



Everest Base Camp My Top 10 Highlights by Marc Jerrard

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INTRODUCTION

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Mount Everest...ooh, just saying those words conjures up so many images and emotions. It's hard not to be drawn in by the awesome power and mystique it's held for so many people over the years. Why wouldn't it? Standing at an impressive 29,032 feet (8,849 metres) above sea level, this colossus has captivated the human imagination for centuries.

For adventurers and highly experienced mountaineers reaching its summit is the ultimate test of skill, determination and physical strength. Many have tried, many have succeeded, and sadly too many have perished on the mountain. Now with the ever-increasing rise of commercialisation, more and more adventurers strive to answer its call, which has resulted in well documented overcrowding in its 'death zone'. And yet, it still draws you in, and no doubt will continue to do so for centuries to come.

When I was younger, a lot younger I, like so many wide-eyed kids with big dreams, imagined myself standing on the roof of the world. Always the adventurer and explorer, with a defiant attitude of "I can do anything! I'm invincible!" Yeah, right kiddo! Bless his little cottons! Ok, so life doesn't always work out the way you intended. Or maybe, just maybe, you were just aiming a fraction too high?

Yep, that was me. Always the dreamer. So, around the time I was turning 50, I found myself like so many people of a certain age embarking on their mid-life journey, asking myself some typically deep questions like; "what have I accomplished in my life?" (no offence to my amazing wife, Marissa, and our 4 kids). Other questions such as "What can I do to really push myself outside my comfort zone"? Now that was THE question!

Ok, getting myself in some sort of physical shape was the first item on the agenda! Gym membership sorted. Tick! What next? Ooh I know. I'll Google "what challenges are there in the UK"? OMG! What I only discovered. A whole world of people doing really daft stuff! I'll have me some of that thank you very much! I'll talk about that in my blog... WalkinginCirclesuk.com

Fast forward a couple of months, and I found myself in a semi-lit, upstairs room in a London pub on the Embankment with 20 or so other wide-eyed adventurers,



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listening to a presentation about trekking to Everest Base Camp! And the rest as they say is history! Ok, I can't really leave you hanging there.

So, now considerably older and dare I say wiser (I can literally hear Marissa laughing right now!), I realised adventure and going for it, didn't mean you had to attempt to summit the world's tallest mountain. But why not go and see the mountain up close and personal anyway? Which is what led me to a room in the aforementioned London pub, totally hooked!

Everest Base Camp... (I'll refer to it as EBC from now on) was my ticket to glory! For the sceptics out there, trekking to EBC is by no means a stroll in the park. EBC doesn't sit at sea level. It's not nestled down in some lush green valley. No, EBC rests high up in the Himalayas, at an impressive 17,598 feet (5,364 metres) altitude, precariously perched on the Khumbu Glacier!

To succeed would take approximately 10 strenuous days of hard trekking to get there, and 3 or so days back, covering over 100kms distance on extremely arduous terrain, all the while dealing with the increasing effects of high altitude and fatigue!

...I had found my adventure of a lifetime. I signed up immediately!!



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My Kit for EBC and Gokyo Lakes!



Everest Base Camp (EBC): My Top 10 Highlights

1. Kathmandu

Nestled in the heart of the Himalayas stands Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. Arriving here you really get the sense of its rich history, diverse culture, and of course the stunning landscapes! No wonder it's captured the hearts of travellers and adventurers for centuries! Needless to say, it got me too! Although with such a time restricted agenda I didn't have as much time to fully explore the city as I would have liked, what I did see and experience, will stick with me forever! You are immediately struck by the warmth, and genuine hospitality of the Nepalese people, who make you feel at home from the moment you arrive. Everywhere I went I was greeted with a big beaming smile, and 'Namaste'.



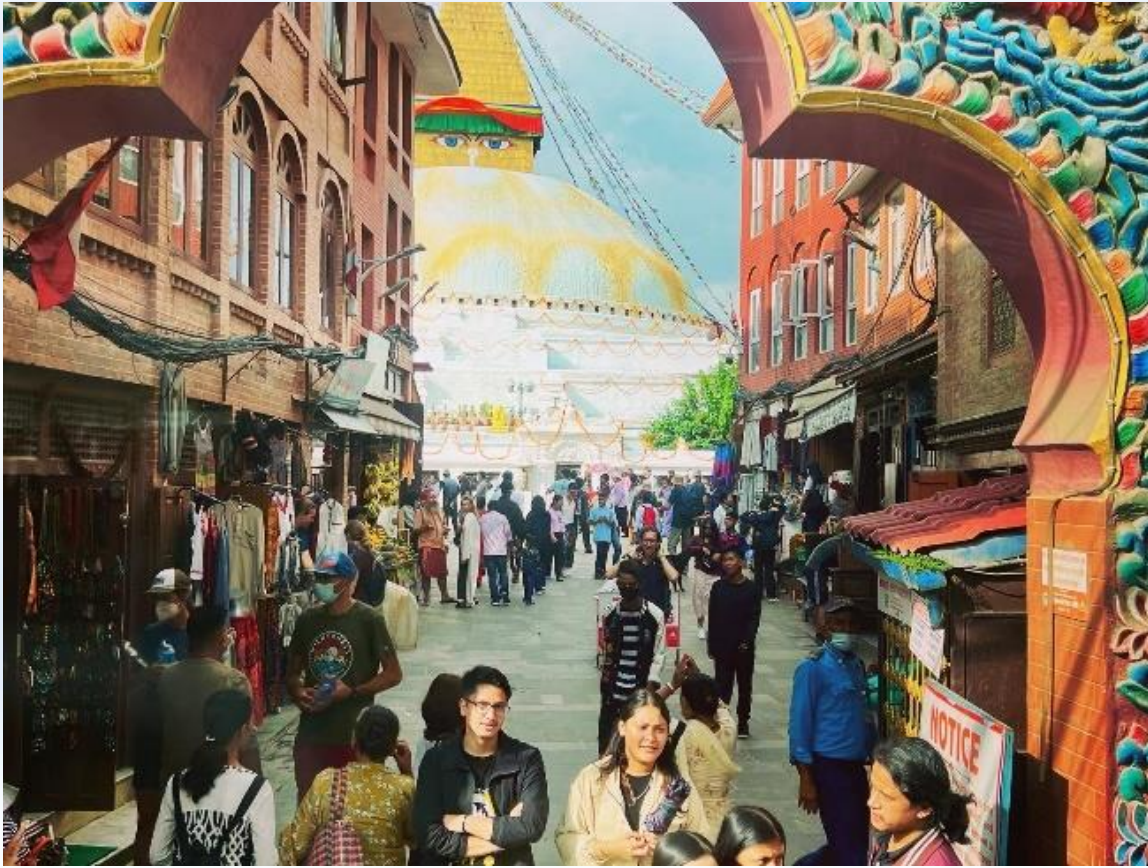
The roads heave with the daily bustle of people, traffic, and jaw dropping twisted electrical network of pylons that align each street! As our outbound flight from Kathmandu to Lukla was cancelled (more on that later), we were fortunate to be able to explore one of Kathmandu's largest Buddhist temples Boudhanath Stupa, centre of Tibetan Buddhism and a place of deep reverence. All the sights, sounds and smells were intoxicating, which made it an incredibly moving experience! As well as Kathmandu's bustling markets and bazaars, if you have time, you can also explore all the culinary delights on offer, which are influenced by Nepali, Tibetan and Indian cuisine. Well worth a try I can tell you! Kathmandu is also the gateway to the Himalayas, which is why I was there after all!



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Boudhanath Temple

Bustling streets of Kathmandu





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2. Getting in and out of the Himalayas

Getting to and from the Himalayas is no easy feat by road, it would add on some considerable time to an already jammed packed itinerary. So, the most obvious and common way is via a short flight (weather permitting) to the Tenzing-Hilary airport in Lukla, around 2,900m above sea level. Although this airport does come with the tagline of being considered the *most dangerous airstrip in the world!* Great! But oddly enough I was mega excited about the prospect of experiencing this exhilarating flight into the Himalayas! There are countless videos of other adventurers having taken this journey, all vying for a window seat to try and capture the incredible scenery, whilst simultaneously praying the flight would land safely!

But the ability to fly into Lukla is very much weather dependent as previously stated. Cloud cover is a frequent occurrence at these altitudes, and it requires a lot of patience whilst you wait for your opportunity to fly there from Kathmandu airport. In fact, our patience spread into two days! The first day there were no flights at all due to heavy rain and low clouds. The second day was beginning to look like more of the same, however, there is an alternative to plane...helicopter! Oh yes! I'll have some of that thank you very much! Ok, it came at an additional circa £250 p/p, but we were all desperate to get going!

Our whole group finally departed on several helicopters, with 5 passengers in each. It was an awesome experience, offering stunning almost cinematic views of the Himalayas, as we rose higher and higher towards the distant peaks. On our particular helicopter, due to persistent low clouds obscuring the pilot's views into Lukla, we were eventually forced to land at Surke. However, this gave the 5 of us some unexpected hiking time, through the night, and in pouring rain, to reach a Tea House for the night. A dramatic start to our adventure, and no doubt a prelude of what was to come!



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Getting ready to depart Kathmandu for the Himalayas by helicopter



Lukla Airstrip: Low cloud cover, made it impossible to fly into Lukla on our trip. We instead landed by helicopter in Surke



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3. Scenic beauty

The trek treated me to an ever-changing canvas of stunning vistas - from the lush green forests, with the vibrant rhododendron blooms, and cascading waterfalls in the lower regions, to the stark beauty of rocky moraines and icy glaciers as you ascend higher and higher. Then there's the incredible sight of some of the world's highest peaks staring down at you...from Ama Dablam, Lohtse, Island peak, Nuptse, and many more. It's a never-ending treat for your eyes!

Then there's the surreal experience of seeing Mount Everest in the distance for the first time! It's so far in the distance, with other nearer peaks giving the impression they are higher, which of course is just an illusion. But you get the feeling all those other peaks which surround Everest are forming a layer of protection for the mighty mountain. Then in a blink of an eye it's gone from view as you continue on your journey along the mountain paths. Moving from one vista to another on a daily basis, is an incredibly awe-inspiring experience.



Lush green forests, with the Dudh Khosi River flowing below!



Ama Dablam, framed by this iconic stupa



The Khumbu Glacier, with an almost lunar landscape



Mount Everest! My first brief sighting, behind the clouds



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4. Glacial Rivers and Bridges

Suspended over roaring glacial rivers, the swaying, prayer flagged suspension bridges add an extra dimension to the trek. The thrill of crossing these bridges amidst the grandeur of nature is unforgettable. The highlight being the notorious Hilary Suspension Bridge. Perched at a fear dreading (for some, not me!) 300m above the Dudh Khosi river, I had been looking forward believe it or not to crossing this mighty suspension bridge ever since I first booked to go on this expedition. It will always remain as one of my main highlights, standing on the bridge with a few of my new friends, all of us with beaming smiles, snapping up photos and videos like hungry children!



The Hilary Suspension Bridge



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5. Namche Bazaar

This bustling Sherpa town, perched like an eagle's nest at 3,440m, is a hub of culture and commerce. It's a vital acclimatisation stop where we had the opportunity to interact with locals, and shop for essential supplies (such as fizzy drinks, toilet paper, paracetamol, and loads of Snicker bars!). Plus, it's a great chance to pick up some souvenirs (I personally bought a magnificent Yak bell, some Tibetan prayer flags, and a soft Yak blanket).

This place also serves up some amazing coffee shops with extremely tasty and very much welcomed cake! A scarcity during your time spent on the trek, so it was very much savoured! Namche Bazaar also boasts the highest Irish pub in the world! Although we avoided the temptation now to quench our thirsts with a pint or two, it was a great motivation to know we would be heading back to Namche en route down again in a couple of weeks! (*Which of course we did...and duly celebrated in style!*).

During our acclimatisation time in Namche Bazaar, we had the opportunity to trek up towards the Everest View Hotel...the clue's in the name! Although, on our particular day, we had more of the familiar by now cloud cover. Although this wasn't the day when we'd first see Mount Everest for the first time, a few other peaks did make a brief appearance for us. That was good enough for me!

Whilst trekking up there, we were treated to make a stop at Sagamartha Next – which is a non-profit organisation that promotes sustainable tourism in the Khumbu region, by inviting in a wide range of talent to bring innovative sustainable solutions to the waste management issues that exist in the region. It was both fascinating and uplifting to see firsthand all the hard work and outcomes from their endeavours. It's definitely well worth a visit.



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Namche Bazaar: Photo taken on our acclimatisation day



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6. Tea Houses and Lodges

One of the benefits of trekking in the Himalayas are the Tea Houses and lodges where you get the opportunity to rest, refuel, and bond with other trekkers. Although being a Westerner, it can take some getting used to the, shall we say varying quality of available rooms, and toilets (most being in the form of squat), these resting spots were very much a welcome respite after a long day of trekking. I can also assure you that I was always grateful for the food on offer – mostly in the form of essential carbs such as potatoes, pasta and pizza if you were lucky! Or you could opt for the local options such as dahl baht, or a couple of my personal favourites being either a hearty Sherpa stew, or momos!

Most Tea houses have a central common room, where food and hot flavoured tea are served, and where you can generally hang out, play card games (very popular choice), or just sit in silence due to fatigue. There is usually a Yak dung heater (yep you heard that right!), which not just gives the only element of warmth you're likely to experience there, but also serves as a place to hang out some wet clothes (if you could find the space as a very popular feature!). You can also buy additional supplies in most tea houses, such as wifi cards, and some drinks and snacks. But the higher you go towards EBC, the more remote the tea house, meaning higher prices! Hence the benefit of buying what you can In Namche Bazaar!



Left image: Relaxing after a long day's trekking



Left image: Lunch stop at Phakding



Above: Kharik Hola, with the golden staircase leading up to a school!



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7. Religious and spiritual belonging

Throughout the trek, either whilst passing through a small village, or perched in more remote places, you get the feel of the religious and spiritual significance of this region. Prayer wheels, and Tibetan prayer flags are a regular sighting, which add an array of bright colours as they flap in the breeze!

Also, a prominent feature are stupas – most are mound like structures, some are larger with more prominent meaning. You are asked by your Sherpa guide to walk in a clockwise direction round a stupa, which signifies a mark of devotion, and no doubt good luck!

For me, the most memorable area of reverence you pass en route to EBC is whilst trekking through the Thukla Pass, to the Memorial for the Fallen, or what's commonly known as the Climbers Graveyard. Arriving here and spending a little time walking around the various prayer flag adorned stupas was an incredibly moving experience for me. It's a reminder and tribute to those who have sadly lost their lives on the mountain.

A highlight to me, more out of respect and admiration for those who had dared to dream, but ultimately succumbed to the unrelenting power of the mountain.



View from the Memorial for the Fallen



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8. Tengboche Monastery (and a Tibetan Nunnery)

Enveloped by the Himalayan grandeur, this ancient monastery, with the serene chants of monks and panoramic views of Everest and Ama Dablam is an unforgettable experience. Arriving here on our particular day, the views were partly obscured by low hanging cloud and drizzle. This seemed to give the monastery even more prominence, as it stood proudly, but silently. Sadly for us we didn't have time to fully explore the monastery, but It still left a lasting impression on us all.

We were treated the following morning however to a surprise, having left our lodge in Deboche, to visit a small Tibetan nunnery, which stood framed by an impressive view of Ama Dablam behind the building. Our group was allowed to enter the inner temple, and our main guide Sherpa Chhiring gave us an impressive overview of the history and art and other symbols that adorned the room. We were not permitted to take any photos inside unfortunately, but it was an experience I'll never forget!



Tengboche Monastery



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9. Sherpa guides and culture

I can't speak highly enough about the Sherpa guides and porters we were lucky enough to have with us during our entire journey. They work tirelessly to make sure you are always fully supported, well fed, and sometimes entertained during often very hard going and long days. They do all of this with warm hearts and big beaming smiles!

There were always 3 or 4 Sherpa guides with us, plus a few porters, who have the unenviable task of either carrying some of our heavy duffle bags to our ongoing Tea House, or leading a small herd of Yaks who carry our bags on their backs!

Trekking through the many Sherpa villages also offers you a small glimpse into the Sherpa way of life and culture. A few of us were even treated to being invited into our main Sherpa guide's (Jangbu) home, where his wife and children greeted us and fed us with some Tibetan pancakes and hot mango tea! It is a cherished memory having been able to immerse myself in this unique cultural experience.



Our wonderful Sherpa guides!



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10.EBC Arrival

Reaching Everest Base Camp is an achievement that words can hardly capture. Standing at the foot of the world's highest peak is a humbling experience that marks the climax of all your planning and dreaming! It takes approximately 7-8 days of long hard climbs and descents over tough terrain, not forgetting at high altitude, to reach Everest Base Camp. But it's all worth it!

Depending on the time of year you trek to EBC you may be able to see plenty of activity and tents down in the actual camp. April is the best time, as many expedition operators and their clients will be heading up there in preparation for summitting Mount Everest!

I arrived in EBC on 3rd October, which meant the camp was quiet, bar from a few tents. However, the sheer scale of camp, sitting below the mountain, and the notorious Khumbu Icefall, is just magnificent to behold!

It's a long and extremely strenuous day of trekking to reach Base Camp, and then trek back, exhausted to Gorak Shep (which isn't the most pleasant of places to stay, as is well documented). By the time we made it to Base Camp, I was brought to tears, both a mix of fatigue, and pure joy, in succeeding one of my lifetime's ambitions. The infamous rock is synonymous with countless photo and video posts on many social media platforms! So, obviously I took plenty of both!



Everest Base Camp: 2.30pm October 3rd 2022



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We did it! Unbridled joy at reaching EBC!

Extended Highlights!! (What? There's more?)...

As my adventure also included the trek to Gokyo Lakes via the Cho La Pass, here are a few other highlights... You didn't really think I could keep it to my Top 10 did you?



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11. Challenging Passes

Having opted for the extension to trek to Gokyo Lakes, meant we'd have a few other very challenging days ahead. Crossing the Cho La pass and summiting and then descending Cho La itself, at a height of 5,420m, was an incredibly tough challenge, made more imposing by the overnight snow and blizzards, and sub-zero temperatures, which continued throughout the day of the climb. The day's trek took so much longer than we all expected, round 10-11 hours! So we decided to stay at a different Tea House that night, before heading to Gokyo Lakes the following morning. I can't tell you how grateful we all were!

Moving on from our Tea House, we then crossed the Nzogomba Glacier en-route to Gokyo Lakes, which added another element of challenge and fatigue to our trek.

The feeling of accomplishment upon conquering these high passes is up there for me with reaching EBC itself, if not dare I say even bigger, such was the difficulty in overcoming the challenges we faced.



Cho La summit 5,420m, 05th Oct 2023



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12. Gokyo Lakes

Words simply cannot describe the beauty and majesty of this place. That moment when we had eventually climbed atop of a steep ridge, having crossed the mighty Nzogomba Glacier, I'll never forget. Seeing the astonishing beauty of Gokyo Lakes down in the valley below, just blows your mind! The lakes hit you with their stunning turquoise colour amidst some breathtaking scenery! There are 6 lakes in all, with the largest Thonak Lake, or no.1 lake as it's known, being the centrepiece, sitting below the mighty Gokyo Ri.

I could have spent days up here, exploring all the lakes and taking in the vista. We spent a couple of nights here, which was very much welcomed after some long arduous days climbing! No more words...check out some images on the net for yourself! I promise you you'll be blown away! It's definitely worth considering bolting this onto your EBC agenda, if you are able, and willing to take on the additional challenges in reaching there!



*Gokyo Lakes...with its turquoise waters, enveloped by snowcapped mountains,
and the village nestled below to the right*



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13. Departing the Himalayas

I can't omit this addition to my highlights package, as it was one of my most memorable experiences. If you recall, we arrived at Surke (not Lukla) via helicopters, due to the poor weather on the day. Likewise, after what we believed to be our final day of hiking when we arrived by foot at Lukla, the weather once again closed the door on us from being able to fly out from the Tenzing-Hilary airport. I can assure you decide to embark on the EBC trek, you're more than likely to be more successful in being able to fly out by plane from Lukla than I was! However, Instead, we had to dash down the mountainside by foot to Surke in the hope we could all depart by means of helicopters once again.

After a 2 hour extremely strenuous trek due to the very steep and slippery terrain, and rush we were in, we made it to Surke. On arrival there were hundreds of people, trekkers, and adventurers, all similarly tired, hungry and keen to make it off the mountainside and back to the comforts of their respective hotels in Kathmandu. Patience was key once again. But eventually my helicopter arrived sometime later in the afternoon. The flight this time wasn't going to take us directly to Kathmandu. Instead, we headed towards Ramechamp airport in Manthali. A longer flight, tinged with a mix of emotions with the realisation that you are departing the Himalayas for the final time. However, the thought of being able to take a HOT shower (extremely rare in the Himalayas) was oh so appealing!

Once in Manthali, the drive was about 5 hours by minibus. The road, if you can call it a road, which wound itself up and down through twists and turns on a precarious mountain edge, was an adventure in itself. Cars, bikes, trucks, animals, you name it, all vying for space, taking no precautions overtaking round blind bends...wow!

But we made it to Kathmandu, and to our hotel where we could at last take a much-needed shower, get into some clean clothes, and gorge ourselves on the feast that was presented to us. A thoroughly well-deserved finale to our Himalayan adventure!



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14. Friendships and Memories

Last but not least, are the bonds that you form with your group during your expedition. Even well before we set off for EBC, a bunch of us set up a group chat. This was such a great idea, as it enabled us to form a strong bond even before we set off! Then spending every day and night together, having shared moments of awe, exhaustion, and ultimately triumph, has further strengthened our friendships which I'm sure will last a lifetime! We all still regularly chat, share photos of what we're up to, and occasionally meet up for long hikes and social occasions.



Friends for life! At the entrance to Lukla, after completing an epic 19 day journey to Everest Base Camp and Gokyo Lakes



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A final note...

Trekking to Everest Base Camp is much more than just a physical journey; it's a highly spiritual, emotional, and cultural experience that undoubtedly will leave an indelible mark in your heart and soul. My Top 10 (ok 14) Highlights are just a glimpse of the multitude of wonders that I was fortunate to experience throughout this extraordinary adventure. Not only was it the huge sense of accomplishment I had been dreaming about since I was that younger wide-eyed kid, but It's left me with me a bucketload of cherished memories, and a band of brothers and sisters (including some of the Sherpa guides) whose friendship will last a lifetime.

I hope my journey will inspire YOU to take the leap and to always go for your dreams!

Namaste

Marc