

Emergencies and Evacuations while on trek in Nepal

Obviously we hope this will not be necessary but it is important you have some information on what to expect in the event of an evacuation, and how Adventure Alternative Nepal and the UK office will look after you in the event of sickness or an accident.

What to bring on trek

Can you make sure to bring your insurance policy with you and have the emergency telephone number easily at hand? Take it with you on trek and make sure people know where it is in case you are incapacitated. Make sure everyone in the group and your sirdars (Nepalese trek leaders) are aware of any medical allergies you have. If you have an allergy, or a medical condition, or are using prescribed medicines then please keep the information with your insurance papers, and ensure that your fellow trekkers help with getting this information to a medical person in the event of an emergency.

We also recommend that you register with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about your holiday abroad. For British citizens just google LOCATE and register online. In the event of a problem then the local Consulate can help but it will be beneficial if they already have your details. Furthermore, we recommend you read about Nepal and find out the latest travel advice from the FCO Travel website. We are members of the Know Before You Go Campaign, and we do encourage all of our clients to check the site before travel.

If you suffer from symptoms of altitude sickness

Most of the time if you feel the effects of AMS it will be easy to turn round and go back down. Do not make the mistake of 'sleeping on it', because cerebral or pulmonary oedema will develop fast and render someone incapacitated within hours. If you are unsure if you warrant a descent then use the AMS point system in the High Altitude Trek Booklet, listen to your body and take the advice of the sirdar.

If you are obviously suffering from increasingly advanced symptoms during your walk up to the higher villages (such as ataxia, inability to walk, losing consciousness, vomiting or bad coughing which is not relieved) then it is important to head straight back down. Night or day, it is essential that you go down and get to qualified help.

Our sirdar will arrange one or more of our senior porters to descend with you and assist with finding a lodge and await the return of the rest of the team. You will have to make an informed decision to either go back up or to continue down once you are recovered. The likelihood is that once you have descended, it is best not to try and go back up again; each situation demands its own decisions, but you will never be left alone by our staff.

Having an accident

If you have an accident which means you are unable to walk by yourself then our staff will have various options. Firstly, they can provide a team of people to carry you down. Secondly, they can provide a horse which costs about 10,000 rupees per day. Or they can move you to a lodge and call for a helicopter to evacuate you back to Kathmandu

Everyone will help out at this point and it is important to try and stay calm. In almost all cases of mountain accidents, the physical reaction of shock is exacerbated by being in a remote place. Do take reassurance from the fact that this will not be the first time that an evacuation is being made, and people do know what to do. Our priority will be to ensure that everyone is protected and warm and to follow a clear procedure.

Helicopter evacuation

Most insurance companies like to arrange a phone call between a Doctor and the policy holder directly in order to assess the necessity of a helicopter evacuation. This will be either by mobile phone or satellite phone. If no communication is possible from where you are exactly then the sirdar will arrange for someone or a group to head to the nearest place where there is a phone. Generally speaking in the trekking areas of Nepal nowadays, this is never too far away.

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The very first phone call to the insurance company is very important because a case file will be opened and it is vital to ask for and record this reference number. This may not be you, or it might be someone in the group who speaks on your behalf. Please do not expect the sirdar to speak to the insurance company; they do not always have the English to cope with the specifics, so this will take some teamwork. The Adventure Alternative UK number is +44 28708 31258.

The information you need to provide to the insurance emergency number will be:

- ✓ Your name and your postcode
- ✓ Your policy number and the company or agent you booked your insurance through
- ✓ The dates of your trip
- ✓ Your location and the details of your illness or accident
- ✓ The number to contact you with

The helicopter company rarely sends a helicopter unless they are assured payment by the insurance company and, if permission is given, then all of the financial transactions will be handled by them. Therefore there is a three way communication happening between the insurance company, the helicopter company and our sirdar.

Your main point of contact in the event of an evacuation is always your sirdar or Sherpa guide. Sometimes the medical staff at a local clinic will also be involved in the procedure for bringing in a helicopter, especially if it is a clinic run by the Himalayan Rescue Association. Either way a telephone call will be made to the helicopter company to ask for an evacuation. The sirdar will also call our office in Kathmandu and the UK office will also be contacted. The UK office will inform next of kin and control the flow of information.

We cannot help with the payment for a helicopter; your insurance company will arrange this directly with the company and it will help a great deal if you leave a photocopy of your insurance policy with our staff in Kathmandu before you go on trek. We can assist with the cost of a horse but we will ask to have the money refunded when you are back home, and you should be able to recoup the money from your insurance company.

Once the helicopter is on its way then you will be told how long it will be. At this point you may be lying in bed or in the clinic, possibly with an oxygen mask on, if it is a case of altitude sickness.

The helicopter is not large, it can usually carry one casualty, so do not always expect to bring along a friend or relative. Sometimes it can be hours until they appear because the pilots will not risk flying in cloud and it cannot land anywhere, so a decision will be made by the pilot as to where will the optimum spot. This may mean being carried for a short distance.

There are two ways of getting on board a helicopter. Either you will walk yourself, approaching from the side in full view of the pilot. The rotors do not always stop and there can be an updraft, so don't wear a hat.

Your sirdar (and some of the team) will have prepared your day sack with some important items to take with you. These should include your insurance papers, wallet, passport and tickets, some clothes to change into later, toiletries, mobile phone, book, camera and anything valuable. Your main bag of hiking gear can stay with the group and come back down later to Kathmandu if the pilot does not want to take it on the helicopter. It will arrive back in Kathmandu to go with you on the plane home, or be sent by cargo at a later date.

The helicopter flies to Kathmandu and lands at the domestic airport, where our staff will be ready with a vehicle to take you to hospital, or there will be an ambulance if you require a stretcher. Once you arrive in the capital the altitude symptoms will disappear fast, leaving you feeling rather weak, a bit shaky and probably coughing a lot from the dry air in the mountains. The hospital staff will carry out a number of tests to check your hydration levels, any fluid on the lungs and your blood pressure. If you are very dehydrated then they may keep you in for a

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night on a drip; otherwise they may keep you as an outpatient for a few hours and then send you to the hotel to rest.

We use several hospitals in Kathmandu which offer excellent facilities:

NICS International Clinic for altitude problems - <http://www.nepalinternationalclinic.com/>

Om Hospital for general health/accidents etc - <http://www.omhospitalnepal.com/>

Tribhuvan Hospital for general health/accidents - <http://www.teachinghospital.org.np/>

We have a guesthouse in Kathmandu and the likelihood is that you will be taken there to rest, where we have people to help you, unless you have a preference for going to a hotel. This will be your first chance to phone home properly and you are welcome to use our office for skype calls and emails.

The staff in Kathmandu will be able to help with changing your air ticket details, if it is allowable, but it is important to note that travelling by air directly after an altitude-related illness such as an oedema is not recommended. It is best to wait several days.

The Cost of Evacuation

The cost of a helicopter varies depending on where they have to fly to. It can be anywhere between USD\$3500 and USD\$10,000 for evacuations, so it is important that your insurance policy can cover this amount.

The insurance company will follow your progress and keep in touch with the medical staff at the hospital. In most cases they are able to pay for treatment directly but it may have to be your credit card that suffers initially. The helicopter company may take an imprint from your credit card when you arrive in Kathmandu to cover a deposit, which can be 45% of the total amount.

We also recommend that you inform your Consulate of your situation if it is serious enough. They can visit, advise and assist, but their powers are quite limited. They will not intervene with airlines for example, in order to get you a quick flight out!

Repatriation back home

Most likely in the event of serious illness or an accident you will miss out on the last few days of your holiday and end up in a hospital in Kathmandu, after which you will rest and then want to fly home. Do take medical advice about flying before changing your tickets. Your ticket may have conditions attached to changing dates, and you may have to wait some days. It may be easier to wait until everyone comes down with your bag and you can fly home at the scheduled time.

Either way, keep your insurance company informed and ensure that any changes in plan are noted on your case file, which will make things easier when you make a claim later on.

If you are sick enough to warrant repatriation back home with an air ambulance service then the insurance company will by then have allocated a medical team to have direct contact with the hospital staff. They will have daily updates and organise an air ambulance service if necessary, which is a specially equipped private aeroplane used worldwide for this specific purpose.

Finally

Getting ill can be a traumatic experience up in the mountains, and it can happen quite quickly; many people are surprised by just how quickly a situation can develop from feeling 'a bit off' to being whisked back to Kathmandu.

Avoid the situation ever happening by walking slowly and taking the full number of days we recommend to ascend. Please don't try to walk too fast at altitude, the programme has been designed to allow for proper acclimatisation.