

IMG EVEREST 2011: Update for Climbers

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Dear Team and Prospective Team members,

Eric Simonson here, I am IMG Himalayan Program director. I have organized over 40 Himalayan expeditions, including 18 on Everest. For Spring 2011, we are looking forward to our 19th expedition to the world's highest mountain. We have seen over 250 Sherpas and western climbers summit Everest with our IMG teams over the years. Among IMG non-sherpa climbers in the past 5 years who reached the South Col, 83% have gone on to reach the summit. IMG is an international guide service, and we welcome climbers from around the world who share our philosophy.

IMG Everest Philosophy -- "We support Climbers"

I have seen Everest change so much since 1982 when I first went to the mountain. Now you might have close to 1000 climbers and Sherpas on the mountain, so you will not be lonely! The negative side of this is that there are an increasing number of climbers on Mt. Everest that do not belong there or who are poorly supported, so that if they have a problem, it might soon become your problem! To mitigate this we do a number of things. For example, we want IMG climbers empowered with the freedom and flexibility to leave early and get ahead of slow climbers and slow groups. We want to have in place the support and logistics to split our team up if necessary, to beat the traffic jams. We want to have in place the support and logistics to be able to render assistance without negatively impacting our team members. If you want to climb with a large slow group, we suggest you seek another guide service. We have the logistics and horsepower to mount one big summit bid, several smaller bids, or if necessary a second summit bid if the first is unsuccessful. Our goal is to provide great support and flexibility to our climbers with a good fun team structure.

IMG staff

I am happy to announce that for IMG Everest 2011 we have now slated our top IMG guides and our very best "A Team" Sherpas under the expert guidance of Ang Jangbu and Ang Pasang.

Prerequisites

If you are going to be a member of IMG Everest expedition, you need to be a solid climber. That means that you are in excellent physical condition, with good technical skills and previous altitude experience. You need to be proficient with crampons, fixed rope, ascenders, rappelling, and have climbed previously to at least 20,000 ft / 6000m and demonstrated your ability to acclimatize normally. Over the course of the Everest expedition (starting with the Lobuche climb and on the two acclimatization rotations) we expect you to demonstrate your skills and fitness in order to qualify for the summit bids. The single most important thing that you can do to increase your safety on Mt. Everest is to minimize the time that you spend on the dangerous parts of the climb. This includes the Icefall, on the Lhotse Face, and in the Death Zone (above 26,000ft/8000m). You must be able to climb strongly and proficiently to avoid the pitfalls presented by the mountain, the weather, and the other climbers!!

Guided / Non-Guided / Western-guided / Sherpa-guided

These terms all become pretty confusing these days. The IMG Everest programs are ALL guided expeditions, they are NOT non-guided. Our IMG Everest goal is to meet the needs of our customers with programs that combine the best attributes of both Sherpa and western leadership at competitive prices. There are many different styles of guiding on Everest, and they are not the same. At the \$40,000 price we offer a 1:1 personal Sherpa guide. For \$55,000 we offer the 1:1 personal Sherpa guide plus the western guide at a 4:1 ratio. For \$70,000 we offer the 1:1 Sherpa guide and a western guide at a 2:1 ratio. For \$100,000 you get 1:1 for both. Lots of choices depending on what you want, what you need, and what you want to spend! The Sherpas that work for IMG are some of the very best Everest climbers, period. In order to compare different styles of Everest programs you need to understand who is going to be actually climbing with you and what support will be available if there is a problem. These are fair questions to ask of any company, and you should be comfortable with the answers you receive.

Strategy

Our IMG guides and staff will work with you decide on the best strategy for you. We have seen many times that this is not the same for all climbers. It depends on variables like people's health, fitness, acclimatization, aggressiveness, etc. For example, there is debate whether it is better to go up to C1 and then to C2 on your first rotation, or just to C1 and come back to BC. How many nights to stay at C2? Is it really necessary to sleep at C3 before summit bids and if so, how many nights? This kind of planning is not written in stone and will be affected by other factors such as your health, weather, and dates, how you are doing, etc. You will each have considerable flexibility on the mountain to adapt your climb, especially down low. We would expect for the team to break up into a couple different "rotations" as each person finds the schedule that works best for themselves. Our IMG Everest climb is NOT a "free for all". You are a member of an expedition team and everything you do on the mountain will have to fit into the larger picture, especially when it comes to occupation of Camps 3 and 4. Up high it will be especially important that everyone work together and communicate clearly. With IMG you will always be with your very experienced personal IMG Sherpa guide, with whom you will build a personal relationship over the expedition. With IMG you'll always have other climbers and their Sherpa guides in the immediate vicinity and additional IMG guides and Sherpas in position to respond with extra oxygen, gamow, sked stretcher, medical kit, etc.

Sherpas

Most IMG Sherpas are from Phortse and Pangboche. We have a great crew of guys working for us, and many have been with IMG exclusively for over ten years. It is a tight knit bunch, managed by Ang Jangbu and Ang Pasang. The senior guys (the ones we assign to climb with our climbers) have solid English language skills, first aid and rescue training, and tremendous 8000m experience.

Acclimatization and Training

Once we get to Base Camp we will do training on the ice seracs of the lower Khumbu Glacier to check climbers' equipment and review climbing and rescue techniques. Then, we are off to Lobuche Peak, an attractive 20,000 foot climb just down the valley from Base Camp. Lobuche Peak is a perfect warm-up climb for further acclimatization, practice of climbing techniques, and a good chance to get to know everyone better. After Lobuche Peak, we return to Base Camp and get ready to head up Mt Everest!

Most climbers will chose to do two "acclimatization rotations" on Everest, prior to the summit bids. The first trip up will go to C1 (19,500ft/5950m) for a couple nights, C2 (21,000ft/6400m) for a couple nights, tag but not overnight at C3 (24,500ft/7470m), then back to C2 for a night and finally back to BC. After a rest period the second rotation will return to C3, this time for an overnight stay at the camp. After the C3 overnight, we descend to BC to prepare for the summit bids.

To reiterate, each phase of the IMG Everest expedition is an opportunity to evaluate our team members. We do not send people up high for summit bids unless they can demonstrate the skills necessary to climb safely and take care of themselves so that they are an asset to the team.

Icefall

When we head up the Icefall, we break up into two person climber/Sherpa teams. We want to minimize unnecessary stopping and waiting in this dangerous area, and we have found the two person climber/Sherpa teams the best way to allow climbers to keep moving, so you are not waiting for slower climbers or slow groups. Each team is issued two radios and a rescue rope (the Sherpa will carry the rope). We have required check in points along the route, and this is logged at BC. You are on an open frequency, so you know when the climbers ahead and below you have passed a check point. There are many climbers and Sherpas, from many teams, moving up and down in the Icefall and it all gets confusing. You do not want to get stuck behind a big slow group! Each climber stays with their Sherpa who knows the route well, allowing maximum flexibility in the Icefall to negotiate steep spots and move around large slow groups. We do not allow climbers to climb solo. Climbing the Icefall quickly and smoothly is the single most important thing you can do to minimize risk.

Camps 1,2,3,4

At Camp 1 and Camp 2 we have large a kitchen/dining tents, gear storage tents (you can leave items here), and sleeping tents with closed cell pads (two persons per tent). Camp 1 is utilized on the first acclimatization rotation, but most climbers will skip it on the second time up, going straight through from BC to Camp 2. Generally the Sherpas will do most of the cooking/melting at Camp 1, 2, 3, and 4 but we also want the climbers proficient at running the stoves, so if necessary they can also run the stoves. At Camp 3 and Camp 4 (South Col) we have bags and pads in the camps. At South Col we keep a dedicated Sherpa there just to cook, melt, and monitor the radio.

Personal Gear and Pack weights

Generally speaking, you will only need to carry the items which you require during the day while climbing. The Sherpas will carry loads (including a reasonable amount of your personal gear) between the camps. When you are using oxygen (above C3) you will never carry more than one cylinder and regulator (16lbs/7.3kg).

Communications

We utilize VHF radios and satellite phones to maintain good comms, ensuring that IMG climbers, guides, and Sherpas work very closely together as a team. Each climber is issued a personal radio and speaker microphone that will clip to the collar. We constantly monitor the radio 24/7 anytime climbers are on the mountain and we have required check in places/times and logging of all transmissions.

Oxygen

Our IMG cylinders hold 1800 liters, which is enough for 10 hours @ 3 liters per minute (LPM). Each bottle and regulator weighs about 16lbs/7.3kg total. You will never carry more than this. We use the "Top Out" masks with carbon fiber composite cylinders – the "state of the art". For the summit bid we provide oxygen for sleeping at Camps 3 and 4 @ 1 LPM and climbing @ 3LPM. This is considered quite a generous flow rate. Most climbers will use about 7200 liters total on the summit bid, from Camp 3 to the top and back to Camp 3, but we have more oxygen if necessary for emergency. For the climb to the summit you start with a full bottle at the Col and use about half of it on the way up to the Balcony (it is usually about a 5 hour climb to Balcony). You will switch to another full bottle at the Balcony and leave the half full bottle at Balcony for emergency back-up. Leaving the Balcony with a full bottle you go to the summit and back to the Col (normally this is about 8 hours). With our system you do not need to do a bottle change at the South Summit (there have been many cases of missing/lost/stolen bottles from here over the years). We also send backup oxygen, masks, regulators up high with the Sherpas for emergency. On summit bid we have additional Sherpas who will carry oxygen just up to the Balcony, and who will then come back to the Col to wait in reserve in case of emergency up high. This is an important safety aspect – having climbers ready at the South Col to support.

Extra oxygen is available @ \$1500 per cylinder delivered at the South Col and \$4000 at the Balcony.

Many climbers have asked about "practicing" at home with a mask. Our recommendation is to purchase the 3M R-6311 Respirator (about \$30), for example

<http://www.amazon.com/3M-R6311-Low-Maintenance-Half-Mask-Respirator/dp/B0009F5KDS>

The TopOut mask (which we use on Everest) is built on the 3M mask body and doing workouts at home with the 3M mask will simulate some of the issues using oxygen. For climbers familiar with scuba diving, you will be reminded of the necessity to breath easy and steady, don't pant, just focus on moving the air efficiently. Check how the 3M mask fits with your goggles. We have found that many climbers will use a "Small" or "Medium" size and people with big faces can use a "Large" size.

Base Camp

We have a very comfortable Base Camp, with large kitchen/dining tents, roomy single sleeping tents, social tent with heater and dvd, propane heated showers, and good toilets. We have good charging capacity with both 12v solar and back up generator. We have wireless Bgan internet @ \$10/MB, VHF radio base station, large antennas that let us communicate well with the South Col and all the way down to Pheriche. We subscribe our members and Sherpas to the service provided by the HRA Base Camp Medical Clinic so you have available to you unlimited consultation to the doctors.

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Food Preparation

Nothing is more important to health and morale on a long trip than good food. We have a very experienced BC and ABC (C2) cook teams. We receive weekly delivery of fresh fruit, vegetables, and meat to Base Camp in addition to staples purchased in Kathmandu and “goodies” brought from USA. We pack high altitude food in USA using the food assortment that we have found to work well on past expeditions. Most climbers will spend about a week at high altitude (C3 and C4) during the trip, when appetites really wane and life is truly miserable. If you have some food items that you have found to be especially easy to eat, we would encourage you to bring a “personal stash”...especially for the summit bid...so you know you have some foods that you can manage to keep down.

Weather Forecasting

IMG subscribes to weather forecasting by Michael Fagin in Seattle (www.everestweather.com) We have worked with Michael for many years and he does an excellent job tracking multiple weather forecast models and providing custom forecasting for us.

Rescues

Our first priority is always going to be supporting our fellow IMG climbers. We are also willing to assist with other teams that need help with rescue, but this will take second priority to our IMG climbers. Any rescue above Base Camp will require a ground litter evacuation (no helicopter above BC). At and below BC the cost of a helicopter evacuation depends on the type of helicopter involved, the amount of flight time, and the number of landings. For 2009 the cost for an evacuation from Pheriche/Dingboche in the Eurocopter Ecureuil AS350 B2 ran about \$5600. An evacuation from Everest Base Camp or Gorak Shep in the more powerful and expensive AS350 B3 ran about \$10,000. You will need either cash or a Visa / Mastercard with sufficient credit available (not American Express). If you have insurance you may need to guarantee the charge on your credit card and then seek reimbursement from your insurance company. We suggest that everyone carry a rescue insurance policy that will as a minimum cover the \$10,000 evacuation from Base Camp.

Tip Pool

We ask the trekkers and climbers to please contribute \$200 into a tip pool for our Nepali staff. We will collect this in Kathmandu and distribute this on behalf of the team as a thank you gift to the many unsung people that make the whole operation run smoothly...the porters, trek staff, cooks, hotel staff, Kathmandu staff, Base Camp staff, and others that help the team. For the climbers, we ask that you contribute an additional \$300 for the climbing Sherpas (so this makes \$500 total). If you want to give some more to the IMG leaders or the personal Sherpas that climbed with you, that is always appreciated!

“I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you and your entire staff for running such a great Everest program the last two years... Ang Jangbu's management is perfect. Our Sherpa team is beyond outstanding. I saw some crazy things on summit day by other teams and was so proud to be with IMG!”

—Dr. Tim W.

“Jangbu and all the Sherpas were the strongest on the mountain — by far. I can't say enough good things about them. They just outclassed everybody.”

—Bruce D.

For more comments from IMG climbers, please see our website at:
www.mountainguides.com/comments.shtml
