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Exploring the Hidden Tsum Valley

“The Sacred Sanctuary of northern Nepal”
October 7th-October 27th, 2012



The Tsum Valley is situated in the northern Gorkha district of Nepal, surrounded by the Buddha Himal with Himal Chuli to the west, Ganesh Himal to the south and Sringi Himal to the north. Tsum is one of the eight sacred valleys (called Beyuls) in the inner Himalayas and owes its genesis to the 8th century Buddhist saint Padmasambhava. Legend has it that Padmasambhava created beyuls as a refuge for people fleeing from the adverse effects of war, famine or religious persecution. Saturated with Buddhist culture, these valleys uphold religious values and help preserve a lost way of life. Tsum valley is inhabited by Tsumbas, an indigenous community and together with the majestic backdrops of the famous Ganesh Himal, Sringi Himal and Buddha Himal, this serene valley carries a history of ancient Himalayan civilization styles; culture, art, tradition, religion, customs and thinking.

The Tsum Valley landscape is dotted with mani walls, chortens and kaanis (gateway chortens). Chortens are Buddhist religious monuments, also known as stupas, which are distinct features in Tsum Valley. They are erected to ward off evil spirits from places that are identified as thresholds such as confluences and bridges or to commemorate the visit or death of historic figures, lamas or even relatives. Kaanis are also called gateway chortens placed before the entry of any village which travelers are supposed to walk through. Mani walls are long walls made of mani stones i.e. stones with carved mantras. The main purpose of these mani walls is to ask the help of the gods for the wellbeing of travelers.



Itinerary

Day 1. Arrive in Kathmandu. 4,265 feet. Met upon arrival. Transfer to hotel.

On arrival at Kathmandu Tribhuvan International Airport you will be received by our local representatives and transferred to our group hotel. Your Western trip leader or Sherpa guide will give you a brief orientation of the Kathmandu area and other related information that you might require while in Nepal. Your trip guide will collect your airline tickets and passport for safe keeping and so we can reconfirm your return flight from Kathmandu.

Day 2: Sightseeing in Kathmandu. Hotel.

After the long international flight, we have scheduled a day to rest and recover. We'll also have a half-day guided sightseeing tour around the Kathmandu Valley to include such sights as Swayambhunath (The Monkey Temple), Boudhanath Stupa and the ancient city of Patan.

Day 3: Drive from Kathmandu to Arughat Bazaar. 1,755 feet.

After an early breakfast we'll board our private bus for the long (8 to 9 hours) and scenic drive to Gorkha and on to the village of Arughat Bazaar (1,755 feet) in Gorkha district. The village of Arughat is split into two parts, each on either side of the Buri Gandaki River. Arughat Bazaar is large, clean and prosperous with hotels and shops selling cloth, food and hardware. Upon arrival we will meet up with our cook staff and porter support crew.

Day 4: Trek to Liding along the Soti Khola River. 6 to 7 hours of trekking. 2,820 feet.

Our first day on the trail sees us depart Arughat Bazaar and enjoying splendid views of Shringri Himal. We'll pass through several picturesque Gurung and Magar villages, terraced fields and cascading waterfalls en route to our riverside camp called Liding, along the Soti Khola River.

Day 5: To Machha Khola. (6 to 7 hours). 3,050 feet.

Machha Khola (Fish River) is a village situated above the river of the same name.

Day 6: Machha Khola to Doban (6 to 7 hours). 4,625 feet.

The trail from Machha Khola to Doban involves some steep ascents and descents. We will climb a well-crafted stone staircase over a ridge to Doban, which lies at the confluence of the Shiar Khola and the Sarpu Khola.

Day 7: The village of Philim. (6 hours). 5,085 feet.

Today's route follows a rugged and rocky trail which climbs up and down ravines and notched trees. We will have good views of the Sringri Himal as we continue up to the village of Philim at 5,085 feet. Philim is a large Gurung village with fields of corn and millet. There are several good campsites near the village and we will up camp amongst the alder, blue pine and poplar trees.

Day 8: To Chumling (Lower Tsum). (7 hours of trekking). 7,750 feet.

We take the trail up through Philim and head up and over a ridge that leads to the Ganesh Himal Base Camp and Chumling, which is also called Lower Tsum.

Day 9: Chhokangparo Village (Upper Tsum). (5 to 6 hours of trekking). 9,875 feet.

From Chumling we trek to Chhokangparo or Upper Tsum Valley, which is considered a part of the Inner Himalaya. Chhokangparo is a village situated on flat land and made up of two settlements Chhokang and Paro. From here the mighty Ganesh Himal mountain range can be seen directly to the south where it provides spectacular views of the Baudha and Himal Chuli peaks to the southwest.

Day 10: To Nile/Chhule and visit Milarepa Piren Phu Cave along the way. (6 to 7 hours). 11,025 feet.

From Chhokangparo we trek to Nile/ Chhule. This is the last village as we head north into the upper Tsum Valley. Nile is on the western (sunny side) of the Shiar Khola, about 20 minutes walk across from Chhule. On the way we pass the Piren Phu Cave, probably the largest and most popular cave in Northern Gorka. Piren Phu (Pigeon Cave) is one of the most sacred caves in the Tsum Valley. It is located at the foot of a rugged cliff near the village of Burji. The great Buddhist Yogi and Tibetan saint Chyuchin Milarepa was believed to have meditated here. Richly painted Buddhist murals, excellent artistic scripts carved on stones, long prayer flags and significant Buddhist paper scripts make this cave one of the most important cultural assets in this remarkable valley. Beautiful views can be had of the Shiar Khola, Rachen Gomba, the mountains and settlements amidst vast agricultural land.

Day 11: Mu Gomba (12,140 feet) and visit Dhephyudonma Gomba (13,320 feet). 4 to 5 hours of trekking).

We first cross over to Nile and then the trail gradually ascends to Mu Gomba, the largest monastery in the Tsum region. Mu Gomba, established in 1895, is located at the farthest point in the Tsum Valley and situated at an altitude of around 12,200 feet. The monastery houses many religious books, including Kangyur, a life sized statue of Avalokiteshwara and images of Guru Padmasambhava and Tara. Dhephyudonma Gomba is one of the oldest monasteries in the Tsum Valley and is situated in the rugged mountains about a two hike above the village of Chhule and Nile. The history of this monastery is directly associated with the dawn of Buddhism in the valley.

Day 12: Rest and exploration day

A well earned rest day and there is plenty to see in this land of gompas. We can hike up to Mu Gomba and up to the base of Pika Himal. As the crow flies we are quite close to Tibet and will be afforded great views of the Tibetan peaks, the Ganesh Himal range and 8,000-meter Mount Manaslu. After the day's excursion we return to our camp at Mu Gomba and a big evening meal.

Day 13: The Rachen Gomba (5 hours trekking). 10,630 feet.

From Mu Gumba we take the trail to Rachen Gomba, a nunnery. The nunnery is situated in the Shiar Khola Valley at the foothills of the mountains bordering Nepal and Tibet. Rachen Gomba was established in the year 1905 and is one of the largest nunneries in the Tsum Valley. It houses nuns belonging to the Ngak-pa sect, which does not allow animal slaughter. Inside, the nunnery is home to 1,000 statues of the God of Compassion, Avalokiteshwara and life-size statues of Avalokiteshwara, Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, Tara and the Buddha Amitabha. The interiors of this monastery are richly painted with murals depicting Buddhist history. Tara, an avatar of the Buddha, is worshipped from September to November. During this time the nuns are invited into the villages for ceremonies. The statues are molded from clay and situated on a brightly colored, carved throne and pillar with a large prayer wheel.

Day 14: Rachen Gomba to Dumje (6 to 7 hours of trekking). 8,005 feet.

From Rachen Gomba we proceed towards Dumje, a small village with about eight houses and adjoining cattle shed.

Day 15: To Gomba Lungdang (6 to 7 hours of trekking). 10,500 feet.

From Dumje we trek to Gomba Lungdang. On the way we will pass by one of the most beautiful waterfalls in the Lower Tsum Valley, Samba Tingding Chhupyang.

Day 16: Tatopani Hot Springs. (6 to 7 hours of trekking). 5,805 feet.

Today we trek to Tatopani. There is a hot spring at Tatopani where we can soak and relieve our tired muscles.

Day 17: Soti Khola Camp. (6 to 7 hours trekking). 2,360 feet.

Passing through small hamlets and terraced fields we return alongside the Soti Khola River. Tropical waterfalls cascade down from above our route and we'll set up camp near the village.

Day 18: Return to Arughat Bazaar. (6 to 7 hours of trekking). 1,755 feet.

Our last day on the trail as we make our way to the bustling village of Arughat Bazaar.

Day 19: Drive to Kathmandu (8 to 9 hours).

Early start for the drive back to Kathmandu and hot showers at our hotel.

Day 20: Free day in Kathmandu. Hotel.

Free day wander the maze of streets in Thamel, shop for souvenirs, catch up on emails and relax.

Day 21: Transfer to the Kathmandu International Airport for our departure.

Today as per your international flight time, our local representative will transfer you to the airport 3 hours before your expected departure time.



Trip Grading and Costs

21 days. (4 nights hotels, 16 nights of tented camping, 15 days MODERATE to STRENUOUS trekking). Trip's maximum altitude – 13,320 feet at Dhephyudonma Gompa.

Land Only Per Person Price:

2 to 4 people: \$3235

5 to 8 people: \$2860

9 to 12 people: 2495

To reserve your space for this incredible trek, contact Aspen Alpine Guides via email international@aspenalpine.com or 970-925-6618.