

# Across the roof of the world to the king of mountains

Royal Enfield laid on a once-in-a-lifetime adventure to Everest Base Camp and we went along for the ride

By Ralf Bielefeldt  
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Mount Everest Base Camp – is there anyone who isn't awestruck by these four words? There's probably no place in the world that is more daring or more unique. Well, perhaps the Mariana Trench – the deep-sea chasm in the western Pacific Ocean which is 36,000 feet below sea level. I'll accept that; but this is above the waterline.

Mount Everest sits in the Himalayas and stands at 29,030 feet – the highest peak on the planet. Qomolangma, as the mountain of mountains is called in the Tibetan language, stretches across Nepal, Tibet and China. Surrounded by other giants of at least 20,000 feet, it towers so majestically into the sky that its peak can be seen from more than 60 miles away, if the clouds are kind to the observer.

Groups of visitors from all over the world, some of whom waited a week at the last tourist stop at an altitude of 17,060 feet, never got to see Everest in its entirety as it's always shrouded in clouds. Sometimes they nestle around its waist like a fluffy bath towel, sometimes they circle around its head like a cotton wool cap. You have to earn that view.

That's exactly why I am now standing at Kathmandu airport, at 37°C and humidity of 93 per cent. The Royal Enfield Himalayan Adventure Everest Base Camp 2025 beckons – an epic 700-mile motorcycle expedition from Nepal's capital to Everest and back!

**Deafening, constant honking, petrol-filled air**  
The chauffeur waiting for me fills every inch of space behind the

steering wheel of his tiny car. The ventilation system is running at full speed to blow away the rivulets from the inside of the windscreen and cars, scooters, lorries, pedestrians, ox carts, revving mopeds, sonorous Enfields, plus whining 100cc Heros surround me.

Kathmandu is a traffic juggernaut. Motorcyclists dutifully wear helmets, or at least what they consider to be helmets, yet pillions are allowed to ride without any protection. Instead of traffic lights, police officers in light blue shirts control the flow. I have no idea how these brave whistle-blowing artists manage to stand on their pedestals in the petrol-filled air without collapsing in this mixture of constant, deafening honking and carbon monoxide fumes.

My driver cruises along four- to six-lane roads, which are used by at least eight lanes of traffic. The average speed in Kathmandu is probably between 11 and 14mph. Vehicles merge into the rolling mass of traffic from all sides. At some point, we turn left twice and then right again, and then we are standing in the courtyard of the Manaslu hotel, which will be accommodating me and the other participants – most of them from India – for the next two nights.

"The visa formalities take some time," apologises Pankaj, our tour guide. Our bikes are waiting in front of the magnificent entrance portal: 28 Royal Enfield Himalayan 450s in various paint finishes. Each bike is given a number before the start and mine bears the number 91.

## Day 1 Kathmandu-Timure, 92 miles

We stand out like sore thumbs on the rural mountain roads in the *Continued over*



**'We cruise one behind the other through the highest plateau on Earth'**



Meet adventure rider Ralf...

### Who is Ralf Bielefeldt?

Ralf Bielefeldt (59) has been working as a reporter for motorbike and car magazines for over 30 years. He lives as a freelancer near Hamburg, Germany.

Altitude is no problem for our rugged gaggle of Enfields

KHUSHAL BHARTIA

# DREAM RIDE EVEREST BASE CAMP



Anticipation builds for what lies ahead



The number corresponds to your bike



Himmy 450 convoy kicks up the dust



The higher the ride, the colder it gets



Smooth tarmac awaits the riders on the Chinese side



Terrain like no other on Earth



Any issues, the guys will soon sort it



Riding mile after mile in the foothills

## 'It clears and I could cry with happiness: Everest is majestic'

### WE DID IT TOO...

#### 'We forged that bond'

"We faced challenges together, celebrated victories, and built a bond that only the mountains can forge," writes Soumya Chatterjee, one of the participants, in the tour's WhatsApp group.

"This riding experience will stay with me for the rest of my life," adds Manish Phillips. "We built a brotherhood along the way in this raw, unforgiving terrain – it's these bonds that I'm taking back with me."

"This trip has given me unforgettable memories, new friendships and a great sense of achievement. Thank you to everyone who made this possible."

The participants' brand loyalty is high: Girish, nicknamed 'The Old Monk', set off shortly after the expedition with Royal Enfield on the 'Himalayan Odyssey', an 18-day tour of the mountains.

Kathmandu metropolitan area. You don't usually see anything like a group of bikes with gleaming LED headlights and riders in protective clothing here. Most moped riders wear shorts or trackies, and flip-flops instead of boots.

The Royal Enfield Himalayan Adventure Everest Base Camp Tour took place for the first time in 2019 – with a much smaller group – then came Covid. In 2023, a severe earthquake in the border region destroyed parts of the route and in 2024, there was deep discord between China and India. At times, no Indians were allowed to enter the country, so the planned new expedition was cancelled again.

In 2025, the time for the second run has finally come and a large contingent on Royal Enfield's new all-round globetrotter flagship bike waits excitedly. Back in 2019, participants still rode the 24bhp Himalayan 411. We have 39bhp and 30lb.ft between our legs which is more than enough for the roads we plan to conquer.

We stop for lunch in Dhunche, 60 miles northwest of the capital. If you like (and can tolerate) Indian-Nepalese food, you'll be in your element. To me, the colourful

saucers whisper: 'You'd better leave it.' One night and one day on the ceramics of Kathmandu is enough for me for now, so a bowl of plain rice will suffice.

Ahead of us lies the toughest part of the journey: the border road between Nepal and Tibet. Almost 25 miles of no-man's land. Broken asphalt, roughly repaired landslide passages, hub-deep washouts, and collapsed trucks. Deep sand and rock-hard gravel passages with razor-sharp mini stalagmites alternate and one rider's rear tyre is slashed by the nasty, sharp stones. The service truck following our hussar troop patches the collapsed rubber as it reaches the stranded rider and Eddie from Indonesia is soon rolling again.

We continue, mile after mile, after all, where else could we go? The Pasang Lhamu Highway is the only official transit link between Nepal and China.

We finally end up in Timure and our hostel for the night is just metres from the Nepalese border station – which is a shipping container with two grumpy guys who are engaged in a fierce head-to-head battle to see who can stamp our passports the loudest.

#### Day 2 Timure-Gyirong, 28 miles

The night was dreamless. We sleep in twin rooms and I share mine with Julian, a boyish Texan with Indian roots who lives in Mumbai. Flat as pancakes and completely exhausted, we collapsed onto the rock-hard mattresses after the really demanding riding day. Today we only have 28 miles to cover. We have to leave Nepal, which goes quite quickly, and pass through immigration into China. This process takes, literally, hours.

Each passport was given a number before departure in Kathmandu. We have to queue up in this order – and woe betide anyone who messes it up. The border officials already look as if they would prefer to send us straight to the nearest Chinese labour camp.

Meanwhile, to the right of the waiting queues, porters haul all the travellers' luggage through and put it through a huge scanner. All locks had to be removed or opened beforehand and we're told to "turn

off your cameras and delete all pictures on your mobile phones showing prayer flags, the Dalai Lama or naked women". If the border guards discover anything of this kind, that's it for entry and you can forget about apologising.

After three hours, we're done, and the wild ride continues, this time on flawless asphalt. The contrast couldn't be more striking. China/Tibet seems like another world in the first few kilometres after the border: tidy, clean, and completely under the control of the Chinese government. Every 130 metres or so there are pine-green masts with surveillance cameras.

At irregular intervals, there are cameras which flash every vehicle that passes by, regardless of whether you are driving over the speed limit of 25mph or not. It's complete madness. Before we reach Gyirong, our next stop, there are two more checkpoints with roadblocks and barriers. In this region, you can't take a single step without being watched.

#### Day 3 Gyirong-Tingri, 155 miles

Now it is time for things to get serious in terms of altitude. Today we climb from 8860 feet (Gyirong) to 15,100 feet and then back down to 14,110 feet (Tingri).

"If anyone has problems with the altitude, please let me know immediately," our guide Pankaj warns paternalistically.

"And remember to drink as much water as you can, don't smoke and don't drink alcohol, both are serious risk factors at this altitude. If things go badly, you'll have to stay in the hotel or turn back to a lower-lying town!"

Altitude sickness, it seems, is not to be trifled with. It consists of headaches and neck pain, dizziness, nausea, palpitations, tingling in the fingers and at 10,000 feet or higher, it can strike at any time. As a precaution, Pankaj and Sabin, the tour organiser, send their room numbers to the group every evening. The organising team have oxygen canisters with them, and

they regularly check our pulse and oxygen levels with a finger clip to make sure all is well.

We cruise one behind the other through the highest plateau on earth, also known as the roof of the world. In Tibetan Buddhism, the plateau is a sacred place. The average altitude is 16,010 feet above sea level, and at its highest point, it reaches a full 18,044 feet. Just below that is our destination: Everest Base Camp in Rongbuk on the Tibetan side of the Himalayas. There is also an Everest Base Camp in China. Both are reserved for the heroes who want to climb the mountain and are willing to pay five- to six-figure sums to do so.

Our Himalayan 450s run like clockwork. There is no sign of the expected drop in performance due to the altitude, but to me, they sound rougher and louder.

#### Day 4 Tingri-Rongbuk, 67 miles

It's a mere 67 miles to Rongbuk, a piece of cake for us. Morale is high

and the mountain is calling. We park our bikes in the backyard of a hotel and transfer to two green electric buses. These EV shuttles are the only way to get up to the few hostels just before base camp itself. Our rooms are simple, as is the food. There is rice with vegetables, accompanied by the usual sauces, spicy and oily. We drink lemon and ginger tea and dream of our first beer after returning to lower climes (we're still off the hard stuff on account of the altitude).

Annoyingly, as we arrive Everest is mostly covered with clouds, so we pray for a strong wind to blow away that particular misery.

The thin air is less of a problem for most of us than I'd feared. But we didn't have to worry about it overnight as there are oxygen connections between the beds in the rooms, and the appropriate tubes can be purchased at reception. Julian and I turn the bubbling machines up to full power and open the window. Even so, you don't sleep really well at this

altitude and one of us wakes up every 90 minutes. The expected neck pain is quickly relieved with a headache tablet, and you get used to the tingling fingertips over time.

The next morning, low-hanging clouds cover the landscape and the hope of seeing Everest is fading fast. But we get lucky: an hour later, it clears up and there it is.

The mountain towers over us without the wispiest cloud and stands in bright sunshine against a deep blue sky. I don't know if I've ever felt as small and insignificant as I do in this moment and I could cry with happiness. Everest is majestic. And we are completely alone with it this morning without a sound or a tourist far and wide.

It's a moment for eternity as I will certainly never see Qomolangma again in my lifetime. I did everything right, I think to myself – the tour, the companions, the bike. Everything is just perfect on this once-in-a-lifetime road trip and I guess that you can't ask for more on a motorbike. [\[X\]](#)

### YOU CAN DO IT

## Book now for the trip of a lifetime

Royal Enfield offers various tours in the Himalayas. The Royal Enfield Himalayan Adventure Everest Base Camp is set to take place once a year in May and you can book online via [royalenfield.com](http://royalenfield.com).

The price for the 10-day tour (seven days of riding) including motorbike, accommodation and various meals is around £1730. Petrol and travel costs to/from Nepal are not included in the price.

In 2026, the Base Camp expedition will probably follow a different route: the 'Friendship Bridge' at the Rasuwagadhi border crossing, which we used to travel to Tibet and back to Nepal, was completely destroyed and swept away by flash floods at the beginning of July and nobody knows when it will be fixed. The best Everest time for tours (motorcycle, trekking) is from April to June. Due to the complex formalities and language barrier, it is essential to hire a local guide to organise the trip if you want to travel alone or in a small group.

• **Contact: WildAdventureNepal.com, Sabin Nakarmi, phone +977 980 3025108**

#### This could be you in 2026

