



Mera Peak Expedition

Here is an opportunity to challenge oneself on a grand scale, climbing Nepal's highest trekking peak - Mera. At 6,476 m Mera Peak offers trekkers an awe inspiring adventure as you follow in the footsteps of mountaineers who 'cut their teeth' on the way to Mera's summit and from which they learned the awesome truths of the High Himalaya. On the way take in spectacular views as you follow rocky valleys, glaciers and high ridges all the way to its spectacular summit and it's breath-taking view... Even Everest itself, seemingly quite close, appears hardly higher and is just one of a semi-circle of summits! Trek in the company of highly experienced Sherpas, virtually at home at these altitudes and temperatures, well above the 5,000m snow line. You don't need any previous technical climbing experience or skills, you learn the use of climbing ropes, ice axes and crampons along the way.

At the end of 3 weeks of challenging adventure celebrate your achievement in the climbers mecca of Kathmandu.

Itinerary

(N.B: An extra day is built into the program to allow for adverse weather conditions and acclimatization difficulties. If not needed this day will be spent back at Kathmandu on Day 20.)

Day 1 Kathmandu

Arrive into Kathmandu any time this day. Meet at our start hotel in the Thamel district. In the evening we have a full briefing and dinner Meals included: dinner

Day 2 Kathmandu

Day at leisure to fit yourself with all necessary equipment.

If time permits you may wish to explore Kathmandu's many historic squares, temples and narrow streets. Great Buddhist Stupa at Bodhnath and the Tibetan community that resides there.

Meals included: breakfast.

Day 3 Fly to Lukla and trek to Puyan

An early morning stunning flight to the gateway to the region of the legendary Sherpas. Start trek to Puyan.

We descend steeply towards the Dudh Koshi (the torrent that thunders from the flanks of Everest), passing an array of travellers and the first encounters with the extraordinary Sherpas carrying gravity defying stacks of goods to markets up in Namche Bazaar. We arrive in Surke after approx. 2hrs then climb steeply up from the far side of the valley to where there are spectacular views both upwards to Cho Oyu and down into the plummeting canyon to the river below. A further 2 hours brings us to

our lunch stop. We continue through rhododendron forest that in the pre-monsoon is awash with reds and pinks. The huge Magnolia trees add their large white flowers to the canvas as we enjoy a level walk to our night stop in Puyan.

O/nt altitude 2,820m

Trek 5 hours approx.

Meals included:

Day 4 Trek To Pangum

We set off on a gentle 1.5 hour climb to the Khari La pass (2,860m), with today's destination already visible in the distance as we pass through dense forest with occasional glimpses of the white peaks emerging above the clouds. A gradual hour-long descent to lunch is followed by a steady climb for 2 ½ hours to Pangum

O/nt altitude 3,100m

Trek 4 hours approx.

Meals included: breakfast

THE CLIMB – Days 5-14 - High Altitude Tented/Bivouac accom

Day 5 Trek To Ningsow

A short climb brings us to the Pangum La (3,010m) where we cross over into the fabled, awesome and empty Inkhu Valley and we pass through the village of Bhusme (approx. 1hr on), which is the last permanent habitation we shall see. It's another 3 hour walk to our night stop at Ningsow; just a name and a couple of shepherd's huts in a forest clearing.

O/nt altitude 3,100m

Trek 4 hours approx.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 6 Trek To Chhetra Thanga

Today is a long one – climbing and descending the steep and rugged spurs that line the Inkhu Khola valley; the glimpses through the dense forest of the torrent below us are truly dramatic. This is the Himalayan river torrent of steepest descent cutting a jagged incision through this ancient glacial valley while the trail encounters landslides as it clings to the V-shaped valley's precipitous western edge. The finale to the raw, natural feel of today's trek is our camp in the only suitable location – a cave under a huge overhanging rock deep in the forest.

O/nt altitude 3,300m

Trek 7 hours approx.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 7 Trek To Kothe (Mosom Kharka)

A short but steep 500m climb after breakfast offers interesting views; South to the rolling foothills of a few days before, North to Mera Peak itself and our first sight of its dramatic southwest face. The forest is untouched, beautiful, tall pine and moss, lichen and rhododendron creating a peaceful soulful feel during today's walk as we descend to the upper Inkhu Khola and arrive at a few huts and the summer yak pastures that is Kothe.

O/nt altitude 3,691m

Trek 5 hours approx.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 8 Trek To Thangnak

The scenery is taking on a very different character now – Peak 43 sits at the head of the valley and to our right in the east and in morning shadow is the dark west face of Mera. At lunch, with Mera as a backdrop, the reality of it all arrives like a doubtful guest - one you are not sure you should have invited! This guest then accompanies us into camp and will be with us for the next seven days.

O/nt altitude 4,200m

Trek 4 hours approx

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 9 In Thangnak

This will be our first of three acclimatisation schedules; using the day to hike to near-by glaciers up to 5,000m

O/nt altitude 4,200m

Acclimatisation day walks 4hrs approx.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 10 Trek To Khare

Our trail to Khare takes us eastwards across the moraine of the Dig Glacier. Though the climb up the moraine is not steep, you will feel the effects of the altitude and it will be a couple hours before we reach open pasture at Dig Kharka. There the trail levels out before crossing a stream and climbing for another hour to Khare. We have trekked in a northerly arc and are now rewarded by stunning views of the north face of Mera.

O/nt altitude 4,900m

Trek 4 hours approx.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 11 Climb To Mera La (5,415m) & back to Khare

A second day for acclimatisation. Here we use the moraine and scree slopes of the base of the Mera Glacier to familiarize ourselves with high altitude gear, with safety practices, with climbing techniques. And so we climb – towards the Mera La, our route winding its way between the crevasses on the glacier's lower eastern flank. After half an hour, the gradient eases and we emerge onto the wide plateau that leads up to the Pass. A further hour's climbing and we see the prayer flags marking our arrival at the Mera La (5,415m). From here there is the view that clearly shows the step-by-step route to the summit a thousand metres on up. But this is mere rehearsal. In the afternoon, we descend to Khare.

O/nt altitude 4,900m

Acclimatisation & Kit familiarisation day – 4-5hrs approx.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 12 Climb To High Camp (5,800m) – down to Base Camp

Other expeditions are known to opt to go straight to High Camp from Khare and then attempt the summit the following day. This is a risk we don't take, preferring instead further acclimatization which can, often does, make the critical difference. So we climb with high altitude support staff who establish a Base Camp at 5,100m near the foot of the glacier. The summit team then continues the climb and the acclimatisation process – a businesslike ascent in which we have time to take in our surroundings up to what, tomorrow, will be our High Camp. The views of Everest, Makalu, Lhotse and Kanchanjunga are what we came here to see – stunning! Today however we then descend to Base Camp for what anyway is our first night above 5,000m.

O/nt Altitude 5,100m

Climb 6 hours inc acclimatisation approx,

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 13 Climb To High Camp

Following the now familiar route back up the glacier we should find today's climb easier than yesterday. Our team consists now of the summit party supported by a cook plus any others needed to porter but who will then descend to wait at Khare for our return. Arriving at High Camp mid-afternoon, we spend the rest of the day resting and eating in preparation for a pre-dawn start. Our campsite on the leeward side of a rocky outcrop below the glacier is spectacular – a precarious picture truly high Himalayan in its minimal content!

O/nt Altitude 5,800m

Climb 6 hours approx.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 14 Summit Day (6,461m) then descend to Khare

It's a shock to the system; emerging from tents around 2 a.m. for the arduous climb to the summit. Navigating up a snow covered mountain under Himalayan star light is a very unworldly feeling. Sunrise means gaining the first of the false summits and a few hours later our goal will be close, with the final test a number of crevasses that line our trail before the gradient

steepens dramatically. We rope up and painstakingly ascend the final steep hurdle to the summit of Mera (6,461m).

This last hurdle is certainly a test of stamina and resolve. We have been on our feet for at least 6 hours. The panorama of peaks that greets us from the summit will blow all notions of tiredness from our limbs. The view from here has to be one of the finest in the Himalaya.

But we need to descend; down the Mera Glacier, past High Camp and back down to Khare. It's been gruelling but topped by an incredible sense of utter elation, achievement and fulfilment.

On/nt altitude 4,900m

Climb 10-12 hours approx.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Days 15 to 17 Trek Khare to Lukla

We retrace the route back to Lukla; the distance seems to fly by. With renewed supplies of red blood cells coursing through veins, and increased oxygen in the atmosphere, we hardly notice the occasional climbs. Before long we have arrived back in Lukla where apple pie and cold beers await.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 18 Fly to Kathmandu

We catch our short but spectacular flight back to Kathmandu (approx 45 minutes) and transfer to our hotel. Your day is free to explore Kathmandu further, hit the shops or chill out at the many cafes and bars. Meet up in the evening for final night celebration dinner.

Meals included: breakfast and dinner

Days 19 & 20 Kathmandu (Spare day) and departure

Day 19 is an extra day built into the program to allow for adverse weather conditions and acclimatization difficulties which may delay flights or the climb. If not needed this day will be spent at Kathmandu at your leisure.

Depart at any time on Day 20

Nepal Joining Point

TBA - 3 star hotel in Thamel, Kathmandu

Joining Point Instructions

Please note there is no airport bus from Kathmandu's Tribhuvan Airport. However a pre-paid taxi system is in operation. You will find two pre-paid taxi booths inside the airport terminal as you exit the baggage claim area. Fixed rate fares are currently NPR400 to anywhere in the Thamel area from 6am-8pm and NPR500 from 8pm-6am. Journey time is anywhere between 20 to 50 minutes - depending on prevailing traffic conditions.

Our Joining Point Hotel

TBA

Arrival Complications

We don't expect any problems (and nor should you!) but if for any reason you are unable to commence your group trip as scheduled, please contact your starting point hotel, requesting that you speak to or leave a message for your trip leader.

If you have pre-booked an airport transfer (where available) and have not made contact with our representative within 30 minutes of clearing customs and immigration, we recommend that you make your own way to the Starting Point hotel, following the Joining Instructions above.

Accommodation

Accommodation is a mixture of hotels and teahouses or camping in tents. In Kathmandu we use good hotels which are very centrally located with comfortable rooms and facilities. In Tea houses - generally speaking, the accommodation on this trip is a good standard though some patience may be required in the smaller guesthouses where the plumbing and standards of English may not always be a good standard.

For the rest of the days on the trek, we camp in twin share dome tents with separate foam mattresses for every person. There will be a separate dining tent with dining table and chairs, and toilet tents. Hot, clean water provided for brushing and washing up.

Meal Inclusions

Most meals are included in this trip and the food is generally of an excellent quality. Please refer to the itinerary for exact inclusions:

We like to sample the best of local dishes and produce so you enjoy an authentic taste of the region which you're travelling through. Nepalese food is a mixture of different influences from India and Tibet, though western dishes are very widely available and there is a tremendous variety of restaurants in Kathmandu where you can find almost every cuisine at very reasonable prices.

Transport

Private vehicle, plane, walking

Physical Rating

Demanding

Adventures to really get you out there! Be prepared to tackle some big mountain trails with strenuous physical activity on many days at high altitude, often in windy and snowy conditions. You will be walking between 6 and 8 hours a day following tracks that are usually well defined but prior trekking experience in, and confidence with mountain environments is required. You'll have the support of a local crew throughout but to participate fully it's recommended you attain a good level of physical fitness. Start a regular training program in the months leading up to the adventure as your goal is to be able to walk for 6 -8 hours on successive days (include hill training). While technical mountaineering experience is not needed, you will be required to use specialised equipment such as crampons and ice picks (see important notes).

Please refer to our walking guide as this provides good advice on how to start a fitness program.
<http://rawchallenges.com/guide-to-trekking.php>

Visas

Please note that visas are the responsibility of the individual traveller. The visa requirements for your trip vary depending on where you are from and where you are going. We keep the following information up to date as much as possible, but rules do change. It is important that you check for yourself.

If you would like someone to take the hassle out of your visa application please visit the following website:

www.visalink.com.au

Nepal:
You can easily obtain a visa on arrival by air (bring 2 passport photos), cost US\$30 for a single entry visa. Alternatively apply via the Nepalese consulate before you go which has offices in Brisbane and Melbourne. Please visit the following site to download forms:

<http://www.nepalconsulate.net.au/downloadforms.php>

Important Notes

1. Conditions and fitness

This is a trek that requires an excellent level of fitness as there are plenty of ascents and descents and the walking is very strenuous. The weather can be very harsh with snow and frosts. Travellers need to be prepared for all weather conditions. Please ensure your fitness and quality of equipment you bring is adequate for very harsh terrain and conditions. Previous experience trekking in mountain regions is essential to join this trip.

2. Altitude

While our itineraries are designed to allow for adequate acclimatisation, you are likely to feel the effects of altitude sickness and oxygen deprivation whilst on this trek. Please be aware that your group leader may deem it unsafe for you to continue trekking at any time, and arrange for you to descend to a lower attitude.

3. Trek delays or changes

Weather conditions in the Himalayas can change rapidly and our group leader may be forced to change the trip itinerary accordingly. Mera Peak summit component of the trip may be delayed or even cancelled due to the inclement weather. Alternative itineraries will apply if this is the case.

Departing from Kathmandu at the end of the trip:

Please do not arrange any international flight departures before the afternoon of day 20. Although the aim is to leave Lukla for the short flight back to Kathmandu on the morning of day 18 or 19 it is important to note that if there is bad weather or low cloud conditions the flights will not go. In this case we will return on day 21 and will be into Kathmandu by late morning.

4. Technical equipment use

Time is set aside for practical instruction on the use of climbing equipment (climbing ropes, ice axes and crampons) before attempting the summit peak where the use of this equipment is often necessary. Experienced mountain guides will instruct you on the correct and safe use of this equipment.

What to take?

You should pack as lightly as possible 10-12kgs per person. All camping equipment (provided) as well as your main pack are carried by porters. There are safe storage facilities in Kathmandu for extra luggage and valuables before leaving on the trek. Suitcases are not permissible for this trip! The best container is either a backpack or a duffle bag. A comfortable daypack is required to carry items you will need during the day. Please note that you need to either bring or hire a 4 season sleeping bag. As we will be spending most of the trek away from villages there is no need to bring large amounts of money with you. Enough to cover some soft drinks or teas will suffice. Your group leader will go over this before departure.

Checklist (suggested list):

Travel Documents:

- Passport (with photocopies) and Nepal visa

- Copy of travel insurance
- Airline ticket
- USD cash
- Credit card

** Tip: use a money belt for security (put documents inside a plastic bag)

Please note that a tremendous variety of outdoor gear - aimed towards Trekkers - is widely available in Kathmandu at cheap prices. If you need fleeces, jackets, thermals etc these can be picked up very cheaply there.

Personal Items

- - 1 Medium rucksack/backpack (carried by porters)
- - Waterproof pack covers
- - 1 Inner sleeping sheet
- - First Aid kit including moleskin for blisters (see the health section)
- - High factor sunscreen
- - Sunglasses suitable for snow conditions
- - Toiletries (biodegradable)
- - Watch or alarm clock
- - Ear plugs (in case tent mate snores!)
- - Plastic bags for wet or dirty clothing
- - lip balm/chapstick
- - Wet wipes or antiseptic hand gel

Clothing

- - 1 Down jacket/all weather anorak
- - 1 Lightweight water and windproof jacket
- - 2 pair lightweight long trousers
- - 1 Fleece/warm sweater
- - 1 Sweatshirt/light sweater
- - 2 T-shirts (lightweight quick drying fabric) / long sleeved T-shirt
- - 2 Long sleeve cotton (or polypropylene) shirts
- - 1 pair strong mountain/hiking boots
- - 3 Pairs heavy wool socks and 2 pairs light socks
- - 1 pair of knee length shorts
- - Warm hat and waterproof gloves
- - Underwear (including thermals)
- - Small towel and swim wear
- - Sun hat
- - Cotton headscarf/bandana

High altitude trekking Equipment

The following items are essential but can be rented in Kathmandu during time available on day 2 and can be organized by the local operator. Clients should allow a hire charge of approximately USD100-150 for these and other miscellaneous items.

- Sleeping bag should be comfortable to -20c
- Day pack should be good quality (note: 20-25 litre)
- Quality climbing plastic boots
- Snow goggles
- Warm, waterproof gloves and mittens (total 2 pairs)
- Waterproof gaiters

- Overtrousers
- Crampons
- Ice Axe
- Harness
- Ascender/Jumers
- Descender
- Karabiners 2/3

Other Suggestions:

- - 1 Medium rucksack/backpack (carried by porters)
- - Camera and plenty of film
- - Adapter for recharging digital camera (Can be bought locally)
- - Spare batteries
- - Reading / writing material
- - Penknife (put in main luggage at airport)
- - Torch
- - Small calculator (when out bargaining!)
- - Phrase book, map and Lonely Planet guide
- - Small padlock for securing your luggage during flights

Local Dress

When packing be aware that dress standards are conservative throughout Asia. We will be spending a lot of time in the more conservative rural regions of Nepal. Please remember that as visitors to someone else's home it is our responsibility to fit with the local customs by wearing appropriate clothing (irrespective of what other travellers are wearing). Loose, lightweight, long clothing is both respectful and practical, as it provides protection from the sun. Please remove any headwear and shoes when entering Temples or people's homes. Your guide will give you more information on local etiquette.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory for all our trips. We strongly recommend that you take out insurance the moment you register for a trip as you are then covered should you not be able to go in the event of illness or accident. Please send these details (name of insurer, policy number and their 24 hour emergency contact number) to RAW prior to departure.

We require that, at a minimum, you are covered for medical expenses including emergency repatriation. We strongly recommend that the policy also covers personal liability, cancellation, curtailment and loss of luggage and personal effects.

Ensure your travel policy includes high altitude trekking as some policies exclude certain types of trekking but may be added on payment of a small extra premium.

When travelling on this trip, you will not be permitted to join the group until evidence of travel insurance and the insurance company's 24 hour emergency contact number has been seen by your leader. If you have credit card insurance your tour leader will require proof of purchase of the trip (a receipt of credit card statement) with a credit card in your name. Contact your bank for details of their participating insurer, the level of coverage and emergency contact telephone number.

Our preferred insurance company is CoverMore as they provide an excellent service. You can apply on line directly by clicking on this link:

<https://b2c.covermore.com.au/index.jsp?alpha=AAV0231>

Health

All RAW travellers need to be in good physical health in order to participate fully in the group travel experience. If, in the opinion of our group leader, any traveller is unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group, RAW reserves the right to exclude them from all or part of a trip without refund.

Please let us know of any medical conditions on the registration form and if you are currently taking prescription medicine as it is important that our leader is aware of your circumstances. We therefore ask that you read the itinerary in these trip notes thoroughly and then realistically self-assess your physical ability to complete the trip as described. Please consult with your doctor if you have any doubts.

There are no specific health requirements for entry into Nepal. However, you should consult your doctor or travel clinic for up-to-date information and prescriptions for vaccinations and anti-malarial requirements. We would suggest that you are up to date with immunisation protection against typhoid, polio, tetanus and hepatitis.

We recommend that you carry a First Aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements (such as a spare pair of prescription glasses). Please be aware that for legal reasons our leaders are prohibited from administering any type of drug including headache tablets/antibiotics etc. Your first aid kit should include:

- headache tablets
- diarrhoea treatment (both a blocker to bring relief from the symptoms and an antibiotic)
- blister kit
- band-aids
- antiseptic for cuts & scrapes
- lip balm
- insect repellent
- high factor sunscreen.

Given the physical nature of this trip we strongly advise bringing some sachets of an oral rehydration solution (available at chemists) as this aids recovery following activity and dehydration and also helps replace lost body salts should you suffer from 'gastro'. Just add a sachet to your water bottle each day. Please scroll down to the Special Safety Notes below for information on dehydration.

If you are 65 years or older a completed Medical Certificate is required.

Please let us know and we can post you a copy which then needs to be signed by your GP and posted faxed through to 03 9597 0797 prior to departure.

Physical Preparation

For a trip like this the general rule is the more preparation you have done for it, the more you will enjoy it. The Mera Peak climb is strenuous, highly demanding and calls for proficient level of general fitness, so the fitter you are the more enjoyable the experience will be.

The trek up to Mera peak is at extremely high altitude - maximum height 6476m (see days 4-17 for details), the highest among the 'trekking peaks' in Nepal. This expedition involves the use of fixed Ropes, Crampons and Ice-axes near/before/during summit days.

We recommend that you undertake regular aerobic exercise in the weeks before you travel, particularly if you are not in the habit of regular exercise. Walking, overnight hikes, jogging, swimming or riding a bike are all good ways to increase your aerobic fitness, which will allow you to enjoy the trek to its fullest.

Money Exchange

Currency exchange rates often fluctuate. For the most up to date rates please refer to the following

website: www.oanda.com

Nepal: \$1 AUD = approx. 53 Rupees. The Nepalese Rupee is the unit of currency. There are many moneychangers in Kathmandu and Pokhara. Clean bills with no tears are best. ATM's are widely available in larger cities where you can withdraw money in local currency if you have a visa / mastercard or cirrus card. Credit cards can be used to advance cash in banks in major towns but attract a high fee. We recommend that you don't use money changers on the street. When changing money try and get a mix of denominations (your leader will advise you on this). Keep smaller notes with you when on the cycle ride as it can be difficult to change larger notes once out of the city.

Spending Money

Every traveller is different and therefore spending money requirements will vary. Some travellers may drink more than others while other travellers like to purchase more souvenirs than most. Please consider your own spending habits when it comes to allowing for drinks, shopping and tipping.

Any tip that you wish to give to your local guides or leader in recognition of excellent service is always appreciated. We recommend approx. US\$30 to go into a kitty to be distributed to the local team at the end of the trip. Usually we do this on the last night at the celebration dinner.

Emergency Funds

Please also make sure you have access to an additional USD\$400, to be used when unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control (eg. a natural disaster, or an outbreak of bird flu) necessitate a change to our planned route. This is a rare occurrence but it is well worth being prepared!

Keeping In Touch - communication while on the road

If you need to be contacted while travelling we recommend that you set up an email address that can be accessed on the road. Email cafes are commonplace throughout the regions we visit. If someone wishes to contact you in an emergency (eg death or serious illness) we recommend that they refer to our Emergency contact. Mobile phone communication is not available outside Kathmandu on this trip. We don't recommend that family and friends try to contact you through hotels, as they are subject to change and the reception staff may not speak English.

Emergency Contact

In the case of a genuine crisis or emergency, please call the RAW Office.

Tel: +61 3 9597 0799. Outside of office hours please call 0413 703 632

Your Fellow Trekkers

As you travel on a group trip you will be exposed to all the pleasures and maybe some of the frustrations of travelling in a group. We ask you to be understanding of the various needs and preferences of your group - patience with your fellow travellers is sometimes required for the benefit of everyone's travel experience.

Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a certain time, ensure that you don't keep the rest of the group waiting. We have found time and time again that the very best trips we operate are those where the dynamics within the group work well - this takes just a little effort on your part.

Group Leader

RAW has both resident western and local leaders who lead our trips in this region. Generally speaking you will have a western leader with a larger group size supported by local leaders as well. Where the group size is smaller or with a private booking for a few persons you will have a local leader. All our staff are first aid trained and experienced with the special nature and demands of trekking tours and are able to give you support and insights into the local culture.

The aim of the group leader is to take the hassle out of your travels and to help you have the best trip possible. They will provide information on the places you are travelling through, offer suggestions for things to do and see, recommend great local eating venues and introduce you to our local friends.

While not being tour guides in the traditional sense you can expect them to have a broad general knowledge of the countries visited on the trip, including historical, cultural, religious and social aspects. We also use local area guides where we think more specific knowledge will add to the enjoyment of the places we are visiting - we think it's the best of both worlds.

Responsible Travel

We believe strongly in low impact or rather positive impact tourism. Broadly speaking this means that we try to minimise the negative aspects of tourism on the local cultures and environments that we visit and highlight the positive aspects. When we are trekking children will ask you for pens, money etc. It is always hard to resist giving them small gift. However we ask you not to do this as it encourages a culture of begging and often parents will take their children out of school and get their children to prey on tourists. Ask your leader what is the best way to give.

A Couple of Rules

Illegal drugs will not be tolerated on our trips. Possessing or using drugs not only contravenes the laws of the land but also puts the rest of the group at risk. Smoking marijuana and opium is a part of local culture in some parts of the world but is not acceptable for RAW travellers.

RAW's philosophy of travel is one of respect towards everyone we encounter, and in particular the local people who make our destinations such special places. The exploitation of prostitutes is completely contrary to this philosophy. Our group leader has the right to expel any member of the group if drugs are found in their possession or if they use prostitutes.

Safety

Many national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. We recommend that you check your government's advice for their latest travel information before departure.

We strongly recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt while travelling, for the safe-keeping of your passport, air tickets, cash and other valuable items. Leave your valuable jewellery at home - you won't need it while travelling.

Many of our hotels have safety deposit boxes, which is the most secure way of storing your valuables. A lock is recommended for securing your luggage.

Your leader will accompany you on all included activities however during your trip you will have some free time to pursue your own interests, relax and take it easy or explore at your leisure. While your group leader will assist you with the available options in a given location, please note that any optional activities you undertake are not part of your itinerary, and makes no representations about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them. Please use your own good judgment when selecting an activity in your free time.

Please also note that your group leader has the authority to amend or cancel any part of the trip itinerary if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns.

A thorough safety briefing will be given prior to setting off.

Dehydration

Dehydration is the biggest risk when undertaking a physical challenge such as trekking over undulating terrain. It is so important to be aware of your fluid intake especially at altitude and to constantly drink water throughout the day (even when you do not feel thirsty). Symptoms of mild dehydration include:

- flushed face
- extreme thirst, more than normal or unable to drink
- dry, warm skin
- cannot pass urine or reduced amounts, dark, yellow
- dizziness made worse when you are standing - weakness - cramping in the arms and legs
- sleepy or irritable
- headaches
- dry mouth, dry tongue; with thick saliva

The simplest way of monitoring your fluid intake is by checking the colour of your urine. If it is clear or slightly yellow you are well hydrated but once it is a dark yellow you are in the danger zone and need to increase your fluid intake immediately. Ensure that you bring some Gastrolyte sachets as these help your recovery after trekking with the replacement of electrolytes. Gastrolyte is also the recommended treatment for dehydration caused by diarrhoea ('gastro').

Acclimatisation and altitude sickness

Altitude sickness has the potential to affect all trekkers from 2500m and higher. We ascend slowly and give our bodies plenty of time to adjust to the smaller quantities of oxygen in the air. However it is important to be aware of the normal altitude symptoms that you may encounter BUT NOT worry about:

- Periods of sleeplessness
- Occasional loss of appetite
- Vivid, wild dreams at around 2500-3800m in altitude
- Unexpected momentary shortness of breath, day and night
- Periodic breathing that wakes you occasionally
- Your nose becomes bunged up
- Dry cough develops
- Mild headache

If you are feeling nauseous and dizzy be sure to let the main leader know and the person you are walking with so that we can monitor your condition.

AMS (Acute Mountain Sickness) has the potential to become a problem at higher altitudes. Senior staff are trained to prevent, detect and, if necessary, to deal with AMS. Contrary to popular hype, AMS is not common – at least not on well-paced treks. However higher treks are equipped with a PAC (Portable Altitude Chamber). This inflatable, tube-shaped, pressurized, windowed bag creates low-altitude air pressure conditions. A trekker's one or two hour 'stay' can be sufficient response. However, sometimes the patient will need to descend, with an escort, at least 1,000m to better oxygenated conditions. More details will be given to you at the group meeting on the first evening.

RAW Newsletter

We have a free email newsletter full of travellers stories and experiences as well as news on new trips that we are running.

Please send us an extract from your travel journal at the end of the trip. We would also love to receive any photos after the event as we are starting to build up a travellers album for each of our destinations on our website. We need resolution of around 1MB.

Please could you send a CD to: RAW Travel Photo album, 1/24 Bay Road, Sandringham, VIC 3191.

The information in these trip notes has been compiled with care and is provided in good faith. However it is subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the passenger and RAW Travel.