
COULD I DO...
EVEREST
BASE CAMP?

HOBNAIL
TREKKING CO.

Could I do Everest Base Camp?

The honest self-assessment

By Mark E. Johnson, Author of Doofus Dad Does Everest Base Camp

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A note before we start: This guide is not a sales brochure. It's not going to tell you that EBC is easy, that anyone can do it, or that you'll feel like a superhero the whole time. (Spoiler: you won't.) What it IS going to do is give you an honest, no-baloney assessment of what it actually takes — so you can decide for yourself whether Everest Base Camp belongs on your actual calendar or just your bucket list. There's no wrong answer. But there IS a better-informed one. Let's find it.

First, a little context

In April 2018, I trekked to Everest Base Camp for the first time. I was not a mountain climber. I was not an elite athlete. I was a middle-aged dad from Middle Tennessee who had never left the continental United States before launching a trekking company somewhat accidentally after meeting a Sherpa in a Nashville Lyft. With the invaluable help of my wife and Hobnail co-owner, Holly, I convinced 14 other brave souls to join us on our inaugural trip into the Himalayas.

I'm not sure how it happened, but that initial adventure led to 10 years (and counting) of additional epic adventures all over the world. And it all began with Holly and I taking a huge step out of our comfort zones — and with a sometimes overly optimistic (also described as “misguided” or “crazy”) belief that we would figure it out as we went.

I wrote a whole book about it, which you've apparently read, since you're here.

The point is: I went in as a regular person, not an expert. And I came back with a very clear sense of what it actually takes — the physical stuff, the mental stuff, the logistical stuff, and the stuff nobody thinks to ask about until they're at 14,000 feet wondering why they can't catch their breath after climbing a single flight of stairs.

This guide is everything I wish someone had handed us before we went.

Section One: The Fitness Question

“Am I in good enough shape to do this?”

Let me give you the honest answer, not the diplomatic one.

You need to be reasonably fit. Not marathon-runner fit. Not CrossFit-at-5am fit. But genuinely, honestly active — not “I walk to my car” active.

Here's what EBC actually involves, physically:

- **12 days of hiking**, with daily distances ranging from about 3 to 10 miles
- **Elevation gain** that tops out around 17,800 feet at Base Camp (for context, Denver — "the Mile High City" — sits at 5,280 feet)
- **Cumulative mileage** of roughly 80 miles round trip
- **Terrain** that ranges from pleasant valley trails to rocky, uneven, occasionally steep paths that will make your knees file a formal complaint

The good news: the pace is slow and deliberate. This is not a race. You're not being timed. Nobody is going to leave you behind because you needed an extra five minutes at the top of a particularly gnarly switchback. Acclimatization actually *requires* that you take it slow.

The bad news: slow and deliberate for 8 hours is still 8 hours. And it's at altitude, which means your body is working harder than usual just to do basic things like breathe and think clearly.

The real fitness question isn't "Am I an athlete?" It's "Have I been consistently active for the past several months, and am I willing to train specifically for this over the next 3-6 months?"

If the answer to both is yes, you're probably in the conversation.

What good EBC training looks like:

- Regularly hiking over uneven terrain — and/or training on a Stairmaster or whatever steps are available — with a weighted pack or rucksack
- Building up to back-to-back hiking days (your legs need to know what "tired from yesterday" feels like)
- Cardiovascular base — walking, cycling, swimming, whatever you'll actually do consistently
- Leg and core strength work, because your knees and back will thank you

I'm not going to lie to you: I trained harder for EBC than I had trained for anything since high school. And I was still surprised by how demanding it was. But I made it. Our whole group made it. Nobody was an elite athlete. Many of them were in their 50s (including me), and some, in their 60s.

Bottom line on fitness: If you're currently active and willing to train with intention, EBC is within reach. If you're starting from the couch in month one, you can still do it, but you'll probably need more time than you think.

Section Two: The Altitude Question

The thing I'm most scared about and also forgot to ask about

Here's something nobody mentions loudly enough: **the altitude is the hardest part of EBC. Not the distance. Not the terrain. The altitude.**

At sea level, the air contains about 21% oxygen. At Everest Base Camp — 17,800 feet — that figure drops to roughly 10%, about half of what you're used to. Your body, which has spent its entire life at a much more reasonable elevation, does not love this.

Symptoms of altitude sickness range from “mild annoyance” to “you need to go down right now.” The mild version — headache, fatigue, nausea, disrupted sleep — is extremely common and hits almost everyone at some point on the trek. The more serious version is rare but real, which is why a well-run EBC trek builds in proper acclimatization days.

What acclimatization actually means:

You go up. You come back down a little. You sleep low. You give your body time to adjust before going higher. A properly structured EBC itinerary is built around this principle — and it's non-negotiable.

What you can do to prepare:

- Talk to your doctor before you go, especially if you have any heart or lung history
- Ask about Diamox (acetazolamide), a prescription medication that helps many trekkers manage altitude symptoms
- Arrive in Kathmandu a day early if you can, to start the adjustment process
- Stay hydrated. More than you think. More than that.
- Go slow. This is not a character flaw. It's strategy.

The honest truth about altitude:

I got a headache at around 12,000 feet that lasted two days. I also watched a very fit, very prepared member of our group struggle more than anyone expected at higher elevations. Altitude doesn't care how fast you run a 5K. It has its own agenda.

The good news: most people adjust. The itinerary is designed to give you the time you need. And if you do have to descend due to altitude issues, that's a medical decision — not a failure. It's also possible that you descend for a day or two and still be able to complete your trek after recovering.

Section Three: The Time Question

“I want to do this, but I genuinely don't know how to find three weeks in my schedule”

I hear this one a lot. And I understand it — three weeks feels like a long time to be away from work, family, and the general chaos of regular life.

Here's the math, though:

A standard Hobnail EBC trek runs about 20 days door to door. That includes two days of flying each way (Nepal is far), three total days in Kathmandu, 14 days of actual trekking, and one day of just-in-case wiggle room.

Now here's the thing I've noticed in years of doing this:

The people who go on these trips are not the ones who had extra time. They're the ones who decided it was a priority.

Russ Moore is a municipal bonds consultant from Alabama. Susan is a gymnastics coach. They have jobs, responsibilities, and a life that doesn't pause itself when they're gone. They were part of that inaugural Hobnail trek and have since gone on three more.

The “I don't have time” feeling is almost always real. But it's worth asking whether it's a logistics problem or a priorities problem. Those require different solutions.

If it's logistics: let's talk through it. There are ways to structure an EBC trip that minimize disruption — and Holly and I have helped a lot of people figure out the calendar puzzle.

If it's priorities: only you can solve that one. But I'd gently suggest that “I'll do it someday” has a way of becoming “I wish I had.”

Section Four: The Money Question

“What does this actually cost, and is it worth it?”

Let's be honest about this, because the number matters and I'd rather you hear it from me than do fuzzy math on your own.

A Hobnail EBC Classic trek typically runs in the range of **$4,600 per person (double occupancy)**. On top of that, you'll need to budget for international flights (typically $1,200–$2,000 from the Southeast U.S.), gear if you don't already own it, travel insurance (non-negotiable — please do not skip this), and personal spending money.

Total all-in budget for most trekkers: $6,000–$8,000 per person.

I know. That's real money.

Here's how I'd encourage you to think about it:

That number covers roughly 20 days of guided adventure in one of the most extraordinary places on earth — including your guides, lodging, almost every meal, permits, in-country transportation, and the direct cell phone number of the people running your trip. Divide it by 20 days and you're spending less per day than a decent all-inclusive resort.

More importantly: every single person who has done this trek with us — every single one — has said some version of the same thing when they got home. “It was worth every penny. It was the best thing I've ever done.”

Not “it was pretty good for the price.”

Worth. Every. Penny.

I'm not saying that to sell you something. I'm saying it because it's what people actually tell me, unprompted, when they get back. You can make of that what you will.

One thing I will say firmly: buy travel insurance. Good travel insurance, that covers emergency evacuation. A helicopter rescue from altitude in Nepal costs tens of thousands of dollars. I've seen it happen. Don't be the person who skipped the insurance.

Section Five: The Mindset Question

What actually separates people who make it from people who don't?

Over 10 years, Holly and I have sent a lot of people to Everest Base Camp. And we've watched the entire spectrum — people who looked like they'd breeze through it who struggled, and people who were convinced they couldn't do it who absolutely crushed it.

Here's what I've learned separates them:

Flexibility. EBC does not care about your itinerary. Weather happens. Bodies have bad days. Teahouses run out of hot water and somebody gets accidentally locked into their room – and out of reach of the bathroom – in the middle of the night. (This really happened once.) The trekkers who do best are the ones who can roll with it — who find the unexpected funny rather than catastrophic. If you're the kind of person who gets deeply stressed when plans change, this is worth thinking about.

Stubbornness. There will be a moment — probably somewhere between 13,000 and 15,000 feet — where everything hurts, your head is pounding, and you genuinely wonder why you're doing this to yourself. The people who make it are the ones who decide, in that moment, that they didn't come this far to stop here. That's not physical fitness. That's character.

Humility. Go slow. Drink water. Ask for help when something's wrong. Don't let your ego write checks your body can't cash. The mountain is not impressed by how fast you walked the Appalachian Trail.

A sense of humor. This is not optional. When your tea house has no heat and the yak you passed an hour ago somehow beat you to the top of the hill, you will either laugh or cry. Laughing is better. Trust me on this one.

So — could you do it?

Here's a simple honest checklist. Be straight with yourself.

You're probably ready if:

- ■ You're currently active and exercise consistently
- ■ You're willing to train intentionally for 3-6 months before the trek
- ■ You can take roughly 20 days away from home
- ■ You can budget $6,000–$8,000 all-in (or you're starting to save toward it)
- ■ You handle uncertainty and discomfort without completely falling apart

You might need more time if:

- ■ You're currently sedentary and would need 12+ months to build a real fitness base
- ■ You have unmanaged health conditions
- ■ The budget is a significant stretch right now with no clear path to getting there

If your answer is YES:

The next step is a conversation, not a commitment. Holly and I talk to every single person who's considering a trek before they book — by phone, not by form. We want to make sure it's the right fit for you, and we want you to feel completely confident before you put down a deposit. Just reply to any of my emails and say you want to talk. We'll make it happen.

If your answer is “not yet”:

That's a completely legitimate place to be. Keep reading the Tidbits. Keep thinking about it. Train a little. Come back to this checklist in six months and see if the answers have changed.

Everest Base Camp isn't going anywhere.

And neither are we.

~ Mark

Mark E. Johnson is the author of Doofus Dad Does Everest Base Camp and the co-founder of Hobnail Trekking Co., a boutique adventure travel company based in Tennessee. He and his wife, Holly, have arranged life-changing adventures to Everest Base Camp, Mount Kilimanjaro, the Galápagos Islands, Patagonia, and a dozen other destinations around the world. They answer their own phones.