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All you need to know about Nepal's new solo-trekking ban



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To encourage safety and employment in the tourism sector, Nepal will soon require all trekkers in national parks to have licensed guides © MOROZ NATALIYA / Shutterstock



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From April 1, solo trekking will no longer be allowed in [Nepal's national parks and conservation areas](#).

F The Nepal Tourism Board, the body responsible for promoting the country's tourism, announced the decision on March 3. According to the board, the decision was taken after consulting with the country's various tourism stakeholders.

“The two main objectives behind the ban [are] to make trekking in Nepal safer and to create more employment opportunities in the country,” says board director Mani R Lamichhane.

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The new policy seeks to the improve safety of “free independent travelers” who might not know the local terrain © Dori Moreno / Getty Images

A question of safety

According to board-provided data, in fiscal year 2019–20, 390 tourists were reported lost or missing; in the following fiscal year, the number was 54 (nearly all are eventually rescued or found). “In both the years, the majority of tourists who were reported lost/missing were those trekking without guides, basically solo and ‘free independent travelers’ [FIT],” adds Lamichhane. “Even if you look at the data from years before 2019–20, you will see the same trend.”

The umbrella organization [Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal](#) has been pushing for the ban on solo trekking since as early as 2009, says Nilhari Bastola, the organization’s president.

“Every year we see two to four cases of solo trekkers getting involved in deadly incidents,” says Bastola. “Our data shows that having a trained trekking guide goes a long way in ensuring that trekkers remain safe and avert possible dangers.”

Licensed guides, says Bastola, are well aware of the topography of trekking trails and the possible risk factors in various routes.

Many of Nepal’s popular trekking trails are in remote destinations where human settlements are sparse and cellular connectivity unreliable. And in the country’s remote mountainous trails, sudden weather changes and such natural disasters as landslides occur frequently, posing immense risks to solo trekkers unfamiliar with the region’s conditions.

“When trekkers go missing in remote trails, it becomes immensely challenging for authorities to conduct search-and-rescue operations,” says Lamichhane.

Trekkers getting involved in fatal incidents every year had also created a misperception of Nepal as an unsafe trekking destination, agree Lamichhane and Bastola.

“This misperception is impacting our country’s tourism sector, and we are confident that the new rule will help lower the number of such unfortunate incidents,” says Lamichhane.

A boost to the local economy

Another motivation for the new move? Jobs.

“Out of the 171,000 trekkers that Nepal saw in the fiscal year 2019–20, around 46,000 were solo trekkers. Imagine the number of Nepalis who would have gotten jobs had it been mandatory for trekkers to hire guides,” says Lamichhane. “By hiring licensed guides, trekkers will also be creating more job opportunities in Nepal and thus doing their part in being responsible travelers.”

A lack of jobs for trekking guides has been an issue in Nepal’s tourism sector for years. Every year, dozens of Nepalis graduate with trekking-guide licenses, yet many of them do not end up working, says Dawa Tseten Gurung, the managing director of [Himalayan Wander Walkers](#), a Kathmandu-based trekking expedition company. “The new decision will bring more jobs only if the concerned authorities put in place a robust mechanism to ensure that the new rule is implemented.” Gurung’s company boasts a roster of seven trekking guides.



Trekking with a licensed local guide will allow visitors to Nepal to take in the country's stunning landscapes in safety © AlexBrylov / iStockphoto/ Getty Images

How to hire a trekking guide in Nepal

The Nepal Tourism Board has made it clear that solo and FIT trekkers will have to hire guides through government-authorized trekking agencies. Trekkers are free to choose the trekking expedition outfitter of their choice.

Since there are many unauthorized trekking companies offering services, Lamichhane advises visitors to do their homework, and make sure the outfitter they are dealing with has a license to operate legally in Nepal. The Nepal Tourism Board is also working on a database that will have a list of all registered trekking companies in the country.

To accompany you on your trek, you can expect to pay a minimum of around \$17 per guide per day. The price goes up based on the guide's (or guides') experience and the difficulty level of the trekking route.

Places where trekkers can still go solo, for now

Since the new rule bars solo trekking in national parks and conservation areas, many of [Nepal's most popular trekking routes](#) are now off-limits for lone explorers. Yet there are still plenty of trails where one can hike solo.

A route that has become increasingly popular in the last few years, the Pikey Peak trek in the lower [Solukhumbu region](#) offers scenic mountain views – including of Everest – and can be completed in under seven days.

The five-day Ama Yangri trek in the picturesque Helambu region via Melamchi is another great option. In the same district of Sindhupalchok is the remote Panch Pokhari (which translates to “five lakes”). This trek can take anywhere between eight to 10 days.

Closer to [Kathmandu](#) is the Champadevi hike via Chandragiri. “It’s a moderately challenging one-day hike and takes hikers past lush green forest with scenic views of Kathmandu Valley,” says Gurung.

There’s also the option of a three-day Balthali trek via Nagarkot (an hour drive from Kathmandu), with overnight stops at [Dhulikhel](#) and Balthali.