we will be keenest to see will be the Crested Kingfisher – a wonderful bird that is as large as a jackdaw!

There will be plenty of opportunities for those who wish to help with the paddling, particularly through the rapids.

Days 15 – 17

Rafting/Chitwan National Park

This morning we will enjoy the rural scenes of lowland Nepal as we pass them by, and the great diversity of common lowland birds. After lunch with the rafting crew, we will leave them behind and drive to Chitwan National Park where we will be staying for the next three nights.

The Chitwan National Park, in the lowland jungles – the "terai" – of Nepal, comprises 932 square kilometres of sal and riverine forest and grassland. It is a magnificent and unspoilt "jungle" environment with a greater variety of wildlife than any other area in Nepal. Over 500 species of birds have been recorded in the park and we can expect to see nearly half of these, as well as many mammals and reptiles which may include Indian Rhinoceros, Wild Boar, Sambar, Muntjac, Chital and Hog Deer, Rhesus and Hanuman Monkeys, and the Marsh Mugger and fish-eating Gharial Crocodiles. Tiger, Leopard, Sloth Bear and Gaur also occur but are seldom seen. We spend each day making excursions on foot, by jeep and dugout canoe in search of this wildlife.

We will be based at a comfortable jungle lodge situated on the edge of the jungle, a quite superb area for wildlife, particularly birds and bigger mammals. Amongst the very rare birds that we have found here recently have been Jerdon's Babblers and Red-headed Trogons.

During our time in Chitwan a variety of excursions are arranged and we will be able to explore the rivers by dugout canoe, search the grasslands for Tigers, rhinos and other mammals by jeep, and go birdwatching on foot through the forest.

Days 18 – 20

Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

We now make a hard, day-long transfer eastwards to Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, along the East-West Highway. The abundant birds and village life observed on the journey offer plenty of compensation however!

Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve is situated in the Sapta-Kosi River plain in the eastern corner of Nepal, close to the country's border with India. The reserve covers 175 square kilometres to the north of the kilometre-long barrage that spans the Koshi River. This was built between 1958 and 1964 to control and prevent flooding in the plains of northern India to the south. The vast expanse of open water created by the barrage, and the marshes, lagoons, sandbanks, mudflats and arable land that lie around it, offer an outstanding wetland habitat, and one of the finest birdwatching sites in Asia.

Almost all of Nepal's long list of wildfowl, waders, storks, ibises, egrets, terns and gulls occur here, plus a great variety of landbirds, especially warblers and birds of prey. Well in excess of 120 species should be seen each day in this wonderful area, amongst them such local specialities as Swamp Francolin, Red-necked Falcon, and Striated Marsh Warbler. The sharp-eyed may also be lucky enough to see some of the endangered Ganges River Dolphins that live here.

The heart of the reserve lies some 14 kilometres north of the barrage, where seasonally inundated grasslands, lagoons, and remnant patches of khair (*Acacia catechu*) and sissoo (*Dalbergia sissoo*) forest lie alongside the eastern bank of the Koshi River. This region is the last refuge of the Wild Water Buffalo in Nepal, and other mammals recorded include Leopard, Fishing Cat, Jungle Cat, Asiatic Jackal, Spotted Deer, Hog Deer, Nilgai (or "blue bull" – the subcontinent's largest antelope), and the endangered Ganges River Dolphin.

The tented camp is situated at the remote eastern corner of the reserve, north of the barrage. Not far away is the reserve headquarters and close by are several waterholes. Run by experienced naturalists, Koshi Camp consists of 12 large, comfortably furnished, "walk-in" tented rooms, equipped with showers and loos, together with a separate dining room hall and bar serving a wide variety of drinks.

Your most regular and rewarding wildlife outings will be on foot, exploring the grasslands, river, lagoons and woodland close to the camp, and in the vicinity of the barrage, a short drive away. We will also take you by an inflatable rubber raft onto the wide and slow flowing waters of the Koshi River, to enjoy the birdlife of the otherwise inaccessible sandbanks and islands.

Day 21

Kathmandu

We must reluctantly depart from Koshi Tappu this morning in order to make the one and a half hour drive to Biratnagar airport, where we will catch our flight back to Kathmandu. If the weather is clear this is a most spectacular flight; from the right-hand side window seats you will get a wonderful view of the entire central Himalaya, including the world's highest peaks – Everest, Lhotse, Kanchenjunga, Makalu, Cho-oyu, and Gosainthan (in Tibet). We should arrive back in Kathmandu this afternoon, leaving some time for last minute shopping and a final dinner before spending our last night in our hotel.

Day 22

London

Today we must transfer to Kathmandu airport for our return flight to London, via Doha.

Trek grading

This is a Grade B trek. Although some of the days on our 10-day trek involve long walks and plenty of up and downhill, the trails are good, and we have two full "rest days" to break up the trekking.

This is an ideal trek for those who wish for an introduction to Nepal and, at the same time, to get close to the big peaks and their flora and fauna, without going to any great altitude. Most people should confidently manage this trek with a little walking practice beforehand, though you should be used to, and enjoy, walking. On trekking days we will be covering between 13 and 19 kilometres each day, and on some days will be making ascents or descents of up to 914 metres. No altitude problems should be encountered on this trek.

Internal Flights

Please note that in order to offer the planned programme of excursions within the timeframe available, we have included internal flights within your package. We are required to make you aware that certain airlines are banned from operating in European airspace (including UK airspace) because they are found to be

unsafe and/or they are not sufficiently overseen by their authorities. ALL Nepalese airlines are banned from operating in European airspace within this legislation. Upon confirmation of this holiday, we therefore ask you to accept that you will be travelling on internal flights with one of these carriers, and that following the completion of your booking, you will not have the right to cancel without penalty due to any personal perceived risk of travelling with any internal carrier selected for your holiday.

How does this trip benefit the local community and wildlife?

This is a unique tour and it involves visiting nearly all of the habitat types within Nepal. Except for the Alpine and the Tibetan Steppe zone, we visit nearly all the other habitats found in Nepal from north to south. The revenue paid to Annapurna Conservation Area (ACAP) goes directly to fund the project for conservation of its pristine habitats, and the variety of wildlife found there. The trek part brings income to all the trekking staff and their family. The locals benefit from selling the vegetables and crops they grow and from the handicraft products they make, or by getting direct income from the lodging and food. The rafting part benefits the staff and the locals involved by bringing income to them and their families. The stay at Chitwan and Koshi brings income to the national parks for conservation. The staff that works in the hotel in Kathmandu, the resorts at Chitwan get the benefit of 10% service charge. A happy client always leaves some tips to those who have been helpful in making their trip comfortable, safe and fun-filled.

Weather

This holiday takes place in the post-monsoon period, when we expect the very best weather that Nepal has to offer. Clear days and blue skies are expected for much of the time. Rain is infrequent. In the mountains (on trek) days will generally be warm (60-75°F or 15-23°C), and nights will be cool, even cold (though temperatures are unlikely to fall below freezing). In the lowlands days will be warm to hot (up to 80°F or 26°C), and nights mild to cool. Visibility in the mountains is exceptional at this time of year.

Entry requirements

All UK passport holders and most other nationalities require a visa for Nepal, which is obtainable in advance online. No vaccinations are mandatory for entry, but as recommended in our brochure we think it is wise to be protected against TB, polio, typhoid, tetanus and hepatitis A and take malaria prophylactics. We recommend that you consult your GP or local Travel Health Clinic about your requirements as soon as possible before travelling.

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list, sent to you on booking, thoroughly.

While shorts and light shirts can often be worn comfortably during the day at most altitudes on trek, a down jacket, warm "4-season" sleeping bag, gloves, balaclava, and even thermal underwear can be most useful at higher altitudes after sunset. In the terai, shorts and T-shirts are essential, though warmer, more formal, clothing is useful in the evenings.

Food & accommodation included in the price

Accommodation and food are included throughout, except for lunches and dinners in Kathmandu. You should allow about £45 for main meals in Kathmandu where there is a fabulous range of excellent restaurants.

On the trek, accommodation will be in comfortable teahouses, so no need to provide your own sleeping bag etc.

Elsewhere, we will be using the finest accommodation in each part of Nepal we travel to, all of which have the amenities one will require.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Nepal. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.fco.gov.uk/travel regularly prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

Mammal & bird lists

Where available these are automatically provided on booking, and will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

Boat/Raft Trips

The boat/raft trips are done only if the water levels permit.

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