

LANGTANG VALLEY TREK

Land of endless beauty, simple living



SAJJAD HOSSAIN
a journalist and
nature lover

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

It was 3:15pm on August 20.

Monsoon rain lashed Nepal's Langtang National Park as our four-member team trudged back from Lama Hotel, soaked to the bone after more than 13 kilometres on the trail. Exhaustion weighed heavy, but ahead loomed the most perilous section of our return -- the landslide-prone stretch between Rimche and Bamboo.

A wooden memorial suddenly appeared on the path, dedicated to Or Assaraf, an Israeli trekker who perished in the 2015 earthquake. The sight tightened my chest. It felt less like a marker and more like a warning. Moments later, the trail narrowed to a slippery ledge carved into the hillside.

"One by one," said our guide, Ngawang Bhote -- Everest and Manaslu summiteer. The rain had turned the path to sludge.

Then it happened. My boot pressed

fear. At the final stretch Ngawang grabbed my arm and pulled me across -- only for us to face one last trial: a rope climb up a slick cliff. The rope was soaked, the rock offered no grip.

My legs quivered. I sat on the muddy ledge, hauling myself hand over hand. Arms burned, knees shook, but inch by inch I climbed until I collapsed at the top, breathless, muddy, but alive.

After a short rest, we pushed another six kilometres to Bamboo (1,970m), our refuge for the night.

Back in Dhaka now, the memory feels dreamlike -- terrifying yet unforgettable.

FROM TEA SHOP TO HIMALAYA

It had all begun weeks earlier; on a humid July afternoon at a tea shop in Munshiganj Sadar Launch Ghat. Over steaming cups, my friends -- Kamrul Hasan Sajib, Samir Kumar, Pritam Saha -- and I debated where to wander next. We had trekked the hills of Bandaran many times, so wanted to try a new destination. Then Sajib suggested Nepal. Hours later, our decision was sealed: the Langtang Valley trek, a moderate difficulty trek.

On August 15, in the evening, our flight landed in Kathmandu. We spent one night in the capital before heading out by car, more than 120 kilometres along cliff-hugging roads, to Syabrubesi -- the gateway to Langtang. At four that afternoon, we began walking. By dusk we had reached Domen River View Guest House, lulled to sleep by the river's roar.

The next few days brought a steady rhythm: hiking on stone paths, seeing forests all around, and gaining altitude. On August 17, after about fifteen kilometres through Pairo, Rimche, and Lama Hotel, we stopped at Riverside Hotel in Gumnachok. The following day, we trekked another fourteen kilometres through Ghodabela and Thangshyap before reaching Langtang village (3430m).

THE VALLEY OF PRAYER FLAGS

Stepping into the village, you are greeted by silence, broken only by the murmur of the rushing river and the fluttering sound of prayer flags. At the entrance stands a whitewashed stone stupa, weathered yet dignified, crowned with a golden spire. Painted eyes gaze out in all directions, watching over every traveller and villager.

Mani stones carved with sacred

mantras form a wall of prayers for peace and protection. Trekkers and locals walk clockwise around the stupa, whispering "Om Mani Padme Hum," believing each circuit spreads merit into the world. Prayer flags carry these blessings on the wind, across the valley and up to the snow peaks.

Langtang village rests in the cradle of the valley, where yak pastures and meadows slope down to the Langtang Khola river. Above it rise the white peaks of Langtang Lirung (7,227m), Tsergo Peak (4,998m), Kyanjin Ri (4,773m), and Yubra (6,262m). The valley teems with wildlife -- red pandas, Himalayan thar, and the dazzling plumage of monals -- all protected within Langtang National Park.

Here, culture and nature merge seamlessly: prayer wheels spin beside stone-and-wood homes, chortens and mani walls stand among pastures, and flags ripple against the skyline. The people, resilient and generous, welcome trekkers with food, shelter, and smiles. Their warmth helps to turn the harsh, remote Himalayan village into a place that feels like home.

TOWARD KYANJIN RI

The next morning, we set off early toward Kyanjin Ri, a mountain with two peaks -- the lower at 4,400m, the higher at 4,773m. The air was sharp and cold, and the distant snow-capped summits shimmered in the morning light. Carrying only light packs, we planned to return by evening. Two hours of hiking brought us to Kyanjin Gompa at 3,890m. After a brief rest, we began the steep ascent, with Sajib surging ahead while Samir, Pritam, Ngawang, and I followed.

Everything was steady at first, but as the ascent continued, a strange fear gripped me. Looking down at the tiny village made me uneasy. At 3,970 metres, I collapsed, unable to go on. Around 11:00am, I told my team, "Something is happening in my mind. I can't move forward." Ngawang checked my pulse and urged me to stop. It felt like the saddest moment of my life -- everyone going forward, but

not me.

Back at the lodge, I sat alone, staring at the hills, wishing I was still up there. Soon, Samir returned, saying he too had been paralysed by fear. Together we wandered the village, waiting. By 1:45pm, Sajib and Pritam came back with Ngawang, faces glowing. Sajib had stayed nearly an hour at the summit.

For Ngawang, it was routine. At only twenty-seven, he was already a veteran, having summited Everest last year. This was his 10th Kyanjin Ri visit. His journey in the mountains began at the age of 14, when he started working as a porter on Mount Everest. Mountaineering runs

in his family: his father had worked in the mountains, one brother summited Everest five times, and another serves in a security force. Back at the lodge, I sat alone, staring at the hills, wishing I were still up there. Soon, Samir returned, admitting he too had been paralyzed by fear. Together we wandered the village, waiting. By 1:45 pm, Sajib and Pritam returned with Ngawang, faces glowing. Sajib had stayed nearly an hour at the summit.

That evening, we left Kyanjin Gompa at four. Fog closed in as Sajib, Pritam, and I walked ahead. After more than an hour downhill, we reached Langtang.

While we were resting, the hotel owner received a video call from a hotel owner of Kyanjin Gompa -- Samir had fallen behind and turned back after losing sight of us. The owner and Ngawang rushed to fetch him, and two hours later he returned safely. That was one of the most beautiful moments of the trip.

'DAL BHAT POWER, 24 HOUR'

This line is everywhere in Nepal, and trekking in Langtang made me understand why. Dal Bhat, the national dish, is simple but sustaining: rice, lentil soup, vegetables, pickles, and a

crunchy papad. Sometimes eggs or meat are added, but even plain dal bhat keeps you going for hours.

Every tea house serves it, and the best part is unlimited refills of rice, dal, and veggies. In Langtang village, a plate costs about 950 rupees with eggs, 700 without. Pricy, yes, but fair -- every essential is carried up here by mules or human porters.

Tea is a must. A steaming cup of milk or lemon tea, costing around 170 rupees, feels perfect after a freezing trek. At Ghodabela, I tried potato-and-vegetable momos for 700 rupees a plate -- expensive, but biting into them with snowy peaks in view made them priceless.

Even basics come at a cost: a boiled egg is 250 rupees, hot water 70. Yet once you realize the effort it takes to bring supplies to these heights, every sip and bite earns your respect.

Sightings of wildlife along the trail added to our experience. We spotted numerous species of birds -- the Yellow-breasted Greenfinch, Plumbeous Redstart, Streaked Laughingthrush and Variegated Laughingthrush. Along the trail, we also saw Himalayan Goral, Nepal Gray Langur, and Northern Red Muntjac.

LIFE IN LANGTANG

Villages in Langtang seem carved out of time. Most hotels are simple stone-and-wood lodges with tin roofs painted blue, standing out against the white mountains. From the outside, they appear modest, but inside, cosy dining halls warmed by a fire or stove welcome trekkers.

Rooms are basic -- wooden walls, two single beds with thin mattresses, a blanket or two. Nights are cold, so most trekkers carry sleeping bags. Rent is surprisingly cheap, around 1,000 Nepali rupees per night, but guests are expected to eat their meals there; the hotels depend on their kitchens.

However, the true beauty isn't luxury but the experience. Sitting in the dining hall, sipping hot tea as the sun sets behind snowy ridges, hearing yak bells outside, and watching prayer flags flutter in the wind, it feels like living inside a postcard.

In the villages of Langtang, life is simple, and the beauty around you is endless.



down, a rock slid loose, and my body lurched sideways under the weight of my 13.5-kg backpack. For a heartbeat I saw only the roaring Langtang Khola below, raging like a beast eager to swallow the careless. Somehow, legs shaking, I pulled myself back onto the trail.

A teammate followed and a boulder crashed beside him before vanishing into the torrent.

"Stay back! Don't move!" Ngawang shouted.

We froze. Above us, dozens more rocks clung precariously, waiting for gravity's pull. Darkness was creeping into the valley. Two teammates scrambled across, but three of us remained stranded, hearts pounding with each clatter of falling stone.

Finally another crossed, leaving me next. I stepped forward, swallowing

Want to share your travel experiences with us? Please send your stories to holiday@thedailystar.net



PHOTO: KAMRUL HASAN SAJIB, PRITAM SAHA

