

## Upper Mustang Tiji Festival 2019



The Mustang region of western Nepal is one of the country's most recent districts to be opened for international visitors and trekkers. Until relatively recently it was the Kingdom of Lo and its people lived as part of the Tibetan Himalayan culture. Tibetan languages are still spoken there and the culture, practices and beliefs of the people are still strongly influenced by Tibet. While the Kingdom of Lo became part of Nepal in the late 18th century, the position of monarch, or king, was only abolished by the Government of Nepal in 2008. So the Mustang region offer visitors a glimpse into a unique cultural community of Nepal in a stunning high Himalayan desert landscape. A visit to Upper Mustang to enjoy the annual Tiji Festival, the biggest festival in Upper Mustang, is a special experience in a unique region of Nepal and the Himalayas. This is a chance to look back in time and see mud-walled villages much as they were hundreds of years ago. This is also a chance to meet the welcoming people of Mustang, learn a little of their culture and explore some of the most stunning desert landscapes on earth. You will trek through what is considered to be the deepest gorge in the world where massive snow-capped Himalayan peaks rim the valley skyline high above you. You will feel tiny as you make your way slowly through this ancient landscape and wonder at nature and the spirit of the Mustang people. This a very special trek to a very special place.

Duration: 19 days

Price: \$2199

Group Size: 2

Grade: Moderate

Destination: Nepal

Activity: Festivals

Region: Upper Mustang

**Date & Prices:**

Start Date	End Date	Price
04th May, 2018, Friday	22nd May, 2018, Tuesday	\$1999

### Equipment Lists:

**Footwear :** Well broken-in walking shoes - these must be suitable for snow, thick socks, light socks, camp shoes.

**Clothing :** Down or fiber filled waterproof jacket and trousers, sweater or fleece jacket, underwear, warm and cotton trousers or jeans, shirts and T-shirts, shorts, long underwear, wool hat, sun hat, gloves, bathing suit, track suit.

**Other equipment:** Sleeping bag (5 seasons), lock, day pack, water bottle, sun cream, sunglasses, flashlight with spare batteries, lip salve, gaiters.

**Other items:** Insect repellent, toilet articles, diary, toilet roll, laundry soap, wet ones, pocket knife, towel, sewing kit, plasters, binoculars, camera, memory cards, charger and personal medical kit.

### Itinerary:

**Day 1:** 22 May 2019: Kathmandu arrival

Welcome to Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. The Langtang Ri Trekking & Expedition representative will greet you at the airport and transfer you to your hotel. After your refreshment you will be picked up from your hotel lobby and driven to our Thamel office where you will be formally introduced to your trekking guide. We will go through all your trek itinerary and arrangements with you to insurer every detail is in place. We will also ask to bring your passport, extra passport photographs and a copy of your travel insurance so that we can organize permits required for your trek in the Upper Mustang Region.

**Day 2:** 23 May 2019: Kathmandu sightseeing

After breakfast, we start an interesting tour around Kathmandu. Escorting by an English speaking guide (can be provide any language speaking guide on request) the tour will give you a taste of our vivid Nepali culture and history. In our sightseeing tour we go to Monkey Temple Swayambhunath, Pashupatinath, Bouddhanath and Kathmandu Durbar Square.

**Bouddhanath:** Bouddhanath is a Buddhist religious complex with a history dating back over 500 years. Located on the eastern edge of Kathmandu it is now a site of great pilgrimage for Buddhist followers who circle its massive stupa, spin its many prayer wheels and visit its beautiful monastery. The main feature of Boudhanath is its huge hemispherical white stupa with central golden tower and the all-seeing eyes of the Buddha. Visitors should circle the stupa in a clockwise direction and spin prayer wheels for good fortune and a good life. Visitors may also enjoy visiting the thangka painting school within the complex to see highly skilled artists at work on religious mandala paintings.

**Pashupatinath:** This Hindu Temple is a very large complex and focal point for the Hindu religion in Nepal. This old and very revered complex of buildings and shrines is dedicated to the Lord Shiva, one of the main deities of Hinduism. While Lord Shiva has multiple forms he is often seen as the destroyer. This has great significance for the Pashupatinath temple as it is the site of many Hindi ritual cremations each day. Pashupatinath is considered by Hindus to be an auspicious site for passing from one stage of life to the next through the purifying and destroying flames of cremation. However, on a happier note, visitors may also get to see the temple in a buoyant festival mode with one of the many Hindu festivals celebrated here through the year.

**Swayambhunath:** You will first visit the Swayambhunath temple complex that sits atop a high hill overlooking Kathmandu and the entire Kathmandu Valley. Swayambhunath is perhaps the most sacred Buddhist pilgrimage site in Nepal. It consists of a very large white stupa with the all-seeing-eye of Lord Buddha plus many small stupa and beautifully carved stone shrines. This is a wonderful place to catch your breath and start to understand and appreciate the deep importance of Buddhist belief to the people of Nepal and the Himalaya region. Make sure you ring the many bells to awaken the gods and let them know you are in Nepal. Take the time to enjoy the view over Kathmandu and have your guide point out the many other highlights of the city. In the far distance to the east you may also be able to see the hills of Nagarkot. If you feel energetic you might also like to try some or all of the 350 steps that lead all the way from Kathmandu city up to your Swayambhunath temple vantage point.

**Kathmandu Durbar Square:** The next stop today is the beautiful Kathmandu Durbar Square, or the royal palace square of the ancient Malla Kings of the Kathmandu Valley. This square and all its architectural treasures are a UNESCO World Heritage Site. While some damage to buildings occurred in the 2015 earthquake the site still contains many stunning architectural gems. The original royal palace courtyards are open to visitors and you will marvel at the intricate timber carving and beautifully crafted brickwork of the palace. The open square outside the palace has many beautiful multi-storey pagodas and temples with ornate carving and carpentry artwork that tells some of the story of the ancient kings and their mystical time and beliefs. The square also contains many important Hindu temples and statues such as to Vishnu and Lord Shiva. Durbar Square also contains the unique and intriguing Kumari Chok. This is an ancient and ornate house where resides the Raj Kumari – the Living Goddess. She is a young girl chosen through an ancient and mystical selection process to become the human incarnation of the Hindu mother goddess, Durga. If you are in the courtyard of her home at the right time in the afternoon you may see a brief glimpse of the Goddess at her window.

**Day 3:** 24 May 2019: Drive from Kathmandu to Pokhara

Drive or fly to Pokhara. The flight is an optional extra for this itinerary. Pokhara is located about 200km west of Kathmandu on the shores of the beautiful Lake Fewa. Pokhara is a mixture of restful and busy. It has the atmosphere of a relaxed “resort town” where visitors take it easy seeing the sights and resting before their Annapurna or Mustang trek and once again upon their return. But is also a busy place with all these visitors arriving, leaving and exploring the lake and nearby sights of Pokhara. The option to drive from Kathmandu to Pokhara provides an opportunity to experience more of the real Nepal beyond the national parks and trekking trails. The scenery and people you will meet on the drive is also worth the experience.

**Day 4:** 25 May 2019: Short flight from Pokhara to Jomsom (2,700m) and commence trek to Kagbeni

The early morning flight to Jomsom is very short and very scenic. In the 30 minutes of flight time you will be treated to spectacular views as your aircraft flies up the Kali Gandaki Valley towards Jomsom. The Annapurna Massif and its many stunning peaks will be to your right and the mass of 8,172m Mount Dhaulagiri will be to your left. But too soon you will be on the ground at dusty Jomsom Airport. Once all your team and gear is organised your guide will lead you out on to the trail and commence the four hour trek to the village of Kagbeni. The ancient mud and stone village of Kagbeni sits on a ridge high above the dry riverbed where it is safe from the occasional flood that roars down the valley after heavy rains higher in the catchment.

**Day 5:** 26 May 2019: Trek from Kagbeni along the riverbed to Chele

The trek continues along the twists and turns of the huge Kali Gandaki riverbed. The gradient is gentle and the walking easy as you gain about 400m in altitude over the course of the walk. You will pass through the unspoiled traditional villages of Tangbe and Chhusang and take short detour breaks to rest and explore their narrow lanes and architecture. A chance to share a cup of tea with

the local people is also very likely. As you get closer to Chele the river valley narrows to a deep gorge and the gradient steepens. The last effort for the day is to trek up the steep trail that takes you to Chele village and its fields perched above the narrow southern gorge exit. There are many vantage points around the village where you can look down into the dark gorge and contemplate the surging torrents of water that have cut this spectacular cleft over thousands of years. The views to the east and the Annapurna Massif peaks and Mount Nilgiri are spectacular as the sun sets and the peaks fade to pinks, greys and then nightfall.

**Day 6:** 27 May 2019: Trek through the foothills and deep gullies from Chele to Geling

The trek becomes a little more challenging today as you leave the riverbed and follow the ancient trails along the western slopes of the valley. There is hardly a level step today as you always seem to be climbing or descending a ridge or gully slope. The landscape to the east is dominated by the giant gorge that cuts a gash through the solid rock of the lower valley. You trek through arid land that barely supports hardy goat herds of the few tiny villages you pass through. Eventually you will summit the main ridge and high point of 3,540m before slowly descending towards the welcome sight of Geling sitting high above its terraced fields stretching down the foothill slope.

**Day 7:** 28 May 2019: Trek higher up the valley from Geling to Tsarang

As you continue north into the heart of Upper Mustang the valley widens and the deep gorge you have been skirting opens out again to a wide and gravelly river bed. However, the trail today continues its winding path through the lower foothills. As you descend the valley slopes you pass spectacular red cliffs that glow in the strong sunlight. You then cross a small bridge over the Tangmar Chu River and ascend again to be rewarded with one of the longest and most interesting prayer walls, or mani, in all of Nepal. Say a prayer as you pass just as many thousands of local people have done before you for perhaps a thousand years or more. Upon reaching Tsarang you will be amazed by the sight and community effort that has gone into the construction of the five-story Dzong, or fort, and the nearby Buddhist gompa or monastery. Take the time to appreciate the wonderful statues and thanka paintings of the Buddha.

**Day 8:** 29 May 2019: Trek from Tsarang the Mustang capital of Lo Manthang

Start the day by exploring more of Tsarang and its rich heritage. Then head north on the trail along the wide valley floor towards Lo Manthang. You will see the walled town well before you reach it and then discover there is just one entrance gate to this once well defended town. The ever happy and welcoming people of Lo Manthang will be delighted to see your arrival.

**Day 9 :** 30 May 2019: Tiji Festival - first day

Early in the afternoon, horns resounded, announcing the two twelve-foot copper dunchens, with their elephantine blurring, followed by two double-reeled horns, all accompanied by drum and cymbals. Next an ancient and enormous tanka three stories high is unrolled down the entire south wall of the square. The thanka portrayed Padma Sambhava or Guru Rimpoche who brought this ceremony to Tibet in the 8th century. At mid-afternoon eleven lamas in maroon and gold, wearing high red hats, will come from the palace and take their places along the wall beneath the thanka, with Tashi Tenzing on the elevated seat just in the center. As the monks and lamas commence chanting, twelve more monks come from the palace in maroon and royal blue and glittering gold brocade, with cymbal-shaped hats decked with upright peacock plumes. Soon they withdraw, to be replaced by the masked dancers who start the portrayal of the Tiji myth. Dorje Jono repels the demon through the power of his magical dancing – he dances fifty-two separate dances, one of them in ten different bodies, each with a different head. As the dances end Dorje Jono kills the demon after which his people are relieved of their plague of misfortunes, water becomes plentiful once more, and the balance and harmony of existence are restored.

**Day 10:** 31 May 2019: Second day of Tiji Festival

Numbers of Loba have arrived from the outlying hamlets and the small square will be thronged with wild beautiful people, with all of the women and children, at least, in traditional dress. The King of Mustang will appear wearing a whole crown of tiny river pearls set off by dozens of large red coralline tones interspersed with matched ornaments of turquoise. The theatre of the festival then becomes a blur of costumes and masks, the twelve-foot horns, gold cups of wheat, butter cakes, snow peaks and wind and dust and sun, rajas and foreigners, dogs and yaks.

**Day 11:** 01 June 2019: Third day of Tiji festival

Tiji ends with the ceremonial destruction of the evil remains, represented by some long black yak hair and red torma cakes minced to a dark red gurry. The demons red remnants are set out on an old tiger skin, where-upon they are attacked by bow and arrow, slings, and the old guns. The poor devils remains are over- turned upon the ground, each time to a wild cannonade from the old muzzle-loaders and a wave of cheers and smoke. After enjoying the festival you still have a chance to do excursion around other gompas close to Lo Manthang.

**Day 12:** 02 June 2019: Start the return journey from Lo Manthang to Ghami

The return journey follows different trails and lets you explore new sights and villages. Today's trek takes you through the western foothills and up and down winding trails to the small village of Lo Gekar. While may seem an insignificant little village it actually has what is thought to be the oldest Buddhist Gumpa or monastery in Nepal and Tibet. This fact attests to the significance of the hidden Mustang region in bygone eras. After some time exploring the monastery and learning some of its history it is time continue down the valley to Ghami.

**Day 13:** 03 June 2019: Trek down the valley from Ghami to Samar

The walk today continues down the western flank of the valley. You pass through the village of Gheling again and finish the day at the tiny settlement of Samar perched above its terraced farm plots trailing down the hillside below.

**Day 14:** 04 June 2019: Trek from Samar to Kagbeni

The walk starts with a slow winding descent from the western foothills towards Chele where you once again return to the dry Kali Gandaki Riverbed and then on to Kagbeni.

**Day 15:** 05 June 2019:Trek from Kagbeni back to Jomsom

Retrace your footsteps in reverse as you continue down the riverbed to Jomsom.

**Day 16:** 06 June 2019: Return flight from Jomsom to Pokhara

Your early morning flight will take you quickly from Jomsom to Pokhara where you will have free time to boat on the lake, do some shopping or relax in one of the many great restaurants.

**Day 17:** 07 June 2019: Return from Pokhara to Kathmandu

After breakfast in the morning you say goodbye to Pokhara and head back to bustling Kathmandu by road. You may also choose to fly back to Kathmandu as an optional extra to your itinerary. You will be delivered back to your Kathmandu hotel at the end of today's travels.

**Day 18:** 08 June 2019: Free Day in Kathmandu for a little shopping

This is the free day to explore a little more of Kathmandu and complete your gift shopping. In the evening you will be collected from your hotel for a fun farewell dinner and Nepali cultural dance – so don't forget your dancing shoes!

**Day 19:** 09 June 2019: Departure for home – Kathmandu Airport

We will meet you at your hotel and take you to the airport in plenty of time to meet your flight home.

### **Cost Include:**

- Airport Pick up & Drop Transportation by private vehicle
- Twin/Double sharing accommodation at Kathmandu and Pokhara in 2-3 star hotel with breakfast & all taxes
- Sightseeing in Kathmandu Escorted with English Speaking Guide, private car & all Entrance fee
- Kathmandu / Pokhara / Kathmandu Tourist Bus transportation
- Pokhara / Jomsom / Pokhara flight tickets for member and Nepali guide
- Accommodation in normal tea house during trek
- Meals (Breakfast with 3 cup Tea /Coffee, lunch, dinner) in trekking
- Sleeping bag
- Trekking map for group
- All necessary paper work
- A First Aid and Eco trained & Government licensed holder English Speaking guide & one porter between two people during trek
- Accommodation, meals, salary, equipment, transportation & Insurance of trekking staffs
- Travel & Rescue arrangement
- Annapurna Conservation Area Permit fees
- Upper Mustang Special permit
- 2 Liter water per day and Electricity bill
- All government taxes
- Farewell dinner

### **Cost exclude:**

- International Airfare
- Nepal Visa fee (US\$ 40 per person for 30 days)
- Lunch/Dinner in Kathmandu & Pokhara
- Any expenses of personal nature
- Medical evacuation in case of emergency
- Personal gears & clothing
- Client's Insurance, Items of personal nature i.e. Soft/hard drinks, Tips etc.
- Expenses incurred due to mishaps, landslide, strikes, political unrest etc. In such case extra will be charged as per actual
- Anything doesn't specified in cost include section