

DHAULAGIRI SANCTUARY TRAIL GUIDE

About the trek

This is a 3-4 day moderate but scenic trek along the valley of the Rahu Khola which drains the south face of Dhaulagiri 1 (8172m), returning along the opposite side. More challenging options to reach glaciers can be added in. The valley is untouched by tourism. At its lower end there are a few jeep tracks, but virtually no traffic on them. The start point, Beni, on the Kali Gandaki river, is easily reached in 3 hours by bus from Pokhara.

There is no designated map with the route highlighted in yellow, but the trail appears on the following:

- Dhaulagiri Circuit 1:90,000 (Nepa Maps NS 501)
- Gurja Himal & Hidden Village 1:100,000 (Nepa Maps NS 523)

You will witness some of the most extreme topography in the world, though the trail is 'average' in its demands, and there are no high altitude passes. On the western side it mostly contours above the river, passing through quintessential Nepali scenery of terraced fields, forest, and ochre-plastered villages perched on steep slopes. Most of the inhabitants are Magar people, a Tibeto-Mongolian people, who live in tightly clustered traditional villages built of stone and local materials. On the eastern side it negotiates dramatic cliffs of marble rock where the trail has been cut by hand into the precipice. On both sides the views are dominated by the majestic sheer-cut south face of Dhaulagiri 1, the seventh highest mountain in the world. Rising a staggering 4000 meters from its glacial base, Dhaulagiri's colossal south face is unequalled in the Himalayas. Despite several attempts it has never been conquered and remains one of the greatest challenges in Himalayan alpinism.

For those who are fit, with good balance and a head for heights, the trek may be extended to include a visit to the Dhaulagiri South Face Base Camp (4000m) and a trio of glaciers. Be warned: the trail is narrow, extremely exposed, and barely existent in places. Food and tents must be carried, and a local guide is essential (see below). Allow an extra 4-5 days for this. A further alternative is to climb up and cross via a notch (4300m) in Dhaulagiri's south-west ridge to enter the Kali Gandaki valley at Lete or Kalopani.

Attractive, friendly, and tourist-untouched villages line the valley sides, and the trekker should encounter no problem in finding a bed for the night, even where local lodges or trained homestays have not yet been established. Due to the easy nature of the trek and the frequent villages, the description below has not been divided up into days, but rather into short sections each ending in a village where an overnight stay is possible, leaving the detailed planning of the trek to the individual.

The Magars

All Nepali people are warm, friendly, and hospitable, but in our view the Magars take the prize. Do not be prejudiced by the fact that large numbers of them have been recruited into the British and Indian Gurkha armies. Magars are not naturally aggressive, but soft-spoken and renowned for their trustworthiness and enjoyment of life. They are the largest of the Tibeto-Mongolian groups in Nepal, comprising around 2 million in total. Numerous sub-clans and groups exist. Some speak their own language while others have forgotten their mother tongue and speak only Nepali. Most define themselves these days as Hindus, though their practices and beliefs relate more closely to shamanism.

TO START: Pokhara>Beni>Jhi

From the Baglung Bus Park in Pokhara take a bus to Beni (3 hours). Share-jeeps are also available and start from a spot a few hundred metres up the road from the Baglung Bus Park. At Beni (830m) which lies at the confluence of the Kali Gandaki river and the Myagdi Khola, there

are two options: you can either walk to Jhi, or take another local bus. The buses leave from the Beni Bus station at indeterminate times and take about 1-2 hours for the journey (via Galeshwor). If you prefer to walk to Jhi, ask someone to direct you to the start of the footpath in Beni. It is a moderate but steady climb of 1000m (5-6 hours) to Jhi, passing through the villages of Jamunakharka, Neptechaur, Githani, Patlikhet, and Hila.

JHI (1800 m)

Jhi is a traditional Nepali village with a mixture of ethnic groups. Some older oval-shaped houses still remain. For accommodation there are 5-10 homestays (Dek Prasad Gharbuja Ph 9847731847; Chu Maya Magar Ph 9847624221). If you are not a teetotaler, make sure you sample some Magar "tea". In the morning, it is worthwhile rising early to walk up to Todke Danda (2883m), a high point on the nearby ridgetop where there are outstanding panoramic views of the Himalaya, and Dhaulagiri in particular. The walk up will take approximately 3 hours; allow 2 hours to return.

- 1. Jhi > Jikru > Pakhapani (2000m) > Kotgaon (1842m) 2.30 hours**
From Jhi, the trail heads north-west, contouring gently to Jikru. From there a stone staircase climbs steeply up to the village of Pakhapani (tr: good water), There is a teashop at Pakhapani which will serve local food. The trail then turns west and drops down to cross two small side tributaries before climbing steeply on the far bank via stone steps to the village of Kotgaon (Note: there are two villages named Kotgaon on the map: this is the eastern one). Here there are several shops which will serve food if requested (e.g. Negita Pun 9805466766). It is an attractive compact Magar village, with stone roofs and facades decorated with red and white mud.
- 2. Kotgaon > Ulleri > Rayakhor (2100m) 3.00 hours**
After departing Kotgaon, cross a small stream and take the upper path which avoids a landslide and climbs steadily up through light forest to Ulleri (2000m) in 1.30 hours. Just before the village take the upper (left) path. There is a small teashop. The trail then contours around to reach the village of Rayakhor in just over an hour. There is a good viewpoint of Dhaulagiri (and Annapurnas) near the school. Several houses will provide accommodation and food if asked (Gha Bahadur Sherpujha Magar; Nu Maya Magar). This is a good place to spend the night because it offers good views in the morning.
- 3. Rayakhor > Gyasikharka (1900m) 2.50 hrs**
From Rayakhor the trail descends crossing a landslide (When going in the opposite direction, make sure you take the upper path, not the lower steps) and reaches the river in about 1.20 hours. There is a bridge here but the trail remains on the right bank. After a further 30 minutes the settlement of Chaurkhani is reached with a teashop and other shops (if you wish you can cross the river here and spend a night on the left bank at Kharibot: Dek Bahadur and Yo Maya Chantyal). The route, however, continues upstream on the right bank and after 1 hour Gyasikharka is reached beside the river. There is a teashop here, and locals will provide accommodation if necessary.
- 4. Gyasikharka > Dhar (2000m) 1.00 hr**
Continue beside the river on the right bank, passing by a micro hydro-electricity plant. After one hour a bridge is reached close to the junction of two tributaries with the Chantyal village of Dhar perched some 15 minutes walk above. Dhar has a shop and can provide food and accommodation; there is also a small cluster of artisan households near the river junction where guides can be obtained (Pheshan and Chibin Gharti ph.9806162032). Dhar is a good option to stay overnight because of the views in the morning.

Extended Options from Dhar:

From Dhar the main trek loops back to Beni on the opposite side of the valley. If you have time, however, there are several options to explore before you begin the return. These are described at the end of this trek.

- 5. Dhar > Kharibot (1900m) > Chim Khola (1800m) 3.40 hrs**
Cross the bridge below Dhar to the left bank of the Rahu Khola. The trail follows an easy almost flat route downstream beside the river, reaching the hamlet of Kharibot in about 1:20 hours, and the village of Simudanda in a further 20 minutes. Both villages offer local accommodation, but if you have time, it is recommended to continue and stay overnight in the large, fascinating Magar village of Chim Khola. Some 40 minutes beyond Simudanda, follow the upper (left) fork in the path - it is now a track - (the lower path descends to cross the Chim Khola tributary avoiding the village). The trail climbs a little and as you round a corner heading west up a side tributary (Chim Khola) the compact village hoves into view, its red and white mud homes stacked in narrow tiers on the steep slope.

Chim Khola comprises some 250 households, the majority Magars with 20-25 households of artisans. It is an unspoiled traditional village of stone and mud houses, slate roofs, wooden verandahs and carved windows; stone-flagged paths meander up and down beside water channels and gushing water taps and water channels. The village is well maintained since there are quite a few families of retired British Gurkha soldiers with good pensions, and nowadays at least one from each house works overseas and sends remittances home. Beside the river you can visit the small hydro-electricity plant which supplies their electricity. There are several shops and local lodges where food and accommodation can be obtained.

- 6. Chim Khola > Darmija 1.45 hrs**
From Chim Khola, retrace your steps a short way out of the village and then take a left fork which descends to cross Chim Khola tributary. On the far side the path climbs steadily up through light forest and fields. It is a well-worn route with many villagers on the footpath. In just under 2 hours the village of Dharmija is visible just below the trail. This is another delightful Magar village surrounded by green fields lying on a shelf several hundred metres above the Rahu Khola. Shops and a teashop lodge exist.
- 7. Darmija > Dagnam 2.00 hrs**
Depart Dharmija by the path at the upper end of the village. The trail climbs steadily as the slope steepens until there is no longer a 'slope' but a marble precipice rising from the river bed far below. This is the most dramatic section of the trek. The trail has been cut by hand (using dynamite) into the rocks, leaving isolated pinnacles like sentinels. If you glance backwards in certain places you will find that you have been walking unknowingly on an overhang. For those who dislike exposure, the trail is reassuringly broad and, needless to say, rock-solid! This is not the case across the valley where the slopes are scarred with landslides. The cliff path continues for some 30 minutes until the gradient relaxes and forest reappears. Some two hours beyond Dharmija the large and dispersed village of Dagnam is reached. As one enters there is a teashop lodge (Hotel Riverside) beside a small footbridge. Further on there is another teashop lodge (Susmita Thapa's Khaja Ghar) on the trail. Most of the village lies above the walking trail.
- 8. Dagnam > Beni 2:30 hrs**
About an hour's walk south of Dagnam a track is reached where share-jeps are usually waiting (at least in the morning hours) to offer rides to Beni. The trip takes around 1:30 hours. Alternatively one can walk: Galeswor (on the Kali Gandaki main road some 15 minutes drive north of Beni) is reached in 3-4 hours easy downhill.

Trek to Dhaulagiri 'Sancutary' and south face base camp

We provide details of this trek with a warning and disclaimer: the current condition of the path means that we cannot recommend it to the average trekker. And if you consider yourself 'above average' we ask you to consider the safety of any porters which you might hire to carry your supplies (a lightly-loaded guide is not a problem).

The path is used by local hunters and yarsa-gompa gatherers. In places it is very poorly defined and hidden by vegetation, in other places it has been disturbed by landslides. At times it is both exposed and steep, offering nothing better than toe-steps, so that you must rely on hand-holds of long grasses. In the afternoons clouds and mist descend obscuring visibility and making it easy to lose the way. Snow is also a risk as the altitude increases. It is best to walk in the mornings only.

All food needs to be carried. There are occasional rock overhands which can provide shelter but it is definitely recommended to carry your own tents. Firewood is scarce and a camping stove and gas cylinders are also essential.

- 1. Dhar > Chhari (2100m) 1+ hrs.**
Chhari is the most northerly permanent habitation in the valley. to the glaciers. From Dhar, cross the bridge to the left bank, continue upstream through grazing land and light forest. After an hour, the small hamlet of Chhari set among frugal fields appears on the opposite bank. There are just two houses in Chhari, of the Chantyal ethnic group. They offer basic homestay accommodation and this is a friendly place to stay with a gushing cold water supply from a nearby waterfall. Basic food supplies such as rice, maize, flour, tea and sugar can usually be bought here, but guides should be hired from Dhar. (**N.B.** On maps, this hamlet is labelled Panela, while Chhari is shown 2 kms beyond. That higher settlement, however, is not believed to be a permanent habitation.)
- 2. Chhari > Sunguri Chaur (2600m) 4-5 hrs**
Sunguri Chaur is a sunny pasture lying between two tributaries. On existing maps (e.g. Dhaulagiri Circuit) it is labelled Phedi, but this is an error and locals refer to the place as Sunguri Chaur, meaning 'pasture of the pigs' (Phedi lies elsewhere which could lead to confusion!). A spectacular waterfall is visible from this spot, but views of Dhaulagiri are limited by the narrow valley sides.

From the hamlet of Chhari, cross back to the left bank and continue upstream through forest. The trail sometimes climbs and meanders around side tributaries but basically follows the Rahu Khola river all the way. After 2-3 hours you pass some summer pasture huts which are really only dismantled walls. In a further hour you reach a major tributary which must be crossed either via a log-plank bridge (slippery in wet weather) or by leaping boulders if river water is low. Sunguri Chaur lies a short climb above and between the two tributaries. It makes a good camping spot with flat pasture, a large boulder providing a dry overhang for cooking, good sunshine and running water nearby.
- 3. Sunguri Chaur > Rock overhang near river (3100m) 3-4 hrs**
There is a flat marshy spot in the middle of the Chaur, and the path continues above that. For the first hour the path is broad, climbing gently through mature forest trees and clumps of canes. The gradient steepens and canes begin to predominate. The path becomes more and more narrow and at times you have to bend over double to make your way through a tunnel of canes. With the afternoon mist they brush their wetness onto your clothes as you push through them so that you can easily become

soaked and cold if the weather is bad. In one place you must ascend some 500 metres up a stony landslide scar and the point where the path re-starts is unmarked unless you know where it is. After contouring around a steep cliff section, the trail rejoins the river and shortly after that the first rock overhang is visible beside the river. It offers a flat spot beside it just large enough for two small tents. There is a second larger overhang 15-20 minutes further on.

4. Rock overhang > Base Camp (4000m) 4-5 hours

The first three hours are the most challenging. The sides of the valley close in dramatically creating a narrow gorge with precipitous sides. To avoid this the trail climbs up high above (descending or climbing to cross below or above several dramatic waterfalls that gush down the rocky walls). It is impossible to find the trail without a local guide. As mentioned above, the trail is very exposed in places (several 100 metre drops to the river bottom), barely offering toe-holds. The vegetation is mostly long grass which is surprisingly strong and useful for handholds.

After about three hours you leave the gorge behind and below, and the gradient eases. The path descends towards the river. A side tributary flows in from the east side, and straight ahead of you between the two tributaries lies a grassy flat-topped hill. Head for this by following the side tributary. The way is visible and easy to negotiate though there is no defined path as such. From the top (3800m), Dhaulagiri south face is visible (though greatly foreshortened). The hill looks down on the three glaciers which merge near this point leaving marked ridges of moraine between them. The south face base camp lies just north of this spot at about 4000m, near the confluence of the outflow from two glaciers.

Wild Himalayan herbs and spices

- If you forget to carry tea, do not worry. The tall plant with large red rhubarb like leaves has roots which make a good substitute. It is known as *odar padamchalno*, and you can also eat its stems (it is indeed related to rhubarb and tastes somewhat similar).
- Locals also make delicious salt tea from a small dried fruit known as *Siltimur* which they gather from forest trees. A related fruit husk known as *timur*, is widely used in this area as a spice in food.
- Various wild fungi are also gathered and cooked by villagers, and if you visit in the autumn you will likely be offered some.

GLOSSARY and PHRASEBOOK

Acronyms/abbreviations/nepali words used in the guide

- Chautara – a stone ledge constructed along footpaths on which to rest porter-loads, sometimes with a banyan and pipal tree in the middle to provide shade.
- VDC – Village Development Committee. The lowest political unit in Nepal. A VDC will typically contain several villages.
- Khola – river or stream
- Deorali – a pass
- Bhanjyang – nick point on a ridge
- NGO - Non-Governmental Organization
- Dhara – water spout
- Phedi – the foot of a slope or ridge
- Dobhan – the meeting of two rivers
- Danda (dara) – ridge or hill

- Khani – a mine
- Danda (pr. Dara) – hill or mountain
- Duhre (pr duri) – hill or mountain
- Chiya – tea
- Dudh – milk
- Bazaar – town or settlement with several shops

Note on pronunciation

This has been simplified.

- There are four ‘d’ sounds. These have been simplified to two: d and dh (aspirated)
- There are four ‘t’ sounds. These have been simplified to two: t and th (aspirated)
- There are several ‘r’ sounds. These have been simplified to one.
- There are two ‘a’ sounds: long ‘aa’ (as in a sheep’s *baa*; and short ‘a’ (as in ‘material’)
- ‘e’ should be pronounced ‘eh’ as in ‘hey’
- ‘i’ should be pronounced as ‘ee’ as in feet (short, not a diphthong sound)
- Nasal sounds

Asking Directions

Path	baato
Motor-road	Motor-baato
Uphill	ukalo
Downhill	uralo
Flat/level	terso
Easy/difficult	sajilo/garho
One hour/ two hours	ek guntaa/dui guntaa . . .
Right/left	dayaa/bayaa
Here/there	yahaa/tyahaa
Over there	para
Upper/lower	upallo/uwallo (or) tala
Village	gau
Town	bajar
Pass/col	bhanjhyang/deorali
Can I get a bus?	Bus cha?
How far to the bus?	Bus sama kati cha?
How far to (Pokhara)?	(Pokhara) sama kati cha?
Which way goes to (Pokhara)?	(Pokhara) jaane baato kun ho?
How long does it take?	Kati ta-im (time) laagcha?
Is it far?	Tara cha?
Am I on the right path to (Pokhara)?	Yo (Pokhara) jaane baato ho?
I want to go to (Pokhara)	Ma (Pokhara) jaana chahanchu
Is the path difficult?	Baato garho cha?
Is the path dangerous?	Baato dor-lagdo cha?
I need a guide	(Malai) ga-ide chahincha

Food and accommodation

Cooked rice/lentils/vegetables	dal-bhaat
Cooked food	khana
Water	paani
Boiled water	umaleko paani
Drinking water	piune paani (may still contain bugs!)
Clean water	safa paani (may not meet tourist standards!)
Bottled water	Mineral water (chupa ko paani)
Filtered water	Filta paani
Drinks	piune chij
Tea	chiya
Black tea	phika chiya /raato chiya/dudh na-bhaeko chiya
Coffee	cofi
Sugar	chini
Do you have sugar?	Chini chha?
Please give me tea without sugar	chini na-bhaeko chiya dinos
How much?	kati lagcha/kati parcha/kati bhayo?
I am hungry/not hungry	Malai bhok lagyo/lagena
I am thirsty/not thirsty	Malai tirka lagyo/lagena
Where can I get (cooked) food?	Khana kahaa pahincha?
Is the food ready (to eat)?	Tayar cha?
Is this clean water?	Yo safa paani ho? (be careful!)
Is this boiled (filtered) water?	Yo umaleko (filta) paani ho?
Please boil water for me	Paani umali dinu holaa.
Where can I find accommodation?	Basobas kahaa pahincha?
I need somewhere to sleep	Sutne thau chahanchu
Where is the hotel (teashop)?	Hotel kahaa cha?
How much does it cost?	Kati laagcha?
I need some blankets	Sutne lugaa chahincha
Do you have a clean sheet?	Safa tanda cha?
Where is the toilet?	Toilet (charpi/paikhana) kahaa cha?
Do you sell/have toilet paper?	Toilet paper cha?

Miscellaneous

Yes/No	Ho/Hoina
There is/I have/He has	Cha
There isn't/I haven't/He hasn't	Chaina
Okay	Huncha
Very	dherai
I like	Manparcha/manlagcha
I like Nepal	Nepal manparcha
I need/I want	(malai) chahincha

Do you speak English?
Is there someone who speaks English?
I come from (France)
Do you sell (biscuits)?
Where can I get (biscuits)?
Okay

Inglish bolnu huncha?
Kohi inglish bolne cha?
Ma (France) bata aaeko
(Biscuits) chaa?
(Biscuits) kahaa painchha?
Theek chha.

Health and safety

I have lost my way
I am very tired. I can't walk any more
I had a fall
I have hurt my foot
I hit my head

Baato birayo
Ekdam thakai lagyo. Hirna sakdina.
Lardyo
Kutta lagyo
Thauko lagyo