



In Pursuit of Sun, Solitude and Self – Trek to the Everest Base Camp

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This whole crazy journey started while I was watching a music video with the Himalayas in it. This sparked something crazy in me. Instead of sitting there behind a screen, I wanted to be there in person. The idea to trek to the Everest Base camp was now born.

After I realised I truly wanted to do this, I immediately shared my crazy idea with a few who I reckoned would be equally crazy. What started as a casual suggestion, solidified and eventually turned into an expedition, set for April 2018. Out of the fifteen people with potential interest, it wilted down to just four. I along with Dr Sathish Williams (GUM consultant, Taunton), Dr Sorna Kumar (Dentist, Plymouth), Dr Gopinath Selvaraj (Anaesthetist , Carmarthen) became the expedition team. Once the initial excitement settled, we were faced with the reality of addressing the challenges that came along with hiking 130km and climbing 5500m in altitude. This then lead to searching for a reliable trek company and gathering options on when and how to get there. We all had to start training to ensure we were prepared for the journey ahead. Personally, I started to walk everywhere and even climbed the multi-storey car park at my hospital twice a day, totalling 360 steps. This also included daily training, weekend long walks, hill climbs and many trips to the highest peak in the South West, Pen-y-Fan, Brecon Beacons, Wales.

One of these trips coincided with the worst weather the country has experienced in recent times, including the worst blizzards since 1962. Despite the harsh weather we still continued the trek as per plan. It may have been a short-sighted decision at the time, but in the end, this gave us courage and experience to face any serious conditions. The four of us then embarked on this once in a lifetime journey to the Everest base camp in April 2018. The trek itself was 12 days of approximately 5-6 hours of walking every day with a couple of acclimatisation days in between. We had Chandra, our guide and two porters to help us complete the trek. The first challenge to overcome was the scary experience of sitting through the short flight from Kathmandu to Lukla, one of the most dangerous airstrips in the world. Unfortunately or rather fortunately, our flights got cancelled due to bad weather and we flew by helicopter instead.

However this offered us unparalleled views and a new experience. We then arrived at our first tea house, a small bed- and-breakfast-like hotel which are dotted along most of the treks in the region. The food menu had a wide range of options and I ordered the much-awaited “mo-mos” which were absolutely delicious. The typical tea house provides all the basic amenities



needed to trek in the Himalayas such as beds, a hot meal and the option of a hot shower. This is also the chance to meet the local people, who were very accommodating and friendly and also to meet fellow trekkers.

We then commenced onto our first day of trekking, a short and easy 3-4 hour walk to Phakding village for the overnight stop. On the second day we continued up to Namche Bazaar where we experienced heights of 3000m, the magic number for altitude sickness. The trek took us along the banks of the Dudh Kosi which we crossed by small suspension bridges. The swing of the bridges, the dizzying heights, the cold winds, the oncoming traffic of humans and yaks, the sound of the river and the breath-taking scenery, all combined to provide an indescribable feeling of exhilarating experience.

We then reached the village of Monjo the entrance gate of the Sagarmatha National Park. Unfortunately, one of our mates developed altitude sickness at Namche Bazaar, a beautiful scenic town at an altitude of 3440m. Despite immediate medical attention and an extra day for acclimatisation, he had to be shifted back to Kathmandu for further medical attention. After sorting out the logistics of his transfer, the three of us continued ahead. On day three of the trek, we had the first sighting of Mt Everest peak. The great view of the mighty peaks of Everest, Nuptse, Lhotse, AmaDablam, Thamserku and Kwangde peak with view of the eastern snow-capped mountains were breath taking. The trail leads us up hill through the forested path and a hard walk to get to Tyangboche, housing the largest Monastery in the Khumbu region. The following days we were steadily gaining in altitude and conditions got tougher and progressively challenging. The next day, we started our trail to Dingboche (4,358m/14,295 ft), 5-6 hrs walk, winding through the rhododendron forest to Deboche and crossing a bridge over the raging ImjaKhol River. We moved out of Dingboche on Day 7 and headed for Lobuche on the final stretch to Everest Base Camp, up the famous Dugla hill and at the top of the cemetery for lost climbers, a sombre place, with stunning scenery back across the valley and jagged peaks jutting out across the skyline.

The pace was gradually getting slower, but everyone was still doing good and we kept talking to each other and pushing ourselves. The mountain, the team, the support, the guides, the training all working to get us to our goal and we were having the time of our life.

Motivated to move on to our final destination of Everest Base Camp we started early the next day and moved alongside the Khumbu glacier which kept us company all the way to Base Camp. We stopped for a break at Gorak Shep to get ready for the final leg of our mission. At 5,160m/16,929ft, the air is really thin and the week-long trek had taken a toll on the body and the legs were feeling dead and heavy. However, the excitement of being so close to our mission and realising our dream pushed us along. Even talking to each other became an arduous task at this stage. It took us three hours to complete the trail that took us over rocky dunes and moraine and streams. Finally, we made it. We were at the Everest Base Camp. It felt surreal standing in front of the colourful tents of the summiteers, walking on the ice at the bottom of the ice-fall and this was a dream come true. What a moment and one I will never forget. We spent an hour walking and talking and headed back to Gorak Shep for the night.



L-R - Nooru (Helper), Dr Sathish Williams, Dr Guru Karnati, Chandra (Guide) Farkey (Helper) and Dr Gopinath Selvaraj

Egged by our base camp success, two of us decided to wake up at 4am for our Kala Patthar summit in the morning. This small peak offers the best views of Mt. Everest, Nuptse, Pumori and Ama Dablam along with the entire mountain views of Khumbu Himalayan range and we also can see the Everest base camp. The Kala Patthar climb was one of the most gruelling 2 hours I had ever experienced in my life.



Sunrise view of Mt Everest from Kala pathar (3555m)

As one of my good mates summed it up, starting at 4am in the morning, pitch black surrounding, treacherous mountain, icy wind, no air to breath, tired legs after a week trek, far away from loved ones, no proper food and amenities and many more. You are not conquering the mountain but just conquering yourself.

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