



THE DIARY OF A Mountaineer

Text by Dr Foo Gen Lin

Everest! The very name evokes a sense of adventure, courage and real mettle. The highest peak on earth was summited by the duo, Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953 and has since attracted numerous daredevils and adventure seekers.



Dr Foo Gen Lin is a senior resident under the National Health Group's orthopaedic surgery residency programme. He is actively involved in sports and adventure. Being a running enthusiast, Dr Foo has participated in many major running events as a competitive runner.



Legend

1. "We made it!" The team at Everest Base Camp
2. High jumps on the top of the world

Our journey began three years ago with an idea to build camaraderie within our hospital departments. We settled on the Everest Base Camp (EBC) as one of our team members, Kumaran, had ample experience and knowledge in travelling and trekking in Nepal. Our trip came to a standstill after the Nepal earthquake in April 2015, but we realised then that it was more pertinent than ever to embark on the expedition. We wanted to share with our friends that it is safe to travel to Nepal, and also to witness the country's current state to figure out how we can contribute to further recovery.

We also felt that the expedition could contribute to our medical community here, and what better way than to start with the SMA Charity Fund. The fund provides bursaries to medical students facing financial difficulties to help them achieve their goals of being doctors. Through our trek to EBC, we hope to inspire these students to continue chasing their dreams and to challenge our community to remember and help the less fortunate.

Onward bound

In anticipation of the tough climbs and journey ahead, our motley crew of ten

got together several times a month to train our muscles. We are most grateful to our departments for endorsing our expedition, approving our leave and providing the awesome banner that we carried all the way to EBC!

With our bags packed (some done hastily the night before with last minute shopping at Decathlon!), we departed Changi Airport on 23 October 2016. Surreal as it seemed at the start, the reality of the punishing ascents and long daily treks kicked in. Motivation came in the form of the breathtaking (no pun intended) snow-capped mountains and the friendships that blossomed over the two weeks that we spent together.

Amazing hospitality

Nepal is blessed not just with amazing natural beauty but also inspiring inhabitants. Our guides and the locals whom we met during our trip were always cheerful and friendly despite the harsh environments they lived in and the losses from the earthquake. Being typical Singaporeans, food was always at the top of our minds and we were pleasantly surprised that the tea-houses served many alternatives to the local staple "dal bhat" (local vegetarian curry). Their



cuisine is heavily influenced by Chinese cuisine, with a variety of dishes like fried noodles, fried rice and dumplings (affectionately termed “momos”).

Our daily schedule consisted of a hearty breakfast followed by nearly a whole day of trekking, with a lunch break in-between. Fortunately, food was always prepared fresh, so we had almost an hour each day during lunch time for us to rest our legs. Dinner was usually followed by stories of our daily treks, card games and rounds of *Mafia*. Our fellow team member, Mr Cheng, would occasionally serenade us and liven up the dining room with his guitar (that he carried all the way to EBC!), and we would usually be tucked in by 10 pm on most days, all tired out and in need of sleep to prepare for the next day’s journey.

Reaching the goal

Each day got tougher as fatigue built up and the air thinned out as we went higher. It also got colder and facilities became more basic as we got closer to our target – the Everest Base Camp. I have great respect for my teammates who pushed through these physical and mental challenges to finally arrive at EBC on the ninth day of our trip. For the brief half an hour that we spent there, the bitter cold and lethargy melted away, replaced by the joy and sense of achievement in reaching this summit of our lives.



The journey does not end at the base of Everest but continues to live on in our memories. Our lives have been greatly enriched by the experiences from this trip and some of us are already eagerly making plans to return to this beautiful country in the not so distant future! ◆

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