



Top tips for first time trekkers

Some trail wisdom we've picked up over the years that we think you might find useful on your trek.

In no particular order:

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Stop and sort things out

This is a 'golden rule' to apply to most situations on the hill: going up high things tend to get worse rather than better, niggles become problems, problems become trek stoppers. Stop at the niggly stage and sort things out.

This applies to snagging socks and loose bootlaces (fix it before it becomes a blister / broken ankle); sun on your neck (cover it before it becomes a burn or heat stroke); feeling a bit chilly (put a layer on before hypothermia creeps up); rubbing rucksack straps (rejig before you get sores); bit thirsty (stop and have a drink before all sorts of health horrors creep in). Get the picture?

Hydration

Everything in the high hills will be sucking the moisture out of you: exertion, altitude, dry air.... And the one thing we need gallons of to help adjust to height gain and keep healthy? Water.



Even if you're the sort who never drinks at home, drink lots and lots of (safe, clean) water on trek. It really is magic.

Drinking

You can't have too much water when on trek – but what's the best way to carry and consume this essential liquor? We recommend carrying at least one 1 litre water bottle (Nalgene bottles are bomb proof!) plus either another bottle of the same or a Camelback, Platypus or similar bladder system. An alternative choice for one of your Nalgene bottles could be a LifeSaver filter system (a straw filter to suck water out of your bottle, the filter gets rid of bugs, dirt and other undesirables). LifeSaver (and similar brands) are good for grabbing water from the wild, but they don't seal well so no good for hot water bottles or storage.

Bringing bladders

Camelbak type systems are great for being able to sip water constantly whilst on the move. However they need lots of careful managing to prevent the mouth piece and pipe becoming a home for lots of happy, but harmful bacteria. Popping that mouthpiece in and out of sunscreen coated lips, to wash nicely sugary bits of chocolate, power bar and other tasty treats away not to mention the odd dangle in the dust in warm and sunny conditions are all excellent for stimulating microbial growth. Be ready to sterilise the mouthpiece every other day. And if it's not warm and sunny it'll doubtless be freezing cold and you'll be sucking up ice crystals unless you invest in a tube insulator. The biggest hazard for plastic bladders though is our refill system. On trek our kitchen teams will be boiling up bucketfuls of water getting it safe for you to drink. Just-boiled water tends have a deleterious effect on bladder seals – they pop and burst all over the place. So if you're using a bladder, bring a bottle too to put the hot water in, let it cool down for a few hours then top your plastic pouch up.

A lot of bottle

Using bottles? Simple, safe and they double up as a hot water bottle for toasty toes on those chilly evenings. On the trail find a way to hang them / stash them so you can reach for them easily without having to take your 'sac off. Net pockets on the side of sacs (and a friend if you've stiff shoulders) or an insulated pouch attached to your rucksack waist-belt are ideal. Wide necked Nalgene are the best and most reliable in our experience.

Headaches

One of the effects of exertion, dehydration and adjusting to new altitudes can be a headache. Your first action should be to drink a good dose of water (1L +) but if that doesn't sort it some pain relief will be effective. We've found paracetamol (Tylenol) and Brufen based drugs (ibuprofen, nurofen etc) to be the safest and most effective. However aspirin or codeine based ones are a no-no.

Ups and downs to expect

As well as lots of physical ups and downs expect to have a few emotional ones too: some days you'll be tired / homesick / missing your loved ones/ aching for a hot shower and other days will be stuffed full of the best ever moments, where every twist and turn of the trail fills you with elation. Life is a rollercoaster (as that Ronan fella once said) – and so is trek. Come prepared!

To bring for treats and to make life brighter in tough times

I find sugarfree chewing gum can really help if you're feeling a bit sickly and it's also great for keeping your throat wet in the dry and dusty air.



Some people like to bring their own drink concoctions with them for days when you're feeling a bit 'over' water, tea, hot juice, herbal teas etc but need to drink. Things like effervescent Vit C or fizzy rehydration tablets can be a nice way of getting the liquid in and adding a bit of va va voom.

Chocolate, jelly babies, nice sweets to keep in your pocket always help on big uphill –chocolate helps with most things in life!

A small tub of Vaseline is excellent for applying to chapped lips and raw noses at night or dabbing on your toes to prevent blisters in the day.

Talc tipped liberally into clothing and socks keeps bad smells at bay and reduces scratchiness.

A thick moisturiser such as Nivea or cold cream is excellent for cracked fingers and dry skin.

Coughs and colds

Puffing and panting a bit in the cold, super-dry mountain air of higher altitudes can really tickle your airway linings in a non too funny way. The cold, dry air can irritate your nasal, sinus, throat and lungs causing coughs (the dreaded Khumbu cough for example) and leaving you open to colds and infections.

To reduce irritation we've found wearing a Buff or scarf wrapped round the mouth and nose helps: it keeps the dust out and, most importantly, catches moisture from exhalations making the inhaled air more moist and slightly warmer.

It can help to suck menthol sweets or chew sugarfree gum, particularly the Airway clearing type. Some people swear by Fisherman's Friends! You'll also find throat sweets like Strepsils are good for soothing itchy, dry throats and reducing coughing and a honey based cough syrup may be worth having along too.

Clean set of clothes for evenings-night time

Bring a set of warm clothes with you that you *only* wear in camp. Even if you wear exactly the same things each night and sleep in them too at least you'll always have something (relatively) clean and dust free to change into at the end of each day.

Keeping clean

Up high and at colder times of year the prospect of a long hot shower is a wonderful thing. Sadly it's unlikely to happen (in the way that the fantasy plays in your mind) until you get back to Kathmandu. Where water is in good supply our kitchen team will heat water up for our camp 'shower' – a big bag with shower nozzle that we can rig up in a small tented area. Or you can have a bowl of warm water to wash with in your tent porch. I've found having a small bar of soap and face cloth to hand is the best way to 'squaddy wash' in your tent porch.

Some people bring wet wipes which can be really handy but then need to be disposed of somewhere – if you're bringing them make sure they are bio disposable and be ready to carry them out.

Dry bags for everything

Trek bags and rucksacks are not 100% waterproof so make sure everything you have is also stored in a dry bag, sack liner or thick plastic bag. It can and does rain (on some trips it may even snow) sometimes pack animals, porters or even you may slip and slide into a river. The last thing anyone



needs is damp or even wet spare clothes and personal items and you absolutely do not need a wet sleeping bag or down jacket. So keep everything well-wrapped up.

And bring some spare bags for storing dirty clothes too.

Random stuff

Pegs – small, plastic ones can be useful for getting hand-washed socks etc dry on tent guy ropes and other bits of string. Bring some cord if you want to create your own line as well.

Small karabiners are dead handy for hanging stuff, attaching things, holding things in place and even keeping trousers up.

Gaffer tape – solves most breakage type problems (especially in combination with super glue or stretchy boot glue)

A needle and thread are useful for tears, rips and loose buttons

Psychic leaders

Contrary to popular opinion (amongst trekkers and leaders alike) most trek leaders are sadly lacking in psychic abilities: they almost certainly won't know the exact temperature at the top of the mountain (whilst sitting in a valley tea house), nor the *exact* time for you and your group to get to location X. Most importantly, although they can take a good guess using the usual facial and bodily clues, your leader won't know how you are feeling unless you tell them. So do speak up if you are in discomfort, unwell or indeed overjoyed! As a good friend reminds me (often) - 'you have words, use them!'

Money

You won't need much money on our trek but you should have some local currency with you to: tip staff who have given good service; buy drinks and souvenirs etc. Goods and services in the mountains are expensive so bring more than you need. And always carry some convertible currency for 'just in case' situations.

Trekking Poles

These can be useful if you know how to use them. Great for downhill on iffy trails for those with dodgy knees or just needing a bit of help balancing, especially with large rucksacks on. Some people also like using them to help find a rhythm. Things to be aware of:

- Use the hand straps and holds as they're designed or risk RSI of the elbows or worse
- With your hands through the straps, your lower arm should be parallel with the ground when walking on the flat.
- Lengthen the poles on downhill
- Kebabing – be careful of flailing poles when going uphill. It's too easy to skewer the person behind you. Pretty much guaranteed to end in tears – yours, theirs, both.
- Poles aren't an abs replacement – you should be engaging your core to maintain balance and protect your back

