Earthbound Expeditions

Island Peak Climbing

21 days, from US$2,697 per person

Duration
21 days

Grade
Alpine PD

Max altitude
6,189 m

Start and end
Kathmandu

On the trail
5 to 7 hours a day

Best season
Apr to May, Oct to Nov

Accommodation
Teahouses and tents

Meals
All meals on the trek

Group size
Up to 12

Getting there
Fly to Lukla

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Island Peak Climbing Overview

An introduction to Himalayan mountaineering, combining the Everest trail with a guided ascent of Imja Tse (Island Peak).

Trip overview

Island Peak, Imja Tse in Nepali, is a 6,189 m trekking peak at the head of the Imja valley, and it is the usual first Himalayan summit. It is a real climb, not a walk: the summit day involves fixed ropes, a jumar, crampons, an ice axe and a headwall of about 100 m at over 6,000 m, and it starts at around one in the morning. It is also achievable for a fit person with no previous climbing experience, which is why it is the most common first Himalayan peak.

Climbing skills and training

No climbing skills are needed in advance. The itinerary includes a full training day at base camp with your climbing Sherpa: rope work, ascending with a jumar, abseiling, walking in crampons and self-arrest with an ice axe. If you have done a Scottish winter route or an alpine course, you will already know much of this; if you have not, it is the most useful day of the trip. Fitness and altitude tolerance cannot be taught in a day, and the two weeks of trekking beforehand are for building these.

Why the trip takes twenty days

You acclimatise to 6,189 m by first walking the Everest Base Camp route. The itinerary follows the standard route up the Khumbu, with rest days at Namche and Dingboche, before turning east into the Imja valley to Chhukung and base camp. Shorter Island Peak itineraries leave out this approach and have lower summit success rates as a result.

Summit success rate

Fit, well-acclimatised groups on a twenty-day itinerary reach the summit in most cases, but not all. Climbers are turned back by weather at the headwall, crowding on the fixed rope in peak season, or exhaustion on reaching the crampon point after fourteen days of trekking. Turning back below the summit is a normal outcome, and your Sherpa's decision is final.

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
2	Kathmandu valley, and a gear check	-	-	1,400 m
3	Fly to Lukla, walk to Phakding	3–4 hrs	-	2,651 m
4	Phakding to Namche Bazaar	6–7 hrs	-	3,440 m
5	Namche, acclimatisation day	2–4 hrs	-	3,440 m
6	Namche to Tengboche	5–6 hrs	-	3,860 m
7	Tengboche to Dingboche	5–6 hrs	-	4,410 m
8	Dingboche, acclimatisation day	4–5 hrs	-	4,410 m
9	Dingboche to Lobuche	5–6 hrs	-	4,940 m

10	Lobuche to Base Camp, sleep Gorak Shep	7–8 hrs	-	5,364 m
11	Kala Patthar at dawn, down to Dingboche	8–9 hrs	-	5,545 m
12	Dingboche to Chhukung	3–4 hrs	-	4,730 m
13	Chhukung to Island Peak base camp	3–4 hrs	-	5,087 m
14	Training day: ropes, jumar, crampons, axe	-	-	5,087 m
15	Summit day, and back to base camp	12–14 hrs	-	6,189 m
16	Reserve day for weather	-	-	5,087 m
17	Down to Pangboche	6–7 hrs	-	3,930 m
18	Pangboche to Namche	7–8 hrs	-	2,840 m
19	Namche to Lukla	-	-	-
20	Fly to Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
21	Fly home	-	-	-

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

Arrive in Kathmandu, where an Earthbound Expeditions representative meets you and transfers you to a 3-star hotel.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, arrival day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: None

Day 2

Kathmandu sightseeing

A pre-trek briefing and introduction to your guide, followed by a half-day sightseeing tour of the World Heritage Sites.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast

Day 3

Fly to Lukla (2,840 m) and trek to Phakding (2,610 m)

Take an early morning flight to Lukla, with views of the Himalayan peaks. Descend and trek to Phakding for the night.

Altitude: 2,610 m On foot: 3–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Phakding Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4

Trek from Phakding to Namche Bazaar (3,440 m)

The trail climbs to Namche Bazaar, the gateway to the Everest region. You may see Everest for the first time about halfway up the climb.

Altitude: 3,440 m On foot: 6–7 hrs Night: Teahouse, Namche Bazaar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5

Acclimatisation day in Namche Bazaar, hike towards Thame (3,800 m)

An acclimatisation day with a hike towards Thame and Sangbuche, with good views of the snow peaks, before returning to Namche.

Altitude: 3,440 m On foot: Optional 2–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Namche Bazaar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6

Trek to Tengboche (3,860 m)

Trek through Khumjung to Tengboche monastery, which has panoramic views of the Himalaya.

Altitude: 3,860 m On foot: 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Tengboche Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

Trek to Dingboche (4,410 m)

The trail crosses the Imja Khola on the way to Dingboche, passing terraced fields and pastures where yaks graze.

Altitude: 4,410 m On foot: 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Dingboche Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

Acclimatisation day in Dingboche (4,410 m)

An acclimatisation day at Dingboche with optional hikes. The views include Lhotse and Ama Dablam.

Altitude: 4,410 m On foot: Optional 4–5 hrs Night: Teahouse, Dingboche Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 9

Trek to Lobuche (4,940 m)

The trail climbs through a grassy valley towards the Khumbu Glacier. Overnight at Lobuche.

Altitude: 4,940 m On foot: 5–6 hrs Night: Teahouse, Lobuche Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10

Trek from Lobuche to Gorak Shep (5,164 m) and Everest Base Camp

Walk along the Khumbu Glacier to Gorak Shep, then continue to Everest Base Camp in the afternoon. Return to Gorak Shep for the night, the highest overnight stop of the trek.

Altitude: 5,164 m On foot: 7–8 hrs Night: Teahouse, Gorak Shep Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 11

Hike to Kala Patthar (5,545 m) at dawn and trek to Dingboche

An early start up Kala Patthar for the sunrise view of Everest and the surrounding peaks, followed by a long descent past Lobuche to Dingboche.

Altitude: 4,410 m On foot: 8–9 hrs Night: Teahouse, Dingboche Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 12

Trek from Dingboche to Chhukung (4,730 m)

A short walk up the Imja valley, below the wall that links Nuptse and Lhotse, to Chhukung.

Altitude: 4,730 m On foot: 3–4 hrs Night: Teahouse, Chhukung Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 13

Trek from Chhukung to Island Peak Base Camp (5,087 m)

About four hours along the Imja Khola to base camp. The crew put up the tents and check the climbing equipment.

Altitude: 5,087 m On foot: 3–4 hrs Night: Tented camp, Island Peak Base Camp Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 14

Training day at base camp

A day of rope training with the climbing guide: fixed-line technique, the jumar, crampons and the ice axe, and a practice of the descent.

Altitude: 5,087 m On foot: Training, 3–4 hrs Night: Tented camp, Island Peak Base Camp Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 15

Summit Island Peak (6,189 m) and return to base camp

Start at around one or two in the morning, climbing over rock and snow to the glacier, then up fixed ropes on the headwall to the summit ridge. Return to base camp in the afternoon.

Altitude: 6,189 m at the summit On foot: 12–14 hrs Night: Tented camp, Island Peak Base Camp Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 16

Reserve day for weather

This day is kept for a second summit attempt if weather or conditions prevent the first. If it is not needed, it allows an easier walk out.

Altitude: 5,087 m On foot: None, spare day Night: Tented camp, Island Peak Base Camp Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 17

Trek from base camp to Pangboche (3,985 m)

Descend the Imja valley past Dingboche to Pangboche and its old monastery.

Altitude: 3,985 m On foot: 6–7 hrs Night: Teahouse, Pangboche Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 18

Trek from Pangboche to Namche Bazaar (3,440 m)

Walk past Tengboche and down to the river, then climb back up to Namche.

Altitude: 3,440 m On foot: 7–8 hrs Night: Teahouse, Namche Bazaar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 19

Trek from Namche Bazaar to Lukla (2,840 m)

The last day of walking: down through the pine forest to the Dudh Koshi, across the suspension bridges and up the final climb to Lukla, where you have a celebration dinner with the crew.

Altitude: 2,840 m On foot: 6–7 hrs Night: Teahouse, Lukla Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 20

Fly to Kathmandu

Fly back to Kathmandu. In the evening there is a cultural show and dinner.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 21

Departure

Transfer to the airport for your onward flight.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, departure day Night: No overnight Meals: Breakfast

Island Peak Climbing Cost and What's Included

- Airport transfers and ground transport
- Licensed English-speaking guide
- Accommodation throughout the trip
- All permits and national park fees
- Meals as per the itinerary

Not included

- International flights
- Travel and rescue insurance
- Personal trekking gear
- Tips and personal expenses
- Nepal entry visa (on arrival)

Island Peak Climbing Packing List

Weight limits and climbing equipment

Your porter carries a strict maximum of 20 kg, shared between two trekkers. The Lukla flight allows 15 kg and baggage is weighed. In addition, boots, crampons, ice axe and harness are heavy and must be carried up. We provide the duffel bag, sleeping bag, down jacket and group climbing equipment.

Head and eyes

- Sun hat with a brim, and a warm hat that covers your ears
- Two buffs or neck gaiters
- Sunglasses, category 3 or 4. Snow glare at this altitude is strong
- Headtorch and spare batteries
- Sunscreen SPF 50 and lip balm with sun protection

Clothing

- Three or four merino or synthetic base layers, not cotton
- Two mid layers, one fleece and one light insulated jacket
- Down jacket. We provide one; bring your own if you feel the cold at night
- Waterproof jacket and trousers that pack small
- Two pairs of trekking trousers, one lined
- Underwear for four or five days, washed along the way

Hands and feet

- Liner gloves and insulated outer gloves or mittens
- Trekking boots with ankle support, already worn in. This is essential
- Four pairs of wool trekking socks

- Camp shoes or trainers for the evenings
- Gaiters, if you are travelling in winter or early spring

Bags

- Duffel bag for the porter, 20 kg maximum. We provide one
- Daypack, 30 to 35 litres, with a rain cover
- Dry bags or thick liners. Nothing stays dry for long on a Himalayan trail

Sleeping

- Sleeping bag rated to -15°C. We provide one
- Silk or cotton liner, for warmth and hygiene
- Earplugs. Teahouse walls are made of plywood

Health

- Personal first aid kit: blister plasters, tape, painkillers, rehydration salts
- Diamox, if your doctor agrees, plus any medicines you take regularly
- Water purification: tablets, a filter or a SteriPen
- Hand sanitiser and wet wipes
- Throat lozenges. Almost everyone develops a dry cough at high altitude

Papers and money

- Passport valid for six months, plus two photocopies
- Four passport photographs for permits
- Travel insurance certificate showing helicopter cover to 6,000 m
- $400 to $700 in small notes. The last cash machine is at Namche Bazaar

Climbing equipment, which can be hired in Kathmandu

- Double or insulated mountaineering boots that take a step-in crampon. Trekking boots are not suitable
- Crampons, fitted to those boots in Kathmandu before you leave, not at base camp
- Ice axe, harness, jumar, belay device, two locking carabiners and a helmet
- Mountaineering gloves plus a warm spare pair. On summit morning it is around minus twenty with wind
- A reliable headtorch and spare batteries, because you set off at one in the morning
- Category 4 glacier glasses and a spare pair. Snow blindness on the Imja glacier is a real risk

Route map

Altitude by day

Optional extras

Luxury lodge upgrade in the lower Khumbu

Price on request

Where the route passes one, we book a premium lodge instead of the standard teahouse. Mountain Lodges of Nepal has lodges at Lukla, Phakding, Monjo, Namche and Deboche, and Everest Summit Lodges has lodges at Lukla, Monjo, Tashinga and Pangboche. They offer warmer rooms, better beds, private bathrooms in most rooms and a quieter dining room.

There are no premium lodges above Pangboche, so the higher nights are in standard teahouses. We confirm which lodges have rooms on your dates before you book.

Photos, videos and reviews of this trip: enepaltrekking.com/island-peak-climbing