

## TREK 9 : Kathe Khola: Valley of a Million Rice-fields

**Grade:** Easy  
**Days:** 2-6 (flexible)  
**Permits:** none  
**Highest point:** 2560 m

### Overview

Like an abstract art-form created by centuries of toil, the steep narrow terraces cascade from all points of the compass, gracefully outlining the contours of the mountains. In the monsoon a million lakes reflect the sky, and in autumn the terraces turn gold with ripening rice. This is the quintessential Nepal of terraced fields, rushing rivers, mud-washed villages, fronds of bamboo and views of the Dhaulagiri and Annapurna Himalayas. Inhabited largely by Magar people, this valley also has numerous communities of *Dalits*, people who were once the artisans of Nepal, practicing a variety of trades - cobblers, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, tailors and musicians. Although these skills are fast dying out, you will meet some who still practice their craft.

This is an ideal route for those with limited time, or those wishing for an easy introduction to trekking in off-the-beaten valleys of Nepal. The beauty of this trek is its flexibility in duration since at any point, the trek - which follows the perimeter of the valley - can be curtailed by descending to the Kathe Khola river (allow 2 hrs) where frequent buses take 30 minutes to reach Baglung.

### To Start

From Pokhara, take a bus, share-jeep, or taxi to Baglung (2 hrs). For accommodation there is the tourist-standard Peace Palace hotel in Baglung, or rustic homestays in Bukini village.

### Bukini: 'Base-point' Village

Forty years ago when we spent a year living here, Bukini was a traditional village, two days walk from the nearest road. Nowadays, lying just 15 minutes across the river from the bus station in the burgeoning bazaar of Baglung, it has experienced more changes than most, and yet prosperity has largely by-passed it. The village still retains charm and its super-friendly Magar inhabitants (unwritten motto: "we're all one family") are ready to welcome you to their homestays, and invite you to spend a day with them participating in their daily farming tasks such as ploughing, planting, harvesting, and threshing.

Located a gentle 15 minutes walk from Baglung across a dramatic suspension footbridge, Bukini offers a friendly authentic homestay experience for trekkers and non-trekkers alike. **Homestay** contact person: Narendra Thapa Magar (ph. 9806171872) and Ganesh Thapa Magar (ph. 9857620477).

### Stage 1: Baglung to Didanda 2 hrs

The trek begins with a dramatic suspension bridge across the incised meanders of the Kathe Khola, spanning 235m from cliff-top to cliff-top. For those with a fear of heights a blind-fold may be necessary! The bridge is located 150m from Baglung's Bus Park.

On the far side, take the jeep track on the right. If you are planning to stay the night at **Bukini**, turn right onto a footpath after passing a small temple and cross-roads (15 mins from bridge). Otherwise continue on the jeep track and footpaths where they appear, which winds gently up through woods and terraced fields to the steep Magar hamlet of **Aatmuri** (1 hour). From here, a footpath continues onto **Kumal Danda**, another Magar village, set amid orange trees, and in a further hour the village of **Didanda**. This is a village of people who used to be cobblers by trade, although they no longer practise. For **Homestay**, contact Nar Bahadur Sarki (Ph. 9847 668534).

### Stage 2: Didanda to Ramikotham 2-3 hrs

Make a short cut by following a line of cottages to an old *chautara* by a grove of bamboos, where a trail leads through rice fields and re-joins the track. There are more fields and wonderful views across the valley and the peaks of Annapurna rise as altitude is gained. The next village is **Thulo Dhunga** (tr. Big Rock) followed by **Gairiphant** (1 hr from Didanda). Your route now diverges from the main track to take a footpath by a round house (now rare), up a gully to a pine-clad ridge to reach the tiny hamlet of **Khukuri Danda** (tr. Cock's Ridge) in just under 1 hour. If it is late or legs are tired, you are advised to spend the night here at the **homestay** of Lil Bahadur Pariyar (Ph 9806193164), as it is a further hour's steep climb to the next homestays at Ramithan. Khukuri Danda is a village of tailors, and you are likely to see at least one sewing machine in motion.

Otherwise, continue climbing for a further hour to reach the ridgeline village of **Ramikothan** which provides views of 11 major peaks in the Dhaulagiri and Annapurna ranges, from Pyutha in the west to Manaslu in the east. With such a panoramic view it is not surprising that the ridge is honoured with several Hindu temples. For **Homestays** contact Kumari Kisan (Ph 9821392305) or Sarbajit Kisan (Ph 9869633939). Sarbajit's father was a leather worker by trade and he will be happy to explain how they used to process the leather and make it into halters and drums. Just below Ramikothan is **Durimare**, a village of tailors who double as musicians, and a visit to see their traditional instruments made of copper, brass, wood, bamboo, and leather, can be arranged.

### Stage 3: Ramikothan to Lekh Khani 3-4 hrs

The simplest way to reach Kadesh is to drop down through the villages of **Pirala**, **Tingram** and **Resa**, and then follow a jeep track which climbs and contours around the next ridge and steep-sided river gulch to **Kadesh**, a village isolated by two deep valleys and surrounded by forest. **Homestay** can be arranged at Khim Bahadur Bishwakarma who is a working blacksmith, or an easy 45 minutes to one hour brings one to the largely Magar village of **Lekh Khani**. For **homestays**, contact Jhak Bahadur Sunar (Ph. 9846152363), a headmaster by profession, who comes from a line of traditional goldsmiths.

Alternatively, if one continues up the ridge from Ramikothan, past the village of Bauraichaur (homestay available at Chandra Kala Pariyar (ph 9806546738), there is a high-level footpath through forest and pastures. This route avoids jeep tracks and villages but takes an extra hour to reach **Kadesh**, and includes some slippery trails, but is spectacular in the spring when the rhododendrons are in flower. It is also possible to climb right the way up to the forest-swathed peak of Ganja Duri (2759m), rich with bird

life and botanical species, and from there descend directly to **Lekh Khani** (allow 6-7 hrs). **Lekh Khani** used to have artisanal copper mines, and elders of the village can tell you more about its past history. There is now a small workshop where they make traditional paper from the *lokhta* shrub (*Daphne bhoolua*).

#### **Stage 4: Lekh Khani to Bihun 2 hrs**

There is a choice between the easy but dusty jeep track route to **Bihun**, which drops down and then climbs up a deep gulch, or a narrow, hard-to-find footpath which is more picturesque and contours around the gulch. Both take about the same amount of time and lead one to a notch in the **Bihun** ridge. The Bihun ridge is a major artery for motor traffic from Baglung to Burtibang on the Burigad khola. **Homestays** are available at **Raiti Pokhari**, or there are rooms with bathrooms in a modern cement building (Shiva Duri Hotel but no signboard). Contact person for both: Mandrupa Pariyar (9841015009).

Mandrupa's family are traditional tailors, and it is the tailors who also perform as musicians for weddings and festivals. This practice is still very much alive, and Mandrupa's father will be delighted to show you, and play for you, a variety of instruments which he keeps in his home. Nearby you can visit the forge of Bhim Bahadur Bishwakarma, a traditional metal-worker who makes copper water pots and musical instruments and, being modern-minded, also welds window grills in his workshop.

#### **Stage 5: Bihun to Tham Danda 2 hrs**

Your destination homestay can be seen from the start-point – a small white dot on the knoll of a distant ridge. Keep your eye on it! The first hour to the village of **Pyerigaon** follows an almost level jeep track but there is virtually no traffic. Just beyond, take the footpath on the left which climbs steeply to a Sarki village on the ridge of **Chilledanda** in 0.30 hrs. In a further 30 minutes' climb, leads one to a *bhanjhyang* and **Tham Danda**, a Magar village with a tiny satellite hamlet perched on the top-knot knoll with superb sunrise and sunset 360 degrees views. Your **homestay** hosts are Dali and Dhani Kala Thapa Magar (Ph 9867770505).

If you wish to return directly to Baglung the next day, there is a wonderful route which descends from Thamdanda through the amazingly sculpted terraced fields of Trangram which cascade some 500m – probably the best example in the valley.

#### **Stage 6: Tham Danda to Okhle 2 hrs**

Keeping high through other houses of Tham Danda, continue contouring around for 45 minutes to a teashop at the top of the village of Phalam Khani which means 'Iron Mine' reflecting its past history. After a further 15 minutes the highest houses in Dhamjha are reached. If you do not wish to include Okhle in your tour, descend the Dhamjha ridge for 20 minutes to **homestays** in the Sarki community lower down. Contact person:

For Okhle, the path continues contouring for a while and then climbs quite steeply to **Okhle**, which is the highest village on this circuit, nestling among cliffs at 2300m. For **homestays**, contact Jit Bahadur Bishwakarma (ph. 9847682248) or Subedar Tek Bahadur Pun (ph. 98476 30454). This is a village of Magar, Chantyal, and Kami (metal-workers) who have remained here after the local

copper mines closed. You can visit a working forge, and the entrances to old mines.

**Link:** Trek 4

**Options:** From Okhle, one can return to Baglung by jeep (1-2 hrs), or on foot (6 hrs), but the most scenic option is to climb to a low pass (2560m) with panoramic views of the Himalayas from where one can descend into the Myagdi valley and the hot springs at Singa Tatopani. Regardless of your plans, it is worthwhile sparing the time to climb to the pass (45 minutes to 1 hour) from Okhle in the early morning to appreciate the extensive views of Dhaulagiri and Annapurna ranges (the best on this trek). The route to the Pass (Dhaulagiri viewpoint) and the Hot Springs is described in Trek XX Day 2.

#### **Stage 7: Okhle to Titauri 3 hrs**

To return to Baglung on foot, keeping within the Kathe Khola valley, a trail drops steeply down the cliffs. It takes around 30 minutes to reach the jeep track at **Majh Katera** (Teashop lodge). After 15 minutes, just beyond a small temple on the left and a buffalo pond on the right, a path angles down on the right to cross a tributary stream by a small suspension bridge. From here follow the cement irrigation canal which leads to houses in **Sima** village. where a jeep track which climbs left and joins the original jeep track from Majh Katera. **Multana** with a teashop lodge is reached after 2 hours, perched on the Bhim Pokhara ridge.

The next section is the dustiest and least pleasant of the whole trek, but it can be accomplished in less than an hour, so grit your teeth (and if a vehicle passes, you may get grit between your teeth). The jeep track is forced to drop down below a cliff section (high above you can see a rock resembling an Easter Island statue), and then climb back up to the village of **Titauri**. The first **homestay** (Makhuri Kisan 9806119394) is a large traditional house painted blue and green on the left side just above the jeep trail, about 45 minutes' walk from Multana. Fifteen minutes further on is the second homestay (Kopila Kisan ph. 9869014304) is in a cluster of homes at **Ghaderi Danda** some 5 minutes below the trail on the right.

#### **Stage 8: Titauri to Baglung 2-3 hrs**

Keeping high on the largely un-trafficked jeep track the next village on your circuit is **Kalimati**, where there is a teashop lodge called 'Khanal Niwas' (Srijana Khanal ph. 9847628886). The track descends through the village of **Dikkichaur**. If interested, stop by the home of Tek Raj Sharma (ph 9847629523) who makes bamboo stools. Continuing straight downhill, your final stage follows an ancient stone staircase which descends through pine trees all the way to **Baglung** (accommodation: Peace Palace Hotel, and many others).