

# How to take big spenders to **the top of Mount Everest** and back

>> Luis Benitez, 33, professional mountaineer



THE GUIDE >

**ACCEPT INGRATITUDE.** “In 2003 one of my clients summited, then sat down and swore he couldn’t continue. A Sherpa and I dragged and rolled him to the South Col. Twice he nearly knocked me off the mountain. He left for home without so much as a ‘Thank you.’”

**HELP THEM HELP YOU.** “I make sure my clients aren’t pulling tags off their gear at base camp. I tell them to test out the suit and boots at home, walk around the backyard, go out in a storm. One year a client wearing a brand-new down suit and big mittens discovered he couldn’t reach around to finish nature’s call. His guide had to lend him a hand.”

**EXPECT HEAD GAMES.** “Base camp [pop. 350] is incestuous and rumors fly. Come summit time, some teams will even switch radio channels and give out false information about when they’re going to go for it, to ensure that other people won’t be summiting on the same day.”

**EAT LIKE A KING.** “Our cook is so good that other outfitters have tried to steal him. At base camp we have sushi, pizza, wine, even espresso.”

**STAY LOOSE.** “To pass the downtime, we fly big kites and scoot over the ice. We’ll toss a Frisbee, ice climb, boulder. We’ve even had cricket games with a South African team and Easter egg hunts with the Sherpas.”

**PHONE HOME.** “A quick call on the satellite phone to hear someone say they love you and are thinking about you can do a homesick heart good. I also make sure to sort out my bills and personal life before I go, because I need to focus once I’m on the mountain. Last year a guide got a Dear John call at Camp 2.”

**ENJOY THE RIDE.** “Sometimes people get so attached to the summit that they end up making bad decisions—that’s the biggest danger on Everest. I always ask my clients, ‘If we were ten feet from the top and you could almost reach out and touch the summit, and if I told you that we had to turn around right then, could you do it?’ Ultimately, the journey should be more important than the destination.” ▲

**C**limbing Mount Everest is big business. For a Nepali approach, group permit fees can top \$70,000, and some ten outfitters lead an average of 200 climbers up the peak each spring. Luis Benitez is one of a new wave of guides: highly skilled mountaineers with a knack for customer service. “Their real value to their clients is the ability to read hazards and pick weather windows rather than wine bottles,” says guide David Hahn, a 20-year Himalaya veteran. “But I do admire those—like Luis—who can pick both.” Benitez, who guides for New Zealand-based Adventure Consultants, has made four consecutive ascents of Everest, the first in 2001, when he crested the 29,035-foot peak with blind climber Erik Weihenmayer. Foul weather thwarted last year’s bid, but Benitez is back in Nepal this month leading four more high achievers to the roof of the world. Here he shares some secrets of his success. —Kasey Cordell

**NEVER UNDERESTIMATE.** “Type A personalities who adhere to the motto ‘Summit or die—either way I win’ aren’t the most successful on Everest. People like Joe Leroy are. When I met Joe, he was out of shape and could barely handle the hotel stairs. But he listened to directions, put one foot in front of the other, and on summit day he was passing Sherpas on his way to the top.”