

TREK 4: Okhle Dhaulagiri Viewpoint & Hot Springs

Grade Easy **Days:** 2-3 days
Permits: none
Highest point: 2560 m
Map: Gurja Himal & Hidden Village

Overview

This 'mini-trek' combines a taste of homestay experience, with panoramic views of the complete Dhaulagiri and Annapurna ranges. To round it off, you can soak in the hot springs at Singa Tatopani (Myagdi khola). Both the start and finish points are easily reached in a few hours from Pokhara and there are regular buses throughout the day. The climb is gradual and the pass at 2,560 m poses no altitude problems. The descent to the Myagdi Khola river is steep in places but not difficult.

To start

Catch a bus for Baglung from the Baglung Bus Station in Pokhara. You may want to depart Pokhara in the afternoon, spending the night in Baglung, in order to commence your trek in the early morning when it is cool. Alternatively, you can break the first day's trek at Kalimati or Bhim Pokhara. If you wish to save time and don't mind a bone-rattling experience it is possible to take a share-jeep to Okhle (vehicles follows a different route to the walking path).

Day 1: Baglung (1000 m) to Okhle (2300 m) 6-7 hours

Baglung to Dikichaur to Kalimati	2 hrs
Kalimati to Titauri to Bhim Pokhara	2 hrs
Bhim Pokhara to Okhle	2.30 hrs

It is advisable to set out early before the heat of the day. In Baglung bazaar make your way to the left side of Vidhya Mandir Secondary School where a footpath leads to a cement staircase. The staircase ends at the Municipality Office (pink building) where the tractor road is re-joined. Follow this upwards, keeping right until you see a well-trodden footpath rising through pines and bamboos on the left. The footpath is marked by stone *chautara* around pipal and banyan trees, and stone-walled ponds for water buffalo.

Follow this path for the next hour or so, ignoring the tractor road which crosses it from time to time. Leaving the village of **Raato Maato** (Tr: red earth) to your right, continue upwards through rocky crags and sweet-scented pines, with stone steps in the steeper spots. Nowadays this ancient trail is little walked, and one can enjoy the silence and solitude. After 1-2 hours the delightful village of **Dikichaur** set amid wild cherry trees (flowering October-December), comes into view and the trail merges with the jeep track. Follow the track to the right through the village, contouring left at the top. In 15 minutes this leads one to **Kalimati**. There are two teashops near the school where an overnight stay could be made.

With the main climb accomplished, you can enjoy looking down on cascades of terraced rice fields while walking on a fairly level, traffic-free jeep track. New tracks are proliferating at a fast pace, and at times it may be

unclear which one to pick. In general head westwards and gently upwards. If in doubt, ask for the next village by name.

Titauri, is reached in about 1 hour and here, if you glance back, you catch a glimpse of Annapurna South and Machapuchare peaks. There is a teashop and two **homestays**. The first is located in a cluster of homes at **Ghaderi Danda** some 5 minutes below the trail on the left (Kopila Kisan ph. 9869014304). The second is 10 minutes further on the right - a large traditional house painted blue and green (Makhuri Kisan 9806119394)

Continuing westwards, the path descends to negotiate a cliff and then climbs to **Bhim Pokhara (Multana)** on a narrow shoulder of land (1 hr). The village has several teashops with lodging, and some trekkers may prefer to break their journey here.

Heading north-west, the track contours around a minor ridge and enters a wide bowl of terraced fields with scattered villages, the locality known as Dhamja. Okhle – your destination for the night – is visible at the top of the arc. In an hour or less the village of **Sima** is reached. Here there is a choice of tracks. The right track is longer and more boring, but probably less likelihood of missing the route. The left track leads to a short-cut footpath past a pretty waterfall. If you choose the left track, descend a short distance to where the track turns sharply to the left and there is a house on the righthand side with a cement irrigation canal. Take the footpath behind the house which follows the canal.

The path descends to cross a waterfall stream with a small suspension bridge. After a short stiff climb you rejoin the jeep track and arrive at the village of **Majh Katera [Teashop lodge]**. We recommend carrying on to a homestay at the top-most village of **Okhle** [Homestay: Jit Bahadur Bishwakarma Ph 9847682248]. The footpath for Okhle ascends steeply shortly after the Majh Katera lodge. The climb will not be wasted since it reduces the climb the next day.

Okhle village, Dhamjha

Okhle is derived from the word *to crack*, the village being named after a large boulder with a depression where people would bring their rice to hull in the old days. Bishwakarma (*dalit* metal-workers), Magar and Chantyal people settled here during the copper mining days of the Rana regime (18-19th century). On the north side of the ridge tunnel entrances can be discovered, but they are difficult to access. Mining ceased 100 years ago, but even today weeds will not grow on the old slag heaps where the copper ore was processed. Okhle is a delightful village where caste divisions are breaking down, and tourism can be a further boost to this process.

Day 2: Okhle to Singa Tatopani	4 hrs
Okhle to Dhaulagiri viewpoint (2560m)	1 hr
Viewpoint to Tatopani (1000m)	3 hrs

From Okhle Primary School, follow the trail leading upwards. After 10 minutes an open grassy meadow is reached with a stone *pokhari* and a small plantation of pines on the left. Near the pines you pass one of the old slag heaps. Ten minutes further on, follow the trail heading

Singa-Tatopani Hot Springs

Tatopani simply means *hot water*, and there are hundreds of villages with the name Tatopani in Nepal. These hot springs are not to be confused with the more familiar Tatopani hot springs on the Kali Gandaki river (Annapurna Circuit trek) visited by foreign tourists.

The Singa hot springs on the other hand, attract crowds of Nepalis from as far afield as Kathmandu, as they are said to have stronger healing properties. Many seek treatment for arthritic pain, and they may stay 2-3 weeks, bathing twice a day. A ticket for the modest price of a few rupees gives entrance to a cement pool divided by rope into two halves – one half for men, the other for women – covered with a tin roof for shade. The water is changed regularly. Local shops sell cheap and appropriate bathing gear – shorts for men, and baggy shorts and tank tops for women. There are cubicles where one can change.

A bathe here will be a cultural immersion experience! You are likely to be the only 'foreigner' and someone is bound to strike up a conversation with you if you smile at them. After soaking in the hot pool you can wash off with clean hot water on a rocky outcrop or even take a dip in the Myagdi river next to the small pagoda temple.

right. It climbs steadily up from the village on some old stone steps through oak-rhododendron forest. The trail is obvious and in just under an hour the Dhaulagiri viewpoint of Dhamja pass is reached. A stone *chautara* provides the perfect seat for gazing at the astounding panorama of snow-capped mountains. These include the Annapurna range from an angle rarely seen, and the whole Dhaulagiri range.

Follow the trail which descends bearing left (north-west). After 15 minutes a small trail diverts to the right. This dead-ends at a small temple atop a rocky pinnacle. Returning to the main trail, continue descending to reach a grassy shoulder with yet more panoramic views. Further down, the footpath merges with a jeep track near a communications tower on the edge of **Dole**. The local primary school is one of many in Nepal with incredible views. Just beyond the school, leave the jeep track to follow a footpath which descends on the left and leads to **Chepari**

From Chepari onwards there are many villages and a maze of alternative footpaths and jeep tracks, with no clear main trail. However, one cannot get lost for long, and taking an alternative route will not waste much time. Just keep asking anyone you meet for **Tatopani** which lies on the major Myagdi Khola. The shortest route makes a very steep and sometimes slippery descent through forest to emerge on a small precipice directly above a suspension bridge across the Myagdi Khola. To reach the bridge it twists eastwards and then returns westwards across the cliff. Cross the bridge and the village of Tatopani is right there.

LINK: *This mini-trek can be the prelude to Trek 1, replacing a portion of the bus-ride between Pokhara and Darbang. It gives a panoramic view of the contorted maze of rivers and ridges which lead to the foot of Gurja Himal. From Singa Tatopani, one can continue walking to Darbang (5-6 hrs) or catch a bus.*