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ON THE BRINK
MALABAR NUTMEG

COUNTRY CHRONICLES
SILENT SENTINEL

NEW FRONTIERS
GUATEMALA

CORPORATE CAMP
CONQUER THE SUMMIT

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TRAILBLAZERS ADVENTURE TRAVEL PVT. LTD.
Edenwoods, Bay House, Ground Floor A, Gladys
Alwares Marg, Off Pokhran Road No. 2, Thane
(West) 400 610

Download softcopy from
www.trailblazersindia.com
Call us to participate in our camps/activities:
022 21739737 or 022 21739732
OR email us on: contact@trailblazersindia.com

Editor : Ranjan Biswas

Associate Editor : Sachin Sata

Reporters : Shardul Bhogle, Nayantara
Deshpande, Sachin Sata,
Nitisha Sethia

Photo credits : Ojas Chavan, Nayantara
Deshpande, Aalap Kulkarni,
Sachin Sata, Nitisha Sethia



EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

This issue we are focussing on a unique aspect of our planet, majestic mountains and hills. A crucial geographical feature, mountains stand aloof where the earth seemingly attempts the impossible, aiming to touch the sky. For eons now, these silent sentinels have shaped the culture, history, geography, spiritual understanding and the ecology of humans and this planet. Mountains have always craved human attention and we have had romantic as well as adversarial interactions with them.

Since the Vedic period and before, these imposing features of the earth have always fascinated the inquisitive human. Mankind has been fearful at the same time gone to great lengths to climb and dominate them. Today we have succeeded in climbing almost all the large peaks of the world. There are yet many mountains in the Himalayas, the Andes and the Alps that have not yet been scaled by even the most experienced of mountaineers. And so the battle continues, the insatiable need for humans to conquer the elements and prove ourselves to be intrepid explorers drives us to attempt these extraordinary feats.

What are these projections from the land called hills or mountains? There are two major mechanisms by which they are formed, one is due to collision of tectonic plates which causes the land mass to rise up over the plains and the other is due to subduction of the plates causing the magma within to rise up and solidify. Over the years, wind, water, ice and gravity work on these geological structures eroding and shaping them into the triangular peaks we see today. Hills on the other hand may be formed by deposition of rock and sand or by faults in the crust. Although the previously accepted distinction between both was that mountains are landforms of heights above 1000 feet and hills below that, now the official distinction remains a bit unclear with different regions adopting different standards. One of the youngest and the oldest mountain ranges can be found in the Indian Subcontinent. The Aravallis are amongst the oldest mountain ranges formed almost 3.5 million years ago and the Himalayas are the youngest, formed only 50 million years ago. Scientists across the world agree that the oldest mountain range on Earth are the The Makhonjwa Mountains in South Africa formed 3.6 million years ago.

The weather and the wind patterns on planet earth have a lot to do with the occurrence and positioning of mountains and hills. These precious sentries are ecologically fragile and unique. They are a sanctuary for myriad diverse flora and fauna. Hills and mountains because of their height create special microenvironments specific to those altitudes, that cannot be found elsewhere. With the increase of human disturbance, especially due to heavy tourism in these areas, the pressures on the ecosystems are manifold. The wildlife and even the local cultures are under threat since humans living in these conditions are unique in many ways. The customs and traditions they have are very different from those followed by people on the plains.

Lastly mountains and hills have been the spiritual fountainhead of communities and major religions worldwide and have shaped the thoughts of us all. In all Indian history, the one place where people travel to for penance, meditation or redemption has always been the mountains and forests in hills. Even now, the Himalayas remain a spiritual centre for people to visit when seeking blessings. There is something about mountains that brings about a sense of peace and fulfilment in all. Even for the modern traveller who cares not for religious sentiments, mountains are the place to go for solemn contemplation and quiet reflection.

We still have a lot to learn, research and understand about their role in our lives. What remains clear is that the work started by individuals such as Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna needs to be propagated. If not, then our hills will become our highways like the sorrowful sight of the hills of Navi Mumbai that were razed to the ground without whimper. I am sure you will find interesting facets of this unique ecosystem as well as stories from across the world of people and their experiences on some of the most beautiful mountains. Do read and write back with your thoughts, experiences and ideas.

Ranjan Biswas

Editor- Ecotrail | Managing Director, Trailblazers Adventure Travel Pvt Ltd | Trustee- Trailblazers Foundation



MALABAR NUTMEG



Myristica malabarica
Image Courtesy Manzil Baruah

Myristica malabarica is a species from the Myristicaceae family. This species is endemic to Western Ghats and grows in swampy environments. *Myristica malabarica* is an evergreen species that can grow up to a height of 25mts. The IUCN had classified it as a Vulnerable species. Commonly it is known as Malabar Nutmeg or Bombay Mace.

The seed is used as a spice in Indian foods. The plant has many medicinal properties and is widely used in the field of Ayurveda. The seed has a reddish yellow aril which is a specialised outgrowth that covers the entire seed. This aril is used to treat illnesses such as fever and bronchitis.

This species along with others from the same family form a very unique habitat called the *Myristica* swamps. These are freshwater swamps that play an important role in maintaining perennial stream flow and have the ability to store large amounts of carbon compared to other forest types. Being a primitive species, *myristica* swamps also house abundant biodiversity.

Myristica malabarica is facing threat in the form of climate change. During dry spells the seeds have a higher mortality rate, whereas floods can cause them to wash away. Widespread destruction of the forests to increase pasture lands has now caused this habitat that extended all along the Konkan coast to be present only in patches along the Western Ghats.

However conservationists are trying their best to draw attention to this species and habitat. The states of Karnataka and Kerala are both working on declaring *Myristica* swamps as a sanctuary so that they receive a protected status. The government is also going to limit the harvesting of seeds and fruits to make it more sustainable.

SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW

When one thinks of Peru, the first thing that pops into mind is the ancient Inca citadel of Machu Picchu. Attracting almost 4000 tourists a day, it is one of the Cuzco region's most famous tourist attractions. In 2015, geologists discovered a new geological wonder that now draws almost 1/3rd of these tourists. Receiving almost 1500 visitors per day, the Vinicunca or better known as Mountain of seven colours is a new addition to Peru's must see destinations.

Climate change caused the snow covering these mountains to melt revealing the beauty underneath. Hues of red, yellow, green and brown create a marbling effect that gives the mountain its name. These colours result from different environmental conditions and mineralogy. Sedimentary layers with the traces of iron oxide, oxidized limonite, iron sulphide and chlorite result in the red, brown, yellow and green colouration respectively.

Standing 16,000 feet above sea level, reaching these mountains can be a difficult task especially if the weather is unfavourable. The influx of tourists to this spot is largely due to heavily photoshopped images of the mountains floating on the net. Peruvian ecologists have already started noticing the detrimental effects of the increased tourism on migrating birds and erosion of the landscape. Cuzco's Regional Tourism Director has initiated plans with the mayors in the region to come up with a plan for sustainable tourism.



Vinicunca Mountains, Peru

IS MOUNTAIN MANIA JUST A COMMERCIAL CIRCUS?

Mr. John Porter is an ex-president of the Alpine Club, UK, the oldest mountaineering club in the world. Established in 1857, its members have been pioneers in mountaineering development and exploration. Some of his personal achievements in the field are climbs to the northeast face of Bandaka and the south face of Changabang, feats that still remain unrepeatable. Mr Porter describes himself as a member of a generation that almost climbed themselves to extinction. Between 1976 and 1986 a number of climbers took to the mountains and tried to summit peaks in the Himalayas. The climbers purely relied on their skill and judgement of the mountains.

When asked about how the sport has changed over the years, Mr. Porter says, "Mountaineering has changed the way the world has changed, it has become a commercial circus. A majority of people today go for adventure tours because it is a part of their bucket list or to take pictures in a dangerous situation without fully realizing the danger they are in. However there needs to be a distinction between adventure tourism and Mountaineering or Alpinism. To truly appreciate mountaineering, one must learn it. However, before you try to climb a summit think about what mountaineering means to you spiritually and physically then you will take each step responsibly. If you want to go climbing and have an experience of a lifetime, leave your phone and camera at home, just open your eyes" he says.



Mr. John Porter
Ex-President of the Alpine Club, UK

SILENT SENTINEL

Riya Kartha, former Trailblazers outdoor educator writes to us about her adventures in Japan

When we began to climb Mt. Fuji, I was already sure I had made a very big mistake. This beautiful specimen of a mountain, with its seemingly gentle slopes could not present a more deceiving view to the passer-by. I had seen Fuji San ('san' being the word for mountain, not the common Japanese honorific in this case) four years before my climb from a different viewpoint on the ground and I remember being awed by the majestic spectacle she presented to my tiny human presence.

Fuji San stands alone, towering over her country, a lonely but deeply loved sentinel. Never had I thought about what the view looked like from the top. And four years later, here I was, beginning to climb what looked like a seemingly endless mountain, the summit nowhere in sight.

On my first ever hike in the foothills of the Himalayas when I was 16, I remember looking around me midway up the mountain and feeling overwhelmingly small. From that day, I fell in love with the perspective that mountains can give a human being about the sheer insignificance of your life and its significance all at once. I felt like a speck of dust in the universe. At night when this photo was taken, I was tired, hungry, hurting and cold. When I turned and saw this view, I felt that overwhelming feeling again, and it helped me move forward, one step at a time.

And finally, after all the doubts were weathered and all the despair was conquered, there was the summit. I watched the famous sunrise, called 'goraiko' (the arrival of light) from our resting stop just under the summit. Every mountain is different. Some are blanketed in forest, some barren and bare, some snowed under many feet of white, some live in families- endless undulating peaks that go on as far as the eye can see. Fuji stands above the clouds, and she stands alone. She answers to no one but the sun and the earth upon which she rises so grandly. She is lonelier and loftier for it.

We were unprepared for the descent, however. Mt. Fuji is an active volcano (the last eruption was in the early 1700s, so perhaps not really a cause for concern), her slopes are steep and the path is made treacherous by loose gravel. Four hours later, we were happy to be on level ground again. Our feet and bodies were sore, our minds tested for resilience, but our hearts filled with a little more wonder, more awe and respect for Mother Nature than ever before.



Night view of Tokyo city taken during the climb



A mesmerizing sunrise in the Land of the Rising Sun



Hues of blues - Mt. Fuji in the morning mist

First time climbers to Mt. Fuji, now a World Heritage Site, should be cautious when using the internet as reference before the climb. Not everyone can do the climb in 8 hours and most people misunderstand how much time the descent can take. As experienced hikers know, mountains are unpredictable, and often create their own weather systems. In 9 hours, we went from warm to cold and then to wet and cold (certainly the least desirable of all combinations) and then again to bitterly cold at the summit. Physical fitness is a must, and climbing with sufficient stamina helps climbers enjoy the climb- which can be rocky and steep in several places. While Mt. Fuji stands at 12,389 ft, there are several pit stops (called stations) on the way to help climbers refresh themselves.

I had the distinct impression that Fuji San was watching over her country, all the twinkling lights in the distance, the pin-pricks of lives going about their daily routines, unmindful of her gaze. She watches in silence, in sun and storm she stands tall, a formidable but compassionate mother to this island nation.

It was a memorable climb, but I'm happy to be back on solid ground, and gaze up in awe at Mt. Fuji from a distance. While thousands of people climb the mountain each year, I'm happy to have done this once in this lifetime. As the Japanese saying goes, "a wise man climbs Fuji once, only a fool climbs twice."

Riya Kartha, a journalist, photographer, lecturer and avid trekker is currently studying in Japan and exploring the city in her free time.

BICYCLE DIARIES

A mountain biking expedition in the Himalayas

There are a million quotes that highlight the magnificence of mountains and all of them equally inspiring. However one that perfectly sums a recent camp that we conducted in Uttarakhand is the following one by Tyler Knott, "Mountains know secrets we need to learn. That it might take time, it might be hard, but if you just hold on long enough, you will find the strength to rise up."

Trailblazers recently took a group of city-raised students to the wilderness of Uttarakhand. Here they were made to conquer their fears and complete physically challenging activities. Their test started on the very first day when the students were taken for a nature hike through a beautiful trail in the hills. Throughout the climb students felt that reaching the top was an impossible task, Trailblazers experts and teachers kept motivating the entire group to climb. Once they reached the top, the view of the forests and the valleys against the backdrop of a fuchsia tinged sky was something they all cherished.

Through the entire camp Trailblazers encouraged the students to take up and complete a variety of adventure activities that are essentially basic mountaineering techniques. The highlight of the camp was the mountain biking session. Used to biking in the city, the rugged landscape was a new experience for many. Experts explained the usage of gears and how to use them during uphill and downhill cycling. After struggling and sweating it out with the uphill cycling, the downhill ride back to the campsite was a breeze.



All geared up for a cycling adventure

The mountain air helped the students re-energize before returning to the daily grind of school. Not only was it an extremely fulfilling experience for the students in terms of self-discovery and team bonding but they also spent their free time immersed in competitive games. The teachers were thrilled to see them away from their phones and enjoying the great outdoors.

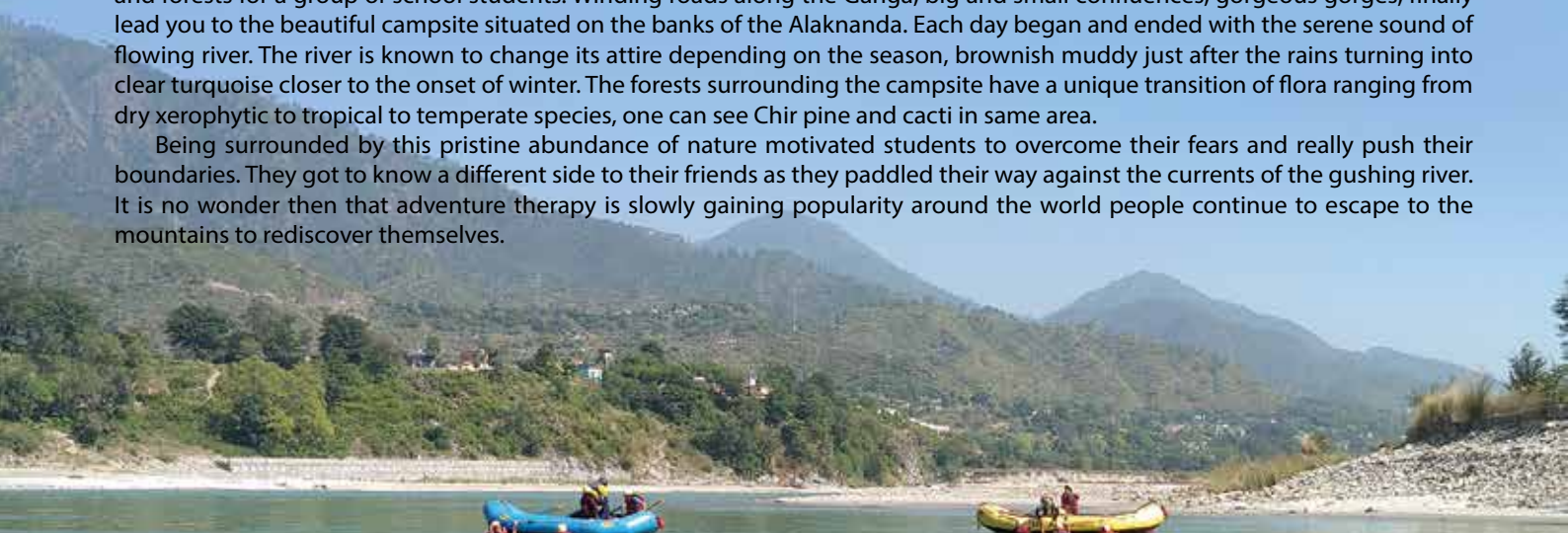
RAPID REWARDS

River rafting down a Himalayan river

The mighty Himalayas stand high and proud like a crown for our exquisite country. It is a place of origin of many life giving rivers, that spread across the land. A characteristic feature of these river apart from its crystal clear waters is the formation of rapids. Rapids are formed when the gradient of a river changes enough to create turbulence and air pockets which give the water a frothy appearance. These sites also act as an attractant to adventure enthusiasts from across the country. White water rafting is not only exciting but also involves a lot of teamwork and collaboration between members to navigate the course of the river.

Trailblazers conducted a multiadventure camp with rafting being the central activity in this mesmerizing setting of mountains and forests for a group of school students. Winding roads along the Ganga, big and small confluences, gorgeous gorges, finally lead you to the beautiful campsite situated on the banks of the Alaknanda. Each day began and ended with the serene sound of flowing river. The river is known to change its attire depending on the season, brownish muddy just after the rains turning into clear turquoise closer to the onset of winter. The forests surrounding the campsite have a unique transition of flora ranging from dry xerophytic to tropical to temperate species, one can see Chir pine and cacti in same area.

Being surrounded by this pristine abundance of nature motivated students to overcome their fears and really push their boundaries. They got to know a different side to their friends as they paddled their way against the currents of the gushing river. It is no wonder then that adventure therapy is slowly gaining popularity around the world people continue to escape to the mountains to rediscover themselves.



TRAILBLAZERS AT ASISC

Conducting city trails for principals of ICSE schools from around the country

The 62nd conference of the Association of Schools for the Indian School Certificate (ASISC) was held in Chennai from the 27th to 29th of November 2019. Principals, academicians, dignitaries, prominent personalities and exhibitors from the educational world participated in this three day event. The conference gave an opportunity to network, learn about various products and new technologies in the field of education. ASISC and Trailblazers had the pleasure of organizing an exclusive cultural, botanical and beachcombing trail for the delegates. Trailblazers would like to extend sincere thanks to the Chairman, Dr. G. Immanuel; Secretary – Treasurer, Mr. K. V. Vincent; and the entire council for the support extended to us in organising these trails.



Trailblazers presenting compendium - Beyond the Classroom - a compilation of inputs from principals on outdoor education to Dr. G. Immanuel, Chairman, Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (Center in Picture 1) and Secretary – Treasurer, Mr. K. V. Vincent, ASISC (Left in Picture 2). Participant along with the Trailblazers team (Second from left in Picture 3)

Cultural Trail:

A thousand years of history and cultural influences, from three of the world's largest religions, unfolded in a two kilometer stretch as participants walked from Kapaleeshwar to Kutchery mosque and then to St Thomas Basilica, guided by Trailblazers experts. The trail also included tasting local delicacies such as refreshing lemon tea with hot banana fritters during the trail. The trail ended at Marina Beach as participants relaxed in the backdrop of whooshing waves.



Registrations for Trails



Delegates registering for the cultural, botanical and beachcombing trails.

Beachcombing Trail:

Nothing is more refreshing than a morning walk on the beach as the sun rises above the horizon into the sky playing hide and seek with the clouds. Top it up with an enriching beachcombing experience with Trailblazers experts and it becomes a morning extraordinary. Participants explored the intertidal zones and learned about the abundant life and their adaptations.

Botanical Trail:

Trailblazers experts conducted a botanical trail in a green space in the heart of Chennai city. Participants learned about types of gardens and various plant species growing in it. They felt closer to nature in the midst of the concrete jungle.



THE MOUNTAINS ARE CALLING AND WE MUST GO



Trailblazers helps a corporate group rejuvenate with a High Altitude Trek in Uttarakhand.

If you have ever worked in an office cubicle, languor, backaches and multiple cups of tea/coffee must be part of your daily routine. The monotony of having to work in the city gets to all of us. Many of us have motivational quotes adorning the walls of our workspace to help us get through the day hoping that tomorrow will be an adventure. Majority of the time these quotes will be superimposed on the image of a lonely man atop a grand mountain range. It is the hope that all the hard work will pay off and one day, the person on that peak will be you! Standing there and feeling a renewed sense of purpose, vigour with a new lease for life.

Trailblazers realizes this need for humans to rejuvenate in the outdoors. Keeping this in mind we have our special High Altitude trekking programmes that help make you the person on that mountain! This not only applies to people at the bottom of the corporate ladder but also to those at the top.

Once again, we had the opportunity to take a group of Chief General Managers, General Managers and Chief Managers from a leading Corporate organization to the Himalayas. Aptly named, Trailblazers Camp Summitter commenced with a team of more than 40 participants divided into two groups ranging between the age of 35

years to 55 years. We started our journey from Haridwar towards our first base camp. From here on the journey kept getting harder, colder and more breathtaking (literally). However, our group of highly motivated professionals refused to give up and took up the challenge of summiting Chandrashila at a height of over 12,000 feet. With the view of the snow capped peaks all around them, the participants celebrated their conquest of the mountain and felt the climb worthwhile. For many of the participants it was the first time they had attempted a feat of this manner. The cherry on top of the cake was when the group was able to witness an Indravajra, or a circular rainbow close to the peak.

Apart from the trek, the programme was supplemented with activities that kept the energy levels constantly high. Whether it was adventure activities such as rafting or peaceful sessions of yoga and meditation, every aspect was taken care of. Mountains being places of spirituality, the group also visited one of the country's highest Shiva temple, Tungnath.

Having had their mind, body and souls cleansed in the serenity of the mountains the group returned to the city with a new zeal for life and ready to take on any obstacle that they might face. Not only was this a personal reflection for many but also for the entire group. The motivation



Campers successfully summit Chandrashila



Mindful meditation in the mountains

from each other helped create new bonds and develop camaraderie between the employees. The outdoors will always remain a refreshing environment for human interactions and self discovery. Write to us if you are looking for programmes that help in bettering the mind, heart and soul of your employees.



GUATEMALA

A Trailblazers outdoor expert recounts her visit to Mt. Acatenango

Going to a far away place is thrilling because it is unfamiliar in climate, culture, people, food, and topography. When I was in Guatemala, I jumped at the idea of going on an overnight trek to Mt Acatenango. The entire topography would be different from any other mountain I'd been to. Also, Mount Acatenango was a volcano.

The Fuego-Acatenango massif has 5 volcanic peaks with rocks dating back to 200,000 years ago. We were to climb Mt. Acatenango at 3760m (12,333 ft), to get a view of the neighbouring Volcan de Fuego (Spanish for Volcano of Fire).

I signed up for a tour going out from a friend's hostel. Thick jackets and woollen hats were part of the deal. We were a group of 4 travellers who had met along the way, all equally excited. We bought some trail snacks the evening before and slept early in the quaint town of Antigua. Early next morning, a small bus picked up everyone who had signed up for the tour. A mix of people thirsty for adventure- a couple, a group of friends, some solo travellers and us. After driving for 16km from Antigua, we reached the base. We split the load of our tent, and used the washroom one last time in civilization before we started the climb.

A fairly easy and pleasant trail. We walked up the winding path, taking breaks and exchanging stories on the way. But soon, it started raining. Quickly wearing our raincoats, we found that little shelter was available. Just as we thought we would manage, there was a downpour! We had no option but to cosily pack up in a small shed and wait, the waiting was part of the adventure.

Once the rain cleared a bit, we decided to walk in the drizzle. Soon we reached the top, but wet and cold. Our clothes were wet, our shoes were wet, the clothes in our bags were damp too and so was the inside of the tent, since we had so smartly split it up. But a hot chocolate sachet and a box of cup noodles around a camp fire made everything a little better.

We retired in our wet tents, unable to sleep because of the sudden gain in altitude. The wetness of the tents, the hard rocks underneath, the cold wet clothes that wrapped us, did not make sleep any easier either. After spending a few hours chatting, exchanging stories and songs from Germany, Pakistan and India, we finally heard our guide's wake up call. It was 3am, time to get up to trek to the peak. We tied our shoelaces with cold numb fingers, grateful for the rented jackets that wrapped us, and set off alpine style, just carrying some water, chocolates and torches on us.

The trek was difficult. Extremely steep on the incline, and with loose ash below our feet. Instead of walking on soil, we were wading through soft black ash, slowing prodding along, panting and puffing. As we climbed up, and as the sky started welcoming the dawn, we got a view of Fuego. The majestic Fuego, peaking from behind the cloud, unaware that a group of trekkers were panting and puffing to get a view of its eruption at sunrise.

The last leg was the hardest. Many trekkers started giving up,



making themselves content with view of Fuego from the mid of Acatenango. But the possibility of seeing Fuego erupt in full view from a vantage point pushed every muscle in my body. I snailed up, step by step. After what seemed like one of the hardest ascents I had done, I finally reached the top. What I saw from the top, was contrary to all my expectations. I was expecting a fiery eruption of lava, my imagination fuelled by the books and movies about volcanoes. But what I saw instead, blew my mind. Fuego erupted, but a calm, quiet and poised eruption. A cloud of smoke was pushed up its vent, and it grew slowly up in the sky, before finally settling down. The entire eruption lasted about 5 minutes. And then soon after, it erupted again, and again, and again. I saw the eruption several times, on the top, on my way down, and even as we reached the base. It was the eruption of a dormant volcano. Almost as if it had a morning routine. But what was routine to Fuego was magic to people, who came from far and near to catch a mere glimpse of it.

Descending to the base was the best feeling. The hardest part was over! Round 2 of hot chocolate greeted us and we sipped on with Fuego still erupting in episodes in the background. The visual is as fresh in my mind as the feeling I felt that day, a mix of awe, excitement, gratitude, achievement, relaxation. It was reconfirmed that planet earth cannot be matched in its beauty, and in its diversity of beauty. We packed up the tents, split it up once again, strapped on our backpacks and started the walk down. We were met by rain once again, but we didn't mind it; the worst was over.

But the best was over too. The journey back to Antigua was filled with a quaint feeling of nostalgia already. Such a short trek, but so magnanimous in experience, would be remembered for life.

LOOKING UP AT MT. EVEREST

Memories from a trek to Everest Base Camp

'Why do you want to climb Everest?' asked the reporter. 'Because it's there' answered George Mallory, the first man ever to climb Everest. No truer words have been said about this beautiful, mighty, gorgeous range of mountains. And the Everest Base Camp (EBC) is a sneak peek into this ambitious world of scaling the tallest peak in the world.

The EBC, as it is famously called, is a 13-day trek that begins with a rocky landing at the famously dangerous Lukla Airport. For the bold traveller who attempts this feat, the trek holds a new surprise everyday. We started with a walk through the lush green forests of the Lower Himalayas, then found ourselves by a gurgling mountain stream, struggled through boulders and rocks and walked through freezing snowfall on our final day of the ascent. Every evening we were greeted in tea houses by our warm Nepalese hosts serving hot ginger lemon tea and following it up with daal bhaat and cheese burgers for dinner. Each night was an adventure in a new village – from small pubs and cafes in Namche Bazaar to the freezing cold of Gorakh Shep, we came across a new side of Nepal everyday.

Not enough can be said about the joy of being part of this vast mountain range. However one cannot take this trek lightly, it is important to be well prepared for the journey. Three months of rigorous physical activity focussing on strength and endurance building ensured I was fit through the days. Since the base is at a height of 5482 metres, we were routinely checked by our guides for oxygen levels. One of the simplest tricks to staying fit and steady was to keep yourself well hydrated!

For anyone wanting to get closer to Mt. Everest, the Everest Base Camp is a dream come true. It is an experience that truly showcases the warmth of Nepalese culture & people, tricky snow-capped mountains and brilliant landscapes. The motivation to keep going everyday during the trek is something that can make all our daily problems insignificant.



KNOW YOUR GEAR

PACK IT YOURSELF (PIY)!

A comprehensive guide to packing right for an overnight trek

Why PIY, you may ask? We find many reasons. It's more thrilling, more self-sufficient, more peaceful, more personal, more spontaneous, we can go on.

While it's spontaneous once one starts the hike, a lot of thought has to go in beforehand. Especially in packing the right gear. It's not just the extra weight one will have to carry, but more importantly, your backpack and its contents has to almost single-handedly ensure you have a safe, comfortable (for what it's worth), and fun experience. And you come out of it wanting to do it again.

Below is a list of PIY Hiking Gear suitable for an overnight camp in the Sahyadris. It must be updated for other terrains (eg-Himalayas) or longer durations.



Gear-Shelter:

1. A tent - The Quechua 2 person tent is affordable and sturdy. It is easy to pitch and packs up compactly
2. Tarpaulin - To lay on the designated camping site, before pitching the tent. This will soften the grass and stones underneath and give a porch like feeling to your shelter for the night.
3. Sleeping bag - If given a choice, buy the openable one, that can be used either as a light mattress covering the floor of the 2 person tent. Or when cold, can be snuck into while zipped up.
4. Bedsheet - To cover self in case using the sleeping bag as a queen-sized mattress. This is an essential, as it can also double up as a stretcher or be torn to make a sling in case of any injuries.



Gear- Outfit:

1. Hiking shoes - Depending on the terrain one is going into. Or can choose a generic one with a rugged sole, high ankles and a tough skin.
2. Trek pants- Loose, comfortable, preferably full length and quick dry. To dry off the sweat, and to reduce exposure to mosquitoes.
3. Cotton/ Quick dry Tshirt- An earthy colour if possible, to avoid eye sore to fellow trekkers. And a lighter colour, to minimise heat absorption.
4. Inner wear & socks- Light coloured, comfortable cotton will feel the most comfortable.
5. Slippers- To change into while relaxing at night, and once the trek is done.
6. An entire set of spare clothes, in case an unpredicted shower drenches us, or you find a lake that you are tempted to jump into without skinny dipping.
7. Cap & Sunglasses – Protection from the sun.
8. Watch- Sweat proof straps, backlight are helpful features. Pedometer, altitude and compass are even better features.
9. Jacket- Depending on the season. Windproof, water repellent, hooded and foldable into its own pocket are some of my favourite features.



Gear- Accessories & Miscellaneous:

1. Water- The elixir of Life. At least 5 litres per person for an overnight camp, keeping in mind that it will be used for drinking, washing up, cooking and everything else.
2. Head torch - An absolute must. One needs to be handsfree to pitch a tent in the dark, among other things. Head torches are available for as low as INR 299.
3. Personal toiletries – A small bottle of liquid soap that can double up as handwash, facewash and any other wash, toothbrush, toothpaste, moisturizer with SPF, toilet paper are essentials, which can be upped or reduced based on need for personal care
4. Mosquito repellent – An absolute must! Vicks vapour rub is a sticky substitute in case the repellent is forgotten
5. Basic first aid – Muscle spray, paracetamol, anti-diarrhoea, anti-nausea and anti-allergen will form a good starter kit. Safety first, always!
6. Garbage Bags – Leave no trace!
7. Power bank, charging cable – Knowing there is back up definitely reduces stress. Keeping the phone on flight mode can help in conserving a lot of battery to begin with.
8. Earphones/ Kindle with backlight- Depending on your need for entertainment



Gear- Meals (for a basic meal):

1. Box of Candles & lighter– To light 7-8 candles together and create a mini stove/ bonfire. In case one cannot find firewood or for other reasons.
2. Aluminium Cup with Handles – To heat water over the candles, and to use for drinking beverages.
3. Cup noodles – Not the healthiest meal, but definitely high on convenience.
4. Premix of Beverage of choice – From masala chai, milk coffee to hot chocolate, all premixes are readily available.
5. Snacks – Nuts, trail mixes, chocolate bars, cookies are always handy to munch on the way for an instant recharge.



And last but not the least, a good rucksack to pack it all up. Hallmarks of a good rucksack are-

- Front load rather than top load, for direct access of all items inside.
- External cases for quick access to various items- especially bottles.
- Good back and strap support, so that the pack ergonomically aligns to the back and becomes part of the body weight.

Also, packing cubes are god's gift for anyone looking to have an easy experience living out of a backpack. Converting each cube into a shelf of sorts, will save time and mental effort in locating a tiny lighter from among the array of items.

Now that we have all of these items, or a better upgraded list based on own requirements, we are all set for anything to come! The sense of power that a well packed bag containing the right gear can give, is unmatched. Now we can have the freedom to choose where to stop and set up base for the night, based on level of tiredness, time or even in case one chances upon a beautiful spot too good to not spend the night there!



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Edenwoods, Bay House, Ground Floor A, Gladys
Alwares Marg, Off Pokhran Road No. 2, Thane
(West) 400 610

Download softcopy from
www.trailblazersindia.com
Call us to participate in our camps/activities:
022 21739732 or 022 21739737
OR email us on: contact@trailblazersindia.com

