

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

As adventure travel climbs, Mount Everest attracts the wealthy, daring

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Mount Everest. Image credit: Wikimedia

By SARAH RAMIREZ

A chaotic climbing season on Mount Everest has drawn attention to the lengths some of the most adventurous affluents will go to reach the world's highest peak.

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At least 11 people have died on Mount Everest this year, with many experts adding overcrowding to the mountain's long list of dangerous conditions. While it is no doubt an impressive physical feat to reach the summit, it also comes with a six-figure price tag.

"There are a lot of bragging rights that come with reaching the top," said Mark Gunlogson, president at **Mountain Madness**, Seattle. "I think if Everest were not the highest peak there would be hardly a soul on the mountain.

"There are certainly some other amazing reasons people are drawn to it: the beauty, the physical and mental challenge, the culture of Nepal and so much more," he said. "The question really becomes whether bragging rights and feeding the ego becomes more important than the latter.

"When the ego drives the climb, that's when things can go the wrong way."

Everest expeditions

Many affluent travelers are interested in experiences and new destinations that not many others have experienced, and for some those one-of-a-kind experiences include climbing the world's highest mountain, despite the dangers and costs.

All hikers interested in climbing Mount Everest must obtain a permit, either through the Chinese or Nepalese governments.



Yak and Yeti is a luxury hotel in Nepal. Image credit: Yak and Yeti Hotel

While China restricts the number of permits it issues, Nepal's regulations are more lax and do not assess climbers' health or mountaineering skills. However, foreigners must pay a royalty fee of \$11,000 to climb any peak in Nepal above 8,000 meters, which includes Everest.

Mount Everest has an altitude of more than 29,000 feet.

According to *Outside* magazine, the China Tibet Mountaineering Association has also increased fees for climbing. As of this January, climbers must pay a \$5,000 security deposit and contribute \$1,500 to environmental protection, on top of the \$9,500 cost of a Chinese permit.

Beyond permits, climbers must also consider the costs of guided expeditions which can reach upwards of \$100,000 and mountaineering equipment. Guided training climbs can cost tens of thousands of dollars as well.

Mountain Madness, which was founded by famous mountaineer Scott Fischer, charges \$67,000 for its Everest expeditions. The fee covers the aforementioned permit, guide staff, food and oxygen, but does not include transportation and personal equipment.

To reach this remote area of Nepal, adventurers can expect to spend about \$1,500 on airfare according to Mr. Gunlogson.

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Instagram post from Mountain Madness

Extreme conditions also necessitate that climbers invest in specialized equipment.

Among the recommendations from outdoor retailer [Whittaker Mountaineering](#) for Everest expeditions are a \$550 parka, to be worn over several other layers, and a \$1,000 sleeping bag rated to keep climbers warm at 40 degrees Fahrenheit below zero.

"A person can expect to spend about \$5,00 to \$6,000 for equipment, and then there is the time off from work and lost income for the two months-plus a person is gone," Mr. Gunlogson said. "It's not a cheap endeavor."

New heights

Despite the financial commitment, more people are hoping to reach the peak of Everest than ever before. More than 800 summits were reported in 2018, a record year, underscoring the increasing accessibility of climbing Everest for those with financial means.

Two decades ago, most climbers came from the U.S. and Europe. Today, the majority of climbers are Indian or Chinese, reflecting these consumers' growing tendency to spend heavily on unique travel experiences.

Indians are spending more on travel than any other Asian nationality, according to Agility Research. Two-thirds of affluent Indians "strongly agree" to increase travel spending in 2019, compared to 57 percent of affluent Chinese ([see story](#)).

For those looking for luxurious accommodations before or after their expeditions, there are several high-end hotels in Kathmandu, Nepal. Yak & Yeti opened as a five-star hotel in 1977 and Yeti Mountain Home has been featured in publications including *Vogue* and *Travel & Leisure*.

Some luxury brands have also aligned themselves with expedition sponsorships and other efforts centered on Everest.

British department store Fortnum & Mason has sponsored expeditions including Mt. Everest climbs, King Tutankhamen's tomb excavation and boat crossings of the Indian Ocean. The retailer used to have an Expeditions department which served Britain's ships, but even though the department no longer exists, Fortnum & Mason continues to support adventure ([see story](#)).

In 2015, British fashion label Pink dressed a team of climbers that were ascending Everest to break the world record for hosting the highest black-tie dinner party.

The team of climbers wore Pink's "superfine" Dickens suit to the dinner at 23,293 feet. To train for the expedition, the team practiced on Mont Blanc, the highest peak among the Alps ([see story](#)).