

TRAVELOGUE

Into the Khumbu Valley: The Gateway to Mt. Everest



Believe in the impossible,
 Then work and try and do
 For only those who dare to dream
 Can make a dream come true!

These four lines of a poem by an anonymous poet had been the inspiration of my life that practically led me into the world of the Great Himalayas in Nepal. The dream of exploring the Everest region became a reality this April. What made this journey extraordinary was that it was my first solo trip into the Himalayan mountains. In April 2015, I along with three team members, did the Annapurna Base Camp (ABC) trek which is 4130m above the sea level.

My journey started on April 1st, 2016. I reached Kathmandu around 4.30 pm, checked in the Pilgrims Guest House, met my Nepali friends with whom I had planned the trek and did some shopping in the evening in Thamel, a popular tourist hub. Thanks to my friends, my flight tickets to Lukla and trek permit were already done.

My flight to Lukla was scheduled at 6.15 am in the morning on April 2nd, but due to bad weather, it got canceled. It is said that flights to Lukla are very unpredictable due to bad weather. Considering this, travelers should try to get early flights and keep buffer days for this journey. Luckily, I got the ticket for 3rd April as well.

The next morning at 7.45 am, I started off to Lukla (2840m above the sea level) by Simrik Airlines, both thrilled and anxious. Lukla was the starting and ending point of the trek. The famous Tenzing-Hillary Airport in Lukla is known as one of the most dangerous airports in the world embedded in the heart of the mountains with a very short runway. Small

aircrafts and helicopters are the means of transportation in this region. I arrived in Lukla at around 8.15am, overwhelmed by the thought of the journey lying ahead. A porter guide named Fudourjey Sherpa (Furba) was waiting for me in the airport to assist me during the trek. I checked in at the Namaste Lodge for breakfast. Meanwhile, Furba arranged the permit for Sagarmatha National Park, the Nepali name of Mt. Everest (8848m above the sea level).

My route was planned according to night stays.

At 10.15 am, I started my trek for Phakding (2662m above the sea level). It took me three and a half hours to reach there. It was a beautiful trek with cherry blossoms every now and then, Rhododendrons, prayer flags and the Dudh Khoshi River beside the trail.

The next day at 7.45 am, I began my hike towards the popular Sherpa village, Namche Bazaar (3440m above the sea level). The trail was mostly uphill with a steep ascent after Monjo. Fountains on the way and the greenery around, created scenic views that helped to relieve the fatigue. On the way, I came across Sagarmatha National Park, a World Heritage Site in Jorsalle and the suspension bridge that was shown in the movie Everest (2015). It took me six and a half hours to reach Namche Bazaar. The view of the village was breathtakingly beautiful. It is situated at a low point and is surrounded by hills and greenery. I spent two nights in Namche Bazaar, visited Everest view point from where trekkers get the first view of the Mt. Everest along with Lhotse, Nuptse, Ama Dablam, Kongde Ri, Thamserku, Kusum Kangalu etc. and hiked up to Khumjung (3800m above the sea level) for acclimatisation.

Trek to Tengboche (3860m above the sea level) was the hardest of all. The trail was slanted uphill and seemed never ending. When I was almost drained of energy, I was caught up by a group of Australian film makers who encouraged me to push on for the last 30 minutes that eventually led me to my destination, making it a long seven hour trek. The spectacular panoramic view of the highest peaks: Nuptse, Lhotse, Kantega, Ama Dablam and Mt. Everest refreshed me immediately. The Tengboche Monastery is the largest Gumpa in the Khumbu region and Tenzing Norgay, who first summited the Mt. Everest with Sir Edmund Hillary, attended this Gumpa to be a monk.

The trail from Dingboche to Lobuche and then towards Gorak Shep was adventurous. As the elevation increased, the greenery faded away and the trail became deserted. The Island Peak (6189m above the sea level) and the Imja Khola River was prominent from Dingboche (4410m above the sea level) which was located just under Mt. Ama Dablam (6812m above the sea level). I spent an additional night there for acclimatisation. Passing through the rugged mountains, icy river, the Sherpa memorial at the Thukla Pass (4830m above the sea level) and Lobuche Base Camp beneath the Lobuche Peak, I reached Lobuche (4940 m above the sea level) after a five and a half hour long hike. The weather was chillingly cold



with a temperature of -3/4 degree celsius and oxygen became thinner.

On April 11, 2016, after a difficult hike through boulders and rocky trail, I reached Gorak Shep (5180m above the sea level) at 11.15 am which was the last lodging facility before Everest Base Camp (EBC, 5364m above the sea level). After lunch, I headed towards Kala Patthar (5545m above the sea level) to observe the most fascinating view of the world's highest mountain, Mt. Everest (8848m above the sea level). It was a challenging hike due to the steep climb and strong wind but the view was rewarding. The white and coal Mt. Everest was towering ahead with its majestic impression and other giant snowcapped mountains Lhotse, Nuptse, Cholatse, Pumori and many more were standing high with their magnificent beauty. The Khumbu glaciers and the amazing view left me spellbound and I could not but thank the almighty for this gratifying opportunity. I spent the night at Gorak Shep. It was freezing cold both during day and night time. The next day after breakfast, I started my journey back towards Lukla.

I came back with a remarkable experience and a sense of achievement. Reaching the height of 5500m+ was challenging but it taught me not to lose hope, to explore my own strength and abilities and to appreciate life even more.

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 Photo Courtesy: Shegufta Mahzabeen

