**JOMSOM & MUKTINATH**

Trek through Jomsom and Muktinath, walk through the unique terrain, taste Thakali food and observe their rich culture.

# JOMSOM & MUKTINATH

Jomsom is a great place to start[trekking](https://www.welcomenepal.com/things-to-do/trekking.html). The diverse landscape and culture found along this trekking route give marvelous insight into the way of life of Nepali people of various ethnic groups.

The highlight is a trek through the deepest gorge in the world carved by the Kali Gandaki River, which originates in the Tibetan plateau to eventually flow into the Ganges in India.

Not too far from Jomsom, you find Muktinath, [the famous pilgrimage site](https://www.welcomenepal.com/places-to-see/pilgrimage-sites.html) for Buddhists as well as Hindus. To Hindus, Muktinath is a sacred place of salvation. They believe that bathing in the waters here guarantees salvation after death. The Hindu god, Brahma, is said to have lit the eternal flames that burn at Muktinath.

To Buddhists, Muktinath is a place where the great sage Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) who brought Buddhism to Tibet, came to meditate.

The area is a perfect place to find fossilized ammonites, known locally as Shaligram, which are found all along the upper reaches of the Kali Gandaki.

This part of Nepal is inhabited by Gurungs and Magars in the lower regions of the Kali Gandaki, Thakalis around Jomsom and people with strong Tibetan roots, the Lopa, around Muktinath and up in Mustang.

Their customs and attire are distinct and this trek is ideal for observing the diversity of the ethnic groups and their customs. Hinduism dominates the lower parts while as one climbs further up, Tibetan Buddhism predominates.

If you happen to be in Muktinath in early September, you are likely to be in time for one of Nepal’s unique festivals, the annual horse race known as Yartung. This is a week of some serious horse racing, Tibetan style, and some equally serious merrymaking.

Most of the route along the Jomsom trek forms a part of the [Annapurna circuit](https://www.welcomenepal.com/places-to-see/annapurna-circuit.html) and Annapurna foothill treks. The usual starting point is Naya Pul on the Pokhara to Baglung road and from there, via Ghorepani and Tatopani, into the gorge of the Kali Gandaki.

Between Tatopani and Lete Khola, there is a dramatic change of scenery. Pine forests crowd in on the trail and the villages take on a quite different appearance.

The layout of the villages and the design of the houses are unique to this area. The houses are designed to protect the inhabitants from the strong winds that blow up the valley everyday from late morning onwards.

These winds are caused by differences in atmospheric pressure between the Tibetan plateau and the lower reaches of the valley. The best example of the unique architecture of this region is found in the village of Marpha which is a two-hour walk down from Jomsom.

The stone flagged streets with efficient underground drainage system and the flat-roofed houses with a central courtyard make an attractive spot to spend an extra day resting. Use the free time to sample apple products of this region from the lush orchards up in the valley.

Jomsom is best known for its airport that offers a quick entry or exit to the valley with regular daily flights from [Pokhara](https://www.welcomenepal.com/places-to-see/pokhara.html). The strong winds that blow up the valley prevents flights from taking off from Jomsom after 11 a.m. Jomsom can also be considered a place to use as a base for exploring the upper part of the Kali Gandaki region. There are numerous accommodation options including a new high-class resort complex.

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An alternative to Jomsom as a base for the trek is the village of Kagbeni which is a two-hour walk up the valley. Kagbeni is not as commercialized as Jomsom and certainly much quieter. This is the furthest trekkers are allowed to go towards Upper Mustang without a special permit and an accompanying Environmental Officer.

For details, see the description of Upper Mustang treks. From Kagbeni to Muktinath is a three to four hour trek and trekkers can choose to do it as a day trip or stay at one of the many teahouses available at Muktinath.

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