



INTERNATIONALE VEREINIGUNG DER BERGFÜHRERVERBÄNDE
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF MOUNTAIN GUIDES ASSOCIATIONS
UNION INTERNATIONALE DES ASSOCIATIONS DE GUIDES DE MONTAGNE

IFMGA

HIGH ALTITUDE EXPEDITION and TREKKING GUIDELINES

1. Introduction

These Guidelines have been drawn up by the High Altitude Guiding Sub-Commission of the IFMGA's Technical Committee, and cover the role of IFMGA members in guiding on trekkings and peaks up to 8,000m and higher. It provides definitions of the various types of expeditions which are commonly practised, and identifies the main issues confronting the high-altitude mountain guide.

Although these Guidelines are intended for use by IFMGA members, they are recommended to all professional trekking and expedition organisers, whether or not the trekkings and expeditions include IFMGA leaders and guides.

These Guidelines cover the following aspects of professional treks and expeditions:

Categories of professional treks and expeditions, including the role of the guide.

The guide's experience.

The use of the IFMGA logo.

Client experience.

High Altitude Warning.

Communications.

Medical.

Environmental.

Training.

Rescue ethics.

Throughout these Guidelines, professionally organised expeditions are referred to as "Professional" rather than "Commercial" expeditions. Although the latter term is more commonly used, it has become associated with poor practice and commercialisation, a stigma which is not appropriate for well-run treks and expeditions.



2. Categories of Professional Expedition

There are 4 categories of IFMGA high-altitude expeditions. These are determined by the role of the guide and the level of service provided. An important thing is also the level of support given by the guide/tour operator (fixed ropes, alpine style climbing, etc.)

The **"IFMGA Expedition Scale"** is as follows:

2.1 Individually Guided Expeditions

This describes guiding in the classic sense with the guide working with his/her clients at all times. The usual procedures of Alpine guiding will be applied in a Himalayan environment. This would necessitate a 1:1 or 1:2 guiding ratio in most cases. Individual guiding can be included in any of the following categories of expeditions. The qualification of the client is at the responsibility of the guide concerned.

2.2 Guided Expeditions

This is the term applied to the more usual climbing strategy on high altitude expeditions. However, it was felt necessary to apply the following criteria, which would need to be met in order to fulfil the term "guided".

- a) The guide should place or prove all fixed ropes and site all camps. The guide should check rope fixings and other aspects of security on the mountain.
- b) The guide should endeavour to go to the top with the clients. This is to provide a clear distinction from led or consulted expeditions, although it is recognised that experienced clients may sometimes go to the summit outside of the direct supervision of a guide.
- c) The maximum guiding ratio is to be 1 guide to 4 clients.
- d) The leader must be IFMGA. It was agreed that other guides working on the expedition could be competent local guides such as Sherpas, who have a working knowledge of English or the predominant language of the expedition members. However, these were to be recruited as guides and not as porters who would double up as a guide, and they must have previous high altitude mountaineering experience suitable for the mountain being undertaken.

2.3 Led Expeditions

IFMGA Led expeditions are where the expedition is organised up to and including base camp (or advance base camp if one is usually used). The limited services provided would include the following:



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- a) The presence of an IFMGA guide at base camp or advance base camp.
- b) Sherpas or local high altitude porters to place all camps and fix ropes as instructed by the IFMGA guide.
- c) All services up to and including base camp and/or advance base camp to be included.

The purpose of Professionally Led expeditions is to give experienced climbers the chance to climb a high peak. In theory, such "clients" do not need to be guided and they would accept that no guiding as such would take place on the mountain. The guide would have no responsibility above base camp for the safety of "the clients", but the guide would be there to give advice, direction and possibly training to the climbing team. The guide may or may not go on the climb him/herself, but the guide should be in radio contact with the team members at all times.

2.4 IFMGA Logistically Supported Expeditions.

IFMGA Logistically supported expeditions are where the expedition is organised up to and including base camp (or advance base camp if one is usually used). These would be operated on a similar basis to the "Led" expeditions with the important exclusion of any services above base camp, as follows:

- a) The presence of an IFMGA guide at base camp or advance base camp is not necessary.
- b) All services up to and including base camp / advance base camp to be included.

Logistically Supported Expeditions are intended for private teams who wish to have the convenience of having the expedition organised by a professional operator. However, they would be completely self-sufficient on the mountain, providing all their own equipment and food, unless arranged for separately by the expedition operator.

2.5 IFMGA Trekking.

In general it can be presumed that all the above categories are applicable. However, an IFMGA guide should be responsible for the correct level of qualification of trek leaders. Care should be taken to have an appropriate guiding ratio and group size according to the trek being undertaken.



3. Expedition Leader's Experience

The minimum level of experience for the IFMGA leader in each of the above categories of high altitude expedition should be as follows:

3.1 Individually Guided

Leaders working on an individually guided expedition should have been to at least 8,000m before, preferably as a guide.

3.2 Guided Expeditions

Leaders working on a guided expedition should have been to at least 8,000m before, preferably as a guide.

3.3 Led Expeditions

For Everest and peaks higher than 8,200m the leader should have at least been to 8,000m before. For the lower 8,000m peaks (up to 8,200m) the leader should ideally have climbed to 8,000m, but at least to 7,500m or numerous times over 7,000m, preferably as a guide.

3.4 Logistically Supported Expeditions

The consultant of the expedition should have a solid knowledge of expedition logistics.

3.5 Trekking

The guide should have at least the minimum level of qualification necessary according to the trek being undertaken. He should ideally have been to the same altitude reached on the trek several times before, preferably as a guide. A good knowledge of the country and trek conditions is a must.

4 The Use of the IFMGA Logo

Teams which fulfil the above minimum IFMGA representation appropriate for their category of expedition will be able to:

- a) Call their expedition an IFMGA Individually Guided / Guided / Led / Logisitcally Supported expedition / Trek.
- b) Use the IFMGA logo on advertising about the expedition.

Teams which do not fulfil the minimum IFMGA representation for their category of expedition will not be able to use the IFMGA logo in any way.



5. Client Experience

Expectations of the clients might vary a lot, depending on the information provided by the guide and also out of the different cultural backgrounds of the clients. These should be taken into consideration when being in contact in the booking phase.

EXPEDITION

The client must truthfully reveal, by means of a questionnaire or other written notification, their mountaineering experience and relevant medical history, to enable the expedition organiser or leader to make an informed decision on the suitability of the client for their chosen objective. When deciding on the suitability of a client the expedition organiser or leader should consider their high altitude experience, technical ability, physical and mental toughness, fitness and group compatibility. The selection of the client for any expedition is at the discretion of the leader or organiser.

TREKKING

The selection of the client for any expedition is at the discretion of the leader or organiser.

6. High Altitude Warning

It is the responsibility of each expedition organiser to issue a High Altitude Warning to all clients and to make it clear that there are additional dangers, such as altitude sickness and cold injury. Clients must be made aware of the hazards of high altitude climbing and trekking, especially above 8000m where they will be at the limit of their mental and physical abilities. Also, the ability of the guides to assist the client may be reduced.

7. Client Information

Expedition and trekking organisers should provide the following information to the clients before commencement of the expedition or trek:

- a) The type of expedition i.e. whether it is an Individually Guided / Guided / Led / Logistically Supported / expedition or trek.
- b) The level of service provided including guiding ratio.
- c) Biographical details of the guides.
- d) Route description, with details of technical difficulty, objective dangers and security provided.



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- e) Past experience of the mountain and likelihood of success.
- f) Insurance arrangements.
- g) Medical and casualty evacuation arrangements.
- h) Personal equipment list.
- i) Price inclusions and exclusions.

8. Communications

All categories of 8000m expeditions, except only logistically supported ones, should have the following level of communications:

- a) Rear link provided by radio or satellite phone, or access to a satellite phone, for medical and weather forecast purposes.
- b) Walkie-talkie radios from base camp up and at least one walkie-talkie for every camp and/or guide on the mountain.

Trekking and expeditions below 8000m:

It is recommended to follow the same guidelines, but this should be at the discretion of the guide/organiser according to the objective and style of the trip.

9. Medical

The responsibility of the guide is not only to take care of the clients but also of the whole team and staff (sirdar, cook, porters, helpers, driver,...).

On expeditions above 8000m the following medical equipment should be provided:

- a) We recommend a medical practitioner is included in all teams but recognise that this will not always be possible.
- b) The emergency first aid kit should be available in every camp, with a full first aid kit at base camp and/or advance base camp.
- c) There should be a minimum amount of oxygen available
- d) A portable hyperbaric chamber must be available as part of the medical equipment.



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- e) Advance arrangements must be made for evacuation assistance in the case of emergency.

On trekkings and expedition below 8000m the following medical equipment should be provided:

- a) A suitable first aid kit.
- b) It is recommended to bring a hyperbaric chamber. But it is up to the discretion of the IFMGA guide/organiser to adapt the equipment to the style and objective undertaken
- c) Advance arrangements must be made for evacuation assistance in the case of emergency.

10. Environmental Practice

This is an important issue which draws a lot of media attention. Abandoned equipment and garbage on mountains and at base camps is an eyesore and professional expedition organisers have been an easy target to blame. The reality is that most professional operators are highly responsible in their attitude towards mountain pollution, thanks to an increasing awareness of these issues among both guides and clients. However, it is still necessary to lay down a Code of Practice, the basic theme of which is outlined below. It is recognised that several very useful and detailed codes of practice already exist which should be embraced by IFMGA expeditions, such as the UIAA Ethical Code for Expeditions, the Kathmandu Declaration and the BMC Mountain Tourism Guidelines.

10.1 Human Waste

Avoid unsightly sanitation on the mountain. At base camp (and advance base camp where applicable). A barrel should be used for a toilet which is transported to a suitable disposable point after the expedition. On the mountain, plastic bags should be used, which can be disposed of down large crevasses, as is the current accepted practice on McKinley in Alaska. Alternatively, it can be removed from the mountain altogether.

10.2 General Garbage

Unless burning is offensive to local religious beliefs (as in the case of Sherpas in Nepal and Tibet) this should be burnt, with non-burnables and remains of the burnt items being brought back to an appropriate collection point. If burning is not locally



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acceptable then all rubbish should be brought back to an appropriate collection point with out burning. Used batteries should be re-exported back to the country of origin.

10.3 Equipment

Every effort should be made to retrieve ropes and used oxygen bottles from the mountain. Teams should encourage high altitude porters to retrieve such items for either their use or for recycling.

10.4 Wood

Under no circumstances should wood be cut by the expedition members or by local staff and porters employed by the expedition. Enough kerosene or other fuel should be provided for all cooking, including for porters. When lodges are used on the trek in and out from base camp, it is encouraged that all cooking should be done by using kerosene, dung or other fuel, other than the wood burning stoves of the lodge.

12. Local Guides' Training

The need to train local guides such as Sherpas should be a priority for IFMGA guides who work on expeditions. Opportunities may exist for such training to be provided in tandem with experiential training for IFMGA guides, and these are being investigated by the IFMGA HA Expeditions Sub-Commission..

Training for local guides can be arranged independently by IFMGA expedition leaders and operators, as a responsibility to their staff. As a minimum, IFMGA expeditions should ensure that their local staff who are going above BC/ABC are trained in the use of the following:

- a) The use of fixed ropes.
- b) The use of specialist equipment such as oxygen and radios

Local staff should also be kept informed of matters affecting the expedition and, where appropriate, included in the decision making process where their experience may prove very valuable.



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13. Rescue Ethics

IFMGA expeditions should render assistance to other expedition team members who are in a life threatening situation on the mountain, so long as this does not unreasonably compromise the safety of their own team members. Clients need to be made aware of this possibility at the start of the expedition, and that any rescue effort may jeopardise their summit chances.