Address: Boudha, 06 Kathmandu Nepal
Tel: +977-9842802155, +977-9844956319
E-Mail: info@outwardadventuretreks.com
www.outwardadventuretreks.com

Himlung Himal Expedition - 25 Days

Himlung Himal Climbing is a grand adventure located to the north of Manaslu, right to the Tibetan border. As this mountain was not opened up to foreigners until the early '90s, which explains why Himlung Himal wasn't climbed until 1992, by a Japanese expedition, it is a less explored destination and is untouched by modernization.

Although it was opened late, Himlung Himal has the highest summit success rate among the 7000m expeditions run every year. Thus, it is known as one of the climbable peaks with fewer technical difficulties in western Nepal. It is the best choice to have close-up views of Annapurna and Mansiri (where Mt. Manaslu lies) mountain massifs, green valleys, pristine waterfalls, rural settlements, and to practice summiting 8000m mountains.

Himlung-Himal-Expediti...

An ascent of such mountains will boost your altitude confidence and is an implausible adventure in and of itself in this amazing part of the Himalayas. Make a highly recommended detour off the beaten path to this infrequently visited, Tibetan-influenced region soaked in Buddhism.

Our journey to Himlung Mountain begins with a drive to Koto, the beginning point of the trek. This will include the beginning point of the Annapurna Circuit trek (Syange or Dharapani) and the ending point of the Manaslu Circuit trek (Dharapani). Trekking further, leaving the main trail of the Annapurna Circuit trek route, we reach Meta, Kyang, and Phu Gaun – the largest Tibetan settlement in the entire region.

Our base for Himlung Himal will be just above the Tibetan village of Phu Gaon (4250m) in the very isolated and restricted Nar-Phu region of Nepal, which is very far away from the more crowded Annapurna trail. There are no roads leading into this region, so the main source of transportation is yak, mule, or porter.

Further trekking, we reach the Himlung Himal Base Camp. Being well prepared here, we climb Camp I, II, III, and the final summit push. The acclimatization climb will be organized repeatedly. We shall start our training and practice the techniques we will use to reach the summit, including taking it in stages to reach the higher camps.

Spending enough time in the base camp, we set up three higher camps where we can spend time acclimating. Summiting the peak, we climb back to base camp and begin trek again till we reach Koto. Catching the vehicle, we drive back to Kathmandu and end our dream adventure.

HIMLUNG HIMAL EXPEDITION: CLIMBING ROUTE

Last year, a guided team of Outward Adventure Treks organized the Himlung Himal Expedition with four clients from Belarus and accomplished the trip successfully. They used a thrilling 25-day itinerary itinerary which takes climbers through the remote and culturally rich landscapes of Nepal, culminating in the ascent of the 7,126-meter peak. The adventure begins in Kathmandu, where participants acclimatize, explore the city's heritage sites, and prepare for the

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climb.

Himlung-Expedition

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From there, a scenic drive leads to Koto, the starting point of the trek into the hidden valleys of the Manaslu region. The trail winds through lush forests, traditional villages, and high-altitude terrain, gradually ascending to the ancient Phu Valley. This initial phase not only helps with acclimatization but also offers a glimpse into the unique Tibetan-influenced culture of the region, with visits to monasteries and interactions with local communities.

The trekking portion of the expedition is as rewarding as the climb itself, passing through picturesque villages like Meta, Chyaku, and Kyang before reaching Phu Gaun, a medieval-style village at 4,580 meters. Here, climbers take an exploration day to visit the historic Tashi Monastery and other cultural landmarks while further adapting to the altitude.

camping-tent-himlung-h...

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The journey then continues toward the Himlung Himal Base Camp at 4,842 meters, where the real climbing preparations begin. After a rest day to organize gear and review climbing strategies, the team embarks on a series of rotations to higher camps—first to Camp I (5,450m) and then to Camp II (6,000m)—before descending back to Base Camp for recovery. These rotations are crucial for acclimatization and help climbers assess the route's challenges, including steep snow slopes and crevassed sections.

The summit push is a carefully planned, multi-day effort that begins with a return to Camp I and Camp II before advancing to Camp III at 6,250 meters. From here, climbers make their final ascent under the cover of early morning, navigating icy ridges and high-altitude terrain to reach the summit of Himlung Himal.

Standing at 7,126 meters, the peak offers breathtaking panoramic views of the surrounding Himalayan giants, including Manaslu and Annapurna. After celebrating this hard-earned achievement, the team carefully descends back to Camp III and then to Base Camp, ensuring safety remains the top priority. A contingency day is built into the itinerary to account for unpredictable weather, ensuring flexibility for a successful summit bid.

The return journey retraces the route through the Phu Valley, allowing climbers to savor the landscapes and culture once more before driving back to Kathmandu. The expedition concludes with a well-deserved rest day in the capital, where participants can reflect on their achievement, share stories, and celebrate before their final departure.

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himlung-phu-gate

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Throughout the climb, the emphasis is on gradual acclimatization, teamwork, and respect for the mountain environment. The Himlung Himal Expedition is not just a physical challenge but also a cultural immersion, blending adventure with the timeless traditions of Nepal's high Himalayan communities.

Overall, this expedition is designed for climbers seeking a less crowded but equally rewarding 7,000-meter peak experience. The combination of stunning scenery, cultural encounters, and a well-structured climbing plan makes it an unforgettable adventure.

With experienced guides, proper acclimatization, and a carefully paced itinerary, participants have the best chance of summiting while staying safe and healthy in the high-altitude environment. Whether it's the serene beauty of the Phu Valley or the exhilaration of standing atop Himlung Himal, this journey leaves a lasting impression on all who undertake it.

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PRICE INCLUDES

Transportation

- Private vehicle: Hotel and airport transfers, sightseeing, and Kathmandu to and Koto to Kathmandu

Accommodation and Food

- 4 nights' accommodation (twin sharing) in Kathmandu in a 4-star category hotel
- 9 nights' accommodation (twin sharing) during the trek in the best available local lodge
- 11 nights' accommodation during the climb in the camp at High Camp
- Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner throughout the trek and climb
- Seasonal fruits throughout the trek and climb
- Breakfast in Kathmandu
- Farewell dinner in one of the cultural restaurants in Kathmandu

Staff

- An English-speaking Trekking Guide including his/her accommodation, transportation, food, salary, transportation, and insurance
- One assistant guide for every 6 trekkers including their accommodation, transportation, food, salary, transportation, and insurance
- Porters (ratio of 1:2 clients) including their accommodation, transportation, food, salary, transportation, insurance
- A climbing guide including his accommodation, transportation, food, salary, transportation, and insurance

Permits and Taxes

- Annapurna Conservation Area Entry Permit
- Restricted Area Entry Permit
- Himlung Himal Expedition Permit
- All applicable taxes to be paid to the Nepalese government

Extra

- Complimentary four seasons down sleeping bag and down jacket provided for the duration of the trek and climbing
- A Duffel bag (to keep personal belongings to be carried by porter), a down sleeping bag, and down jacket hired for the duration of the trek and climb
- Complimentary Himlung Himal Climbing map, Outward Adventure t-shirt and cap and Climbing Certificate
- Tents for Base Camp, Camp I, Camp II, and Camp III accommodation
- First aid medicine box carried at all times by a guide

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PRICE EXCLUDES

- International Flight Cost
- Nepal Entry Visa Fees
- Extra night accommodation in Kathmandu due to early arrival or late departure, or early return from the climb
  Personal expenses such as alcoholic drinks, shopping, snacks, boiled bottled water, hot (Tea/ Coffee) and cold drinks, hot shower, alcohol, Wi-Fi, telephone call, battery recharge fee, extra porters, etc
- Additional costs suffered due to causes beyond our control, such as natural disasters, weather conditions, itinerary modifications due to safety concerns, emergency evacuation, changes in government policies, strikes, and so forth.
- Summit Bonus for the Sherpa Guide ($700) after the successful ascent.
- Tips for guides and porters (Tips are appreciated)

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ITINERARY IN DETAIL

Day 1: Arrive at Kathmandu (1,338m/4,390ft) & transfer to Hotel

Upon your arrival at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu, you will be warmly welcomed by a representative from **Outward Adventure Treks and Expedition**. After completing immigration and customs formalities, you will be transferred to your hotel in the heart of the city. The bustling streets of Kathmandu offer a vibrant introduction to Nepal, with colorful markets, historic temples, and the scent of incense filling the air.

Once you check into the hotel, you can take some time to relax and freshen up after your journey. In the evening, you may take a short stroll around **Thamel**, a popular tourist hub filled with restaurants, shops, and travel agencies. A welcome dinner will be arranged where you'll meet your climbing guide and team, who will brief you about the upcoming expedition.

Overnight in Kathmandu, where you can rest and prepare for the exciting days ahead. The hotel provides comfortable accommodations, allowing you to recover from jet lag before beginning your adventure in the Himalayas.

Day 2: Sightseeing in Kathmandu (1,338m/4,390ft) and Climbing Preparations

After breakfast, you will embark on a guided sightseeing tour of Kathmandu's UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The first stop is Swayambhunath (the Monkey Temple), an ancient stupa perched atop a hill with panoramic views of the valley. Next, you'll visit Pashupatinath, a sacred Hindu temple complex on the banks of the Bagmati River, where you may witness traditional cremation ceremonies.

In the afternoon, you'll explore Boudhanath Stupa, one of the largest Buddhist stupas in the world, surrounded by monasteries and shops selling Tibetan artifacts. Later, you'll return to the hotel for a detailed briefing on the Himlung Himal expedition. Your guide will check your climbing gear, discuss the itinerary, and address any last-minute questions.

The evening is free for final preparations—shopping for any missing equipment or simply relaxing. You'll enjoy another night in Kathmandu before heading towards the mountains tomorrow.

Day 3: Drive from Kathmandu (1,338m/4,390ft) to Koto (2,600m / 8,530ft)

An early morning drive from Kathmandu takes you through scenic landscapes, passing terraced fields, rivers, and traditional Nepali villages. The road winds alongside the Trishuli River, offering glimpses of rural life in Nepal. After several hours, you'll stop for lunch in Besisahar, the gateway to the Annapurna and Manang regions.

From Besisahar, the journey continues on a rougher road towards Koto, a small village nestled in the Annapurna Conservation Area. As you ascend, the air becomes cooler, and the views of snow-capped peaks grow more dramatic. Upon arrival in Koto, you'll check into a teahouse and enjoy a warm meal while soaking in the peaceful mountain atmosphere.

Overnight in Koto, where you'll rest before beginning the trek tomorrow. The sound of the nearby river and the crisp

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mountain air provide a perfect introduction to the wilderness ahead.

Day 4: Trek from Koto (2,600m/8,530ft) to Meta (3,560m/11,680ft)

After an early breakfast, your trek officially begins as you follow the trail along the Nar Phu River, entering the restricted Nar Phu Valley. The path initially winds through dense pine and juniper forests, with occasional glimpses of snow-capped peaks. The first section is a steady climb, crossing several suspension bridges over roaring rivers. You'll pass through small settlements like Dharmasala, where locals still follow traditional Tibetan-influenced lifestyles.

As you ascend, the landscape transitions into a rugged, high-altitude desert, with dramatic rock formations and deep gorges. The trail becomes steeper, and the air thinner, but the breathtaking scenery keeps you motivated. After about 6-7 hours of trekking, you'll reach Meta, a picturesque village surrounded by towering cliffs. The village offers stunning views of the surrounding Himalayas, making it a perfect spot to rest and acclimatize.

Day 5: Trek from Meta (3,560m/11,680ft) to Chyaku (3,700m / 12,140ft)

Today's trek is relatively short but takes you deeper into the remote Nar Phu Valley. The trail follows the river upstream, passing through narrow canyons and crossing several small streams. The landscape becomes increasingly barren, with towering rock walls and sparse vegetation. Along the way, you may spot blue sheep or even the elusive snow leopard if you're lucky.

After a few hours of trekking, you'll reach Chyaku, a small settlement with a few stone houses and yak herders' camps. The village is surrounded by high cliffs and offers a peaceful, isolated atmosphere. Since the day's hike is not too strenuous, you'll have time to explore the area, interact with locals, and take in the raw beauty of the valley.

Overnight in Chyaku, where you'll enjoy simple yet hearty meals prepared by your teahouse hosts. The quiet surroundings and crisp mountain air make for a restful night.

Day 6: Hike from Chyaku (3,700m/12,140ft) to Kyang (3,560m/11,680ft)

The trail descends slightly today as you make your way towards Kyang, another remote village in the Nar Phu Valley. The path follows the riverbed, crossing loose scree slopes and occasional landslides. The scenery remains stark and dramatic, with towering cliffs and rugged rock formations dominating the landscape.

Kyang is a small, traditional village with a handful of stone houses and a tranquil atmosphere. The locals, primarily of Tibetan origin, live a simple life, herding yaks and growing barley. You'll have time to explore the village, visit the local monastery, and observe the unique culture of this isolated region.

Overnight in Kyang, where you'll stay in a basic teahouse. The evening is spent relaxing and preparing for the next day's climb to Phu Gaun.

Day 7: Trek from Kyang (3,560m/11,680ft) to Phu Gaun (4,580m/15,030ft)

The day begins with an exhilarating climb as we leave Kyang and ascend towards the ancient village of Phu Gaun. The

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trail winds through spectacular rock formations and crosses several small streams, offering breathtaking views of the surrounding Himalayan peaks. As we gain altitude, the landscape transforms into a high-altitude desert, with sparse vegetation and dramatic cliffs. The final approach to Phu Gaun reveals a hidden valley where time seems to have stood still.

Phu Gaun is one of Nepal's most remote and culturally preserved villages, with traditional stone houses and a medieval atmosphere. The village is home to about 40 families of Tibetan origin who maintain centuries-old customs and practices. Upon arrival, we'll visit the historic Tashi Lhakhang Monastery, which houses ancient Buddhist scriptures and artifacts. The monastery's colorful prayer flags flutter against the backdrop of snow-capped mountains, creating a truly magical setting.

We'll spend the night in a simple guesthouse, enjoying warm hospitality and local dishes like thukpa (noodle soup) and tsampa (roasted barley flour). The thin air at this altitude may make sleeping difficult, but the incredible starlit sky and peaceful ambiance more than compensate. This is a rare opportunity to experience authentic Himalayan culture untouched by modernity.

Day 8: Exploration day at Phu Valley (4,580m / 15,030ft); Visit Samdu, Choling, and Tashi Monastery

Today is dedicated to acclimatization and exploration of the fascinating Phu Valley. After breakfast, we'll visit the nearby villages of Samdu and Choling, where we can observe traditional Tibetan Buddhist culture in its purest form. The locals, dressed in colorful woolen robes, go about their daily lives herding yaks and weaving textiles. We may be invited for butter tea in one of the stone houses, gaining insight into their unique way of life.

In the afternoon, we'll hike up to the ruins of the old Phu Fort, which offers panoramic views of the entire valley and surrounding peaks like Himlung Himal and Kang Guru. The fort's crumbling walls tell stories of ancient battles and the region's strategic importance on the Tibet-Nepal trade route. Our guide will share fascinating legends about the valley's history and spiritual significance.

The day concludes with a visit to the monastery for evening prayers, where the resonant chanting of monks and the scent of burning juniper incense create a profoundly spiritual atmosphere. This rest day is crucial for acclimatization before we push higher towards base camp tomorrow. We'll enjoy another night in Phu Gaun, savoring the last comforts before heading into the wilderness.

Day 9: Trek from Phu (4,580m/15,030ft) to Himlung Himal Base Camp (4,842m/15,885ft)

Leaving Phu Gaun behind, we begin our approach to Himlung Himal Base Camp. The trail climbs steadily through moraines and glacial valleys, with increasingly spectacular views of the surrounding peaks. As we gain altitude, the air becomes noticeably thinner, and we must pace ourselves carefully. The landscape is stark yet beautiful, with towering icefalls and rugged rock formations surrounding us.

After about 5-6 hours of trekking, we'll reach the base camp, situated on a rocky moraine plateau with direct views of Himlung Himal's impressive south face. The climbing team will have already set up camp, including comfortable sleeping

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tents, a dining tent, and toilet facilities. This will be our home for the next several days as we prepare for our summit attempt.

The afternoon is spent organizing gear, attending a safety briefing from our expedition leader, and beginning our acclimatization routine. Evenings at base camp are surprisingly social, with team members sharing stories over hot drinks as the temperature drops rapidly after sunset. The first night at this altitude may be restless, but our bodies will gradually adjust to the thin air in preparation for the climbs ahead.

Day 10: Himlung Himal Base Camp (4,842m/15,885ft) Rest

Today is a crucial rest day to allow our bodies to fully adapt to the altitude before the climbing begins. After a leisurely breakfast, we'll conduct essential skills training on the glacier near base camp. Our guides will review fixed-line techniques, crampon use, and rope team travel—critical skills for the days ahead. The session doubles as a light acclimatization hike, helping our bodies adjust while staying active.

The afternoon is free for personal preparations—organizing summit gear, hydrating, and resting. The medical team will conduct health checks, monitoring oxygen saturation and heart rates to ensure everyone is adapting well. This is also an opportunity to ask final questions about the climb ahead and review emergency procedures.

As the sun sets behind the peaks, we'll enjoy a special "pre-climb" dinner with extra calories to fuel our upcoming efforts. The mood is a mix of excitement and focus as we mentally prepare for moving to Camp I tomorrow. A final equipment check ensures nothing is forgotten before we enter the true climbing phase of the expedition.

Day 11: Himlung Himal Base Camp (4,842m/15,885ft) to Camp I (5,450m/17,880ft)

The real climb begins as we ascend 600m to Camp I through a mix of moraine and glacial terrain. Roped up for safety, we navigate crevassed sections before reaching the steep snow slopes leading to camp. The thin air makes progress slow but steady, with frequent breaks to hydrate and catch our breath. After 5-6 hours, we reach Camp I's strategically placed platforms carved into the snow.

Camp I offers breathtaking views down the valley and up toward the route ahead. The climbing team has prepared tents with insulating pads, and the kitchen staff delivers hot drinks the moment we arrive. Despite the altitude, there's a sense of achievement as we settle in—this is the first step toward the summit.

The evening is spent melting snow for water, eating energy-dense foods, and resting early. Sleeping at this altitude is challenging, but we focus on recovery—tomorrow brings an important acclimatization rotation to Camp II before descending. Oxygen levels are monitored throughout the night to ensure proper adaptation.

Day 12: Climb Camp I (5,450m/17,880ft) to Camp II (6,000m/19,685ft) and return to Base Camp (5,450m/17,880ft)

Today's push to Camp II is our most critical acclimatization exercise. The route follows a 35-40° snow slope with fixed lines, requiring careful crampon technique. As we climb above 5,800m, the effects of altitude become pronounced—each

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step demands focus. After 4 strenuous hours, we reach Camp II's wind-sheltered location beneath the imposing summit pyramid.

After a short rest and hydration break at Camp II, we begin our descent all the way back to Base Camp. This "climb high, sleep low" strategy maximizes acclimatization while allowing recovery at lower elevation. The return takes about 6 hours total, with the last section across the moraine feeling endless in our fatigue.

Back at Base Camp by late afternoon, the medical team checks everyone thoroughly. A celebratory dinner marks the completion of our key acclimatization rotation—we're now physically prepared for the summit push. Two full rest days at base camp will follow to rebuild energy reserves before our final ascent.

Day 13: Rest day in Base Camp (4,842m/15,885ft)

A complete rest day for physical and mental recovery. The team sleeps in, enjoying the luxury of thicker air at 4,842m. The kitchen serves favorite comfort foods—pancakes for breakfast, pizza for lunch—to boost morale and calories. Personal time is spent reviewing summit gear, writing in journals, or simply soaking in the mountain views.

In the afternoon, the expedition leader holds the definitive summit briefing. We analyze the latest weather forecast (typically aiming for a 3-4 day window of stable conditions) and finalize the climbing roster. Individual oxygen systems are tested, and summit packs are meticulously packed—every gram counts at high altitude.

An early bedtime concludes the day. Tomorrow we begin our summit push sequence—all preparations are complete, all training has led to this moment. The excitement is palpable, but discipline prevails; we know the real challenge is just beginning.

Day 14: Climb Base Camp (4,842m/15,885ft) to Camp I (5,450m/17,880ft)

With nervous energy buzzing through camp, we begin our official summit push after an alpine-style breakfast. The familiar route to Camp I feels different today - every step carries the weight of impending summit attempts. Our packs are heavier with additional supplies, but lighter in spirit knowing we're finally executing the plan we've trained for. The glacier seems to creak louder today as we navigate the same crevasses that now feel like old acquaintances rather than obstacles.

Upon reaching Camp I by early afternoon, we establish our most comfortable high camp yet. The Sherpa team has pre-positioned additional oxygen bottles and supplies, transforming our temporary home into a well-stocked base of operations. We conduct final checks on all climbing systems - harnesses, jumars, oxygen masks - knowing any oversight could prove costly higher up the mountain. The evening is spent in quiet contemplation, visualizing the coming days' challenges over steaming mugs of ginger tea.

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As dusk falls, the temperature plummets to -20°C (-4°F), but our sleeping bags and anticipation keep us warm. The occasional roar of avalanches on nearby slopes serves as a reminder of the mountain's power. We drift into fitful sleep to the sound of flapping tent fabric, knowing tomorrow's climb to Camp II will test our limits like never before.

Day 15: Climb Camp I (5,450m/17,880ft) to Camp II (6,000m/19,685ft)

The crunch of crampons on blue ice marks our departure from Camp I at first light. With supplemental oxygen now flowing at 1L/min, we move deliberately up the 40° headwall. The fixed lines become lifelines as altitude affects coordination - each clip of the carabiner is performed with exaggerated care. At 5,800m, we pass our previous high point; every step beyond is into new personal altitude territory.

Camp II appears like a mirage after six grueling hours. Perched on a narrow ice ledge at 6,000m, it offers just enough space for our tents in this no-man's-land between earth and sky. The simple act of removing boots becomes a 10-minute ordeal as numb fingers struggle with frozen laces. Our oxygen flow increases to 2L/min as we prepare for the night in the death zone, where the body begins dying cell by cell.

Dinner is a forced ritual - chewing becomes laborious at this altitude, but calories are critical. We monitor each other for signs of altitude sickness, knowing cerebral or pulmonary edema could strike anyone without warning. The howling wind threatens to tear our tents from their anchors as we attempt to rest before the most demanding day yet - the push to Camp III at 6,250m.

Day 16: Climb Camp II (6,000m/19,685ft) to Camp III (6,250m/20,505ft)

Today's shorter vertical gain belies its extreme difficulty. The route winds through a labyrinth of seracs and ice cliffs, requiring perfect footwork on 50° slopes. At 6,200m, even with 3L/min of oxygen, each step requires 3-4 gasping breaths. The infamous "Himlung Traverse" - a 100m section of exposed ice - demands absolute focus; one misstep would mean a 1,000m fall down the north face.

Camp III is the most precarious of all - a cluster of tents bolted to the mountainside on carved ice platforms. The Sherpas deserve medals for creating this improbable sanctuary at 6,250m. Movement is restricted to prevent disturbing the delicate balance of our perch. The summit looms tantalizingly close now, just 876 vertical meters above us, but those meters represent the hardest climbing of our lives.

The pre-summit routine is sacred: prepare oxygen systems for 4L/min flow, arrange summit layers for quick pre-dawn dressing, and attempt to force down 800 calories despite nausea. As we settle into our sleeping bags fully dressed, the reality hits - tomorrow we either summit Himlung Himal or turn back. The final weather check comes in crisp over the radio: "Winds 20kph, -30°C (-22°F) with wind chill - perfect summit conditions." The alarm is set for 11:00 PM - summit day begins in just four hours.

Day 17: Climb Camp III (6,250m /20,505ft) to Summit (7,126m/23,379ft) and back to Camp III (6,250m/20,505ft)

The frozen darkness of midnight envelops Camp III as we begin our summit push, headlamps casting narrow beams on

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the ice. Every movement feels deliberate and heavy in the thin air, our oxygen masks hissing steadily at 4 liters per minute. The initial slopes test our resolve immediately—a 50-degree ice wall demands perfect front-pointing technique, each tool placement sending showers of ice crystals glittering in our lights. As we ascend through the "Death Zone," time distorts; the hours blur into a rhythm of clipped carabiners, labored breathing, and the occasional encouraging shout from our Sherpa guides. By first light at 6,800 meters, we're traversing the exposed Dragon's Back ridge, where one misstep would send us plummeting down the north face into Tibet.

The final 300 meters to the summit unfold in slow motion, each step requiring three gasping breaths before mustering the strength to move forward. At 7:12 AM, the snow dome suddenly levels out—we've reached the highest point of Himlung Himal. The world stretches impossibly far below us; the curvature of the Earth visible as dawn paints the Karakoram range gold. For ninety precious seconds, we exist in a sacred space—taking photos with numb fingers, pressing loved ones' mementos to frozen lips, whispering prayers that are instantly stolen by the jet stream. The prayer flags tied to our ice axes snap violently in the wind, their mantras carried across the Himalayas.

The descent demands even greater focus than the ascent, with fatigue and euphoria creating a dangerous cocktail. We rappel down the steepest sections, our legs trembling with exertion as we return to the relative safety of Camp III. Back in the tents, we collapse into exhausted silence, too drained to properly celebrate. The oxygen masks stay on as we sip warm broth, our bodies slowly remembering how to function below 7,000 meters. As we zip ourselves into sleeping bags, the reality settles in—we've stood on top of one of Earth's wild places and returned to tell the tale.

Day 18: Contingency Day (in case of bad weather)

This buffer day hangs heavy over our exhausted bodies at Camp III, a necessary precaution that now feels like limbo. The morning weather radio crackles with updates—winds increasing to 40 kph, spindrift avalanches reported on the north face. We pass the hours melting snow, repairing gear, and monitoring each other for signs of frostbite or altitude sickness. The Sherpas tell stories of past expeditions where this spare day meant the difference between success and tragedy, of summits won during brief weather windows that would have been missed without flexibility.

By midday, the storm we've been watching arrives in earnest, confirming the wisdom of our reserve day. Snow pelts the tent fabric like rice thrown at a wedding, the wind howling through the ice formations around camp. Inside our shelter, we conduct an impromptu "academy awards" for the climb's memorable moments—the best fall (a graceful pirouette into a snowdrift), most creative swear word (a multilingual masterpiece during the ice wall), best snack (the Sherpa's surprise stash of Snickers at Camp II). The laughter feels medicinal, stitching us back together after the summit's ordeal.

As night falls, we make the call to descend to Base Camp tomorrow regardless of conditions. Our bodies have been at extreme altitude too long; fingers and toes need proper medical checks, and our calorie deficit demands real food. The storm rages outside, but inside we're already shifting mentally toward home—toward hot showers, fresh fruit, and the loved ones who've been tracking our progress from afar. This extra day, though unused for its intended purpose, has given us something equally valuable: time to process what we've achieved before returning to the world below.

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Day 19: Climb back to Camp III (6,250m/20,505ft) to Base Camp (4,842m/15,885ft)

The descent from Camp III to Base Camp feels like traveling backward through time, retracing steps that once demanded everything we had. Fixed lines that seemed terrifying on ascent now flow through our ascenders with smooth efficiency, though we still treat each anchor with reverence. Passing Camp II's abandoned tents triggers vivid flashbacks—the sleepless night before summit day, the way our headlamp beams had carved tunnels through the freezing darkness. At the bergschrund near Camp I, we pause to kick steps for the last time, a silent farewell to the technical terrain.

Base Camp materializes like a mirage, its colorful tents impossibly vibrant after days in a world of white and blue. The kitchen staff greets us with steaming towels and sweet milk tea, their smiles wider than we've ever seen. As we peel off layers in the dining tent, the scale of our accomplishment begins to sink in—the summit photos on cameras, the dates scribbled on oxygen bottles, the way our muscles have reshaped themselves to the mountain's demands. The medical check reveals the expected souvenirs: frost-nipped fingertips, weight loss, and blood oxygen levels that make the doctor raise his eyebrows.

That night, Base Camp transforms into a celebration. The cooks outdo themselves—fresh vegetables miraculously produced, cans of beer chilled in the glacier. Laughter echoes off the surrounding peaks as we retell the climb's pivotal moments, the near-misses that seem funnier in retrospect. The Sherpas receive their well-earned tips and gratitude, their quiet competence having been our constant safety net. As the generator finally powers down, we lie awake listening to a sound we haven't heard in weeks: complete silence. No wind, no creaking glaciers, just the mountain releasing us from its grasp. Tomorrow begins the journey home, but tonight we remain—for a few more hours—in the thin place between adventure and memory.

Day 20: Trek Base Camp (4,842m/15,885ft)to Phu Gaun (4,580m/15,030ft)

The morning begins with the bittersweet task of dismantling Base Camp, folding tents that sheltered us through storms and celebrations alike. As we load the yaks, each item carries memories—the dining tent where we planned our strategy, the medical tent where we nervously awaited oxygen level readings. The trail back to Phu Gaun feels surprisingly emotional; we walk past familiar landmarks with a new perspective, no longer anxious about what lies ahead but filled with gratitude for what we've accomplished. The descent is swift, our bodies reveling in the thicker air, and by midday the stone houses of Phu Gaun appear like an old friend.

Returning to Phu Gaun feels like stepping into a different world after the austerity of high camp life. The villagers greet us warmly, their curiosity about our summit success evident in their wide smiles. Children peek from behind doorways as we settle back into the teahouse, its wooden benches now feeling impossibly luxurious compared to our tiny tents. A hot bucket shower works miracles on our tired muscles, washing away weeks of grime and tension. As we sit in the common area that evening, clean and content, the simple pleasures—a book, a cup of real coffee, the sound of laughter—feel like extraordinary gifts.

Address: Boudha, 06 Kathmandu Nepal
Tel: +977-9842802155, +977-9844956319
E-Mail: info@outwardadventuretreks.com
www.outwardadventuretreks.com

The monastery bells ring out across the valley as night falls, their familiar chime marking the end of this chapter of our journey. We pack carefully, knowing tomorrow begins our trek out of the Nar Phu Valley. The summit feels both recent and distant, already taking on the quality of a dream. As we drift off to sleep in actual beds, the mountain's presence lingers—not as a challenge to be conquered, but as a companion that has changed us in ways we're only beginning to understand.

Day 21: Trek from Phu Gaun (4,580m/15,030ft) to Meta (3,560m/11,680ft)

Leaving Phu Gaun at dawn, we cross the ancient bridge one final time, its prayer flags fluttering a colorful farewell. The descent through the canyon feels easier than our initial ascent, though the altitude loss makes us lightheaded in a new way. We move quickly through Chyaku, where we'd once rested on our way up, noting how different the landscape appears when viewed from the opposite direction. The river roars beside us as we navigate the rocky trail, our legs strong from weeks of climbing but our minds beginning to transition back to normal life.

By midday, we reach the familiar pastures of Kyang, where yaks graze peacefully as if no time has passed. The teahouse owner remembers us and serves up a hearty lunch of dal bhat with extra portions—our appetites still raging from the altitude. As we continue downward, the air grows noticeably thicker, filling our lungs with unexpected ease. The trail widens, and we encounter our first trekkers heading upvalley, their fresh faces and clean gear a stark contrast to our weathered appearance. Their questions about conditions ahead make us realize we're now the veterans of this route.

Meta welcomes us back with afternoon sunshine, the lower elevation making sleep come easily despite the excitement of nearing the end of our journey. After dinner, we sort through gear for the last time, separating items to leave with the staff from what we'll carry to Kathmandu. The teahouse common room buzzes with conversation as we begin processing our shared experience, the bonds formed on the mountain now cemented during the walk out. The night sky here seems brighter than we remember, or perhaps our eyes have simply learned to see differently after weeks in the high Himalayas.

Day 22: Trek from Meta (3,560m/11,680ft) to Koto (2,600m / 8,530ft)

The final trekking day begins with a joyful descent through the narrowing gorge, the vegetation growing lusher with every kilometer. Rhododendron blooms splash color across the hillsides, a welcome change from the monochrome world above. We shed layers as the temperature rises, our tanned faces tilting toward the warm sun. The sound of the river grows louder as we approach the tree line, where pine forests replace barren rock and the air carries the rich scent of earth rather than ice.

When Koto's checkpoint comes into view, we pause for a group photo—a stark contrast to our nervous arrival weeks before. The roadhead feels like a portal between worlds, with its parked jeeps and small shops selling snacks we'd fantasized about during the climb. We celebrate with cold sodas and chocolate, our bodies rejoicing at the sudden abundance of sugar and oxygen. The lodge in Koto feels almost luxurious, its mattresses thick, the dining room bright with afternoon light streaming through clean windows.

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As we repack our duffels for the drive to Kathmandu tomorrow, the expedition's rhythm begins to dissolve. Some gear will stay behind for future climbers, some mementos carefully wrapped to carry home. The evening is filled with laughter and toasts, but also moments of quiet reflection as we each begin to comprehend what we've achieved. The mountain remains visible through gaps in the valley walls when clouds part—no longer our adversary but now part of our personal history, its slopes imprinted in our muscles and memories alike. Tomorrow's return to Kathmandu will bring hot showers and comfortable beds, but tonight we savor our last hours in the mountains' embrace.

Day 23: Drive from Koto (2,600m / 8,530ft) to Kathmandu (1,338m/4,390ft)

The rumble of the jeep engines signals our transition back to the modern world as we depart Koto, winding down the bumpy mountain roads that now feel foreign after weeks on foot. The landscape transforms before our eyes—lush terraced hillsides replacing stark cliffs, the air thick with humidity and the scent of blooming flowers.

Passing through bustling villages, we're struck by the vivid colors and noise of everyday life, a sensory overload after the monochrome silence of high altitude. By afternoon, the familiar chaos of Kathmandu envelops us, its honking horns and crowded streets feeling both overwhelming and comforting after our time in isolation.

Checking into the hotel, we savor the simple luxuries—flushing toilets, crisp sheets, and the miracle of hot water on demand—each convenience a small revelation that underscores how far we've come, both literally and figuratively.

Day 24: Rest Day in Kathmandu (1,338m/4,390ft) / Preparation for Final Departure

Waking without an alarm in a proper bed feels surreal, our bodies still attuned to the mountain's rhythms as we linger over a leisurely breakfast of fresh fruit and real coffee. The day unfolds in a happy haze—shopping for souvenirs in Thamel's vibrant markets, visiting the spa for overdue massages, and gathering for a final celebratory dinner where awards are given and stories embellished with each retelling.

Emails and messages from home pour in as we reconnect with the world beyond the Himalayas, our phones buzzing constantly after weeks of silence. That evening, watching the sunset over Swayambhunath from our hotel rooftop, the expedition's challenges already begin softening into nostalgia—the hardships fading while the profound moments of connection and achievement remain sharp and bright. Tomorrow's flights will scatter our team across the globe, but the bonds forged on Himlung Himal's slopes will endure, as permanent as the mountain itself.

Day 25: Final Departure

The morning sun filters through Kathmandu's haze as we zip up our bags one final time, carefully tucking summit photos and prayer flags between folded clothes. Goodbyes at the airport are surprisingly emotional—tight hugs with Sherpa teammates who became family, promises to reunite that we all know we'll keep. As the plane lifts off, we press our faces to the windows, catching a last glimpse of the Himalayas' snowy peaks before they disappear into the clouds, already feeling the strange pull of the mountains even as we fly away.

Back in our seats, we flip through photos on our cameras, marveling at how small and distant those challenging moments now appear. The expedition's lessons settle into our bones—about perseverance, teamwork, and our own

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surprising resilience. Somewhere over the Indian Ocean, we finally remove our trekking bracelets, the faded threads holding weeks of dust and memories. We're returning home changed, carrying an invisible piece of the mountain within us, knowing no matter where life takes us next, part of us will always remain at 7,126 meters, standing in that thin air between earth and sky.