

Elbrus

North-South Traverse

Russia | 5,642m



360 
EXPEDITIONS

www.360-expeditions.com

Elbrus

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Elbrus at 5,642 m is a huge dormant volcano in **Southern Russia's Caucasus Mountains**. The west summit (first ascended in 1874 by the Florence Crauford Grove's British expedition) of this twin-domed peak is **Europe's** highest and the fifth highest of the sought-after **7 Summits**. If you're an adventurous trekker, you'll go via the spectacular **north-south traverse**.

To fully savour the uniqueness of this incredible, prominent mountain and to retain the spirit of adventure we climb to the basecamp following roads which cling high above dizzying drop-offs and give you that wonderful, tingling sensation of complete and utter remoteness. The route to the top is a varied, awe-inspiring landscape: Alpine meadows awash with flowers in bloom, gerbils scattering from swooping eagles and,

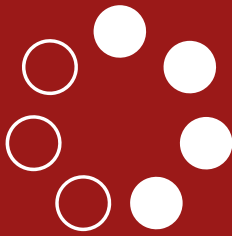
as you near your ultimate goal, surreal volcanic rock twisted into crazy forms and vast glaciers flowing from the summit.

This expertly supported expedition combines elements of an alpine ascent and a Himalayan adventure. You'll be rolling up your sleeves, and carrying your own load, so the emphasis is on individual responsibility and effective teamwork. Through gradual acclimatisation and a day learning the necessary Alpine techniques, your chances of realising this incredible summit are greatly enhanced. This ascent symbolises the very best of mountain adventure.

Elbrus

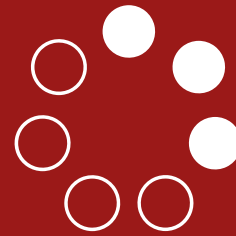
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Russia | 5,642m



Physical – P4

Sustained physical effort calls for a state of high conditioning. You should already have experience of tough challenges (P3) and be regularly training as part of your normal routine. Expect days of up to 8 hours and longer while carrying a pack up to 8-14kg in weight. Summit night could be easily in excess of 12 hours.



Technical – T3

May involve harder scrambling or some trekking and climbing with ropes. If snow is encountered then glacier travel with ropes, ice axes and crampons will be necessary. Basic climbing skills are ideal, but these will also be taught (and certainly practiced) during the expedition and pre-summit phase.

Please note that the grading system used is a rough guide only.



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ITINERARY

DAY 1 : Depart UK

Meet your 360 guide at Heathrow airport for your evening flight to Russia

DAY 2 : Mineralnye Vody

Arrive Mineralnye Vody mid-morning. Soak up some local colour before regrouping in the evening a full 360 brief and an introduction to our local Russian mountain guides. Overnight in hotel.

DAY 3 : Mineralnye Vody – Emanuel Valley (2,250m)

Board four wheel drives for early morning start to the base camp of Mount Elbrus. Fantastic scenery of huge canyons and local villages. The feeling of remoteness is tangible. The last 45 minutes of this 4 hour drive is on a hairy road along the edge of a spectacular canyon. Descend into an alpine meadow and an exciting river crossing before reaching base camp in Emmanuel's pasture (2,700m). Soaring above are the twin summits of Mount Elbrus. Afternoon walk to the local hot springs and a huge waterfall.

DAY 4 : Acclimatisation walk to the high camp (3,800m)

We begin Day 4 climbing to camp 1 at 3,800m (4-5 hrs) and return to Emanuel's (BC) to sleep. Today's climb allows us to get into trekking shape and to test our boots and equipment. More importantly, we start acclimatising by "climbing high and sleeping low". The terrain is a geologist's delight as we climb through hardened lava contorted into stone mushrooms, volcanic bombs and exotic lava sculptures.

DAY 5 : One way trip to high camp (3,800m)

Today we retrace our footsteps through a pristine alpine environment to the high camp sitting on the edge of a huge glacier. We strike camp or find space on the bunks of a small hut that is to be used exclusively by our team. The afternoon is spent soaking up the glorious feeling of wilderness at our lofty perch.

DAY 6 : Ascent to Lenz's rocks (4,600m)

Today we rope up to commence an exciting climb up on the glacier's back to a rocky pyramid known as Lenz Rocks. The views open up as we climb higher and reveal many of the lofty summits of the Caucasus range. Your guides will teach you relevant roping up and glacier travel techniques. We have the chance to scramble up Lenz Rocks to reach a cross there and to soak up the amazing views over a picnic lunch.

DAY 7 : Rest Day

Today won't all be about resting however as the guides once again get busy conducting "Ecole de Glace". For a few hours today you'll enhance your Alpine skills and learn how to self-arrest, crampon and ice-axe techniques as well as have a session on how to set up crevasse rescue systems. The afternoon is dedicated to chilling out, hydrating, eating and sleeping. All of these are important as soon the summit attempt begins.

Elbrus

North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

ITINERARY

DAY 8 : Summit Day (5,642m)

The climb to reach Europe's highest point begins around midnight. We retrace our steps to Lenz rock in the light of our head-torches and the stars and moon. Then as the sun creeps over the horizon we exit the glacier to gain a rock band through which a safe path zig-zags to just under 5,000m. By now we can see far over the plains of Russia and the enormity of the Caucasus Mountains. Soon we reach the saddle dividing the twin peaks of Elbrus and cross it to reach the final steep slopes of the west summit. After a break we continue up virgin snow to gain the final ridge to the top. Today is a tough day by anyone's standards (12 – 14 hrs) but as we reach the summit we are rewarded not only by tremendous views but by the ultimate satisfaction that we have accomplished this amazing achievement by climbing the mountain from the basecamp to the summit under our own steam. There is no finer feeling than this. To reward ourselves for our hard work we descend only 850m and are met by a PistenBully that will take us down to the ski lifts which drop to the valley floor on the South-side. From here we board a final transfer to the village of Cheget and our hotel. This night of summit celebration is always memorable!

DAY 9 : Contingency Day

Reserve day in case of bad weather at summit camp or if people are in need of further acclimatisation. If the traverse is successful we stay in hotel accommodation (not included in the price).

DAY 10 : Mineralnye Vody

Rest day and a celebration lunch in an iconic Caucasus restaurant where you'll be presented with your summiteer certificate. Shopping and enjoying the hospitality of this Alpine village and its good range of restaurants and local markets.

DAY 11 : Return to UK

Breakfast in hotel. Transfer to Mineralnye Vody airport for your day flight home

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North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

KIT LIST

Bags & Packs

Kit bag

A 90 -120L duffel bag to transport kit. A duffel bag is a strong, soft, weather resistant bag without wheels but with functional straps for carrying. Suitcases and wheeled bags are not suitable

Expedition rucksack

70 – 80L capacity that is well worn in and with a good waist belt. You will be carrying big loads on several days with your climbing gear to stash at High Camp, hence the large sized pack. Some climbers prefer to also bring along a smaller day sack, specifically for the summit bid. This is entirely your choice but it not required.

Drybags

Nylon rolltop bags that keep fresh clothing and other important items like passports and iPods dry in the event of a total downpour that seeps into your kitbag. Good for quarantining old socks. Please note that many countries are now banning plastic bags. We would always advise buying re-usable nylon rolltop bags for keeping your kit dry (and sustainability).

Waterproof rucksack cover

To protect rucksack from rain

Small kit bag or light bag

As most of you will already have a smaller bag for carrying on the plane, this can also serve as storage for kit that you intend to leave at the hotel. Please note that this is not required – your duffel kit bag is perfect for storing any leftover kit at the hotel.

Padlocks x 2

For use on your kit bag for travel and on the expedition plus your hotel bag

Sleeping Gear

4 Season sleeping bag

You should get a sleeping bag rated to -15C and choose a sleeping bag that functions within the comfort rating of this temperature. A silk sleeping bag liner will enhance this rating on the coldest nights

Sleeping bag liner

Silk is best for keeping the bag clean and you a little warmer

Sleeping mat

A full length self-inflating rather than $\frac{3}{4}$ length Thermarest

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North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

KIT LIST

Headwear

Warm headgear x 2

This can be a warm hat, beanie, balaclava, anything to reduce the heat loss from your head

Wide brimmed hat

Keeps the sun off exposed areas like ears and the nape of the neck

Sunglasses

Worth spending money on good UV filters. For glacier work category 4 with side and nose protectors. Julbo is our preferred supplier

Ski goggles

Category 3 for days when it may be snowing and very windy. Very useful on summit day

Sunblock

Buy the highest SPF you can find as UV intensifies with altitude

Lip salve

Sun cream will not work on your lips and they are very susceptible to burn without proper protection

Upper Body

Base layer x 2

This is the layer closest to the skin and its principal function is to draw (wick) moisture and sweat away from the skin. You can also get thermal base layers for use at higher altitudes that provide an additional insulative layer while still drawing sweat during times of high exertion

Mid layer x 2

These are typically lightweight microfleece or similar technology that provide varying degrees of warmth and insulation without being overly bulky or heavy to pack

Gilet (optional)

Optional - A great low volume additional layer to keep your core warm, whether down, primaloft or fleece

Light insulated jacket

A lighter jacket such as a Primaloft or lightweight down which can be worn at lower to mid altitudes is a great addition to your kit offering greater flexibility with layering

Soft Shell (optional)

Optional - These should be windproof (not all are) and insulative. They are mostly made of soft polyester and sometimes resemble a neoprene finish which makes them very mobile and comfortable to wear. While offering a degree of weather repellence, they are not waterproof

Elbrus

North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

KIT LIST

Hard Shell

These jackets are thin, highly waterproof and windproof and worn over all other items of clothing. You'll find these made of Gore-Tex or other proprietary waterproof yet breathable technology. Inexpensive hard shells that aren't breathable will prevent evaporation, making you sweat intensely and are not recommended

Down jacket

These provide the best insulation and are worth every penny. Ask advice in the shop (or from us) when buying the jacket and mention you want it rated to -25C and the assistant will recommend the correct fill for you

Warm gloves

Consider liners or a light polartec pair for lower altitudes and evenings, and a thicker waterproof pair like ski gloves for higher altitudes

Down mitts & waterproof mitts

Essential for higher altitudes and cold temperatures. To be worn with a liner glove underneath and waterproof & windproof layer over the top.

Lower Body

Trekking trousers

These tend to be polyester so they dry quickly after a shower and weigh little in your pack. Consider perhaps a pair with detachable lower legs as an alternative to shorts

Softshell trousers

Windproof or thermal lined trekking trousers for higher altitudes and the summit phase. Thermal leggings can still be worn underneath if necessary

Long Johns

Thermal insulation for the lower body

Waterproof trousers

Like the jacket, an essential piece of kit to stay dry and should also be Goretex

Underwear

Merino or wicking material, not cotton. How many pairs you take is entirely up to you

Feet

3-4 season walking boots

Well worn in 3-4 season waterproof boots with mid to high ankle support

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North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

KIT LIST

High altitude boots

These boots are double or triple layered to offer the best insulation and the warmest feet up high. Either Scarpa Vega, La Sportiva Spantiks or 8,000m boots are suitable. Make sure you can fit 2 pairs of socks for added warmth with room to wiggle your toes.

High altitude socks x 2

These are especially thick to provide maximum insulation. Bring two pairs, keep one pair clean for summit day, and wear with a thinner inner.

Trekking socks x 3

Start with lighter socks lower down, working up to thicker pairs for higher up as it gets colder. Some people like a clean pair every day, others are happy to change every other day – that's a personal choice.

Spare laces

Just in case

Trainers

For camp, saves stomping around in heavy boots for the entire day. You could also opt for walking sandals or Crocs.

Technical Equipment

Climbing harness

We recommend Petzl harnesses. Try a variety on in a shop before you buy to ensure a good fit. Legs clips are a good option and avoids having to step into the harness to put it on.

Screwgate karabiners x 2

At least 1 screwgate karabiner is HMS

Sling (120cm)

120cm slings. One to be used as a cows tail and the other as back up

Ice axe

A walking ice axe between 55cm and 65cm. Go to an outdoor shop and try different ones for weight and size so that you get one that feels good to you.

Crampons

12 point mountaineering crampons with anti-balling plates that fit your specific boots (not ice climbing crampons)

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North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

KIT LIST

Climbing helmet

We strongly recommend that you bring and use a helmet, it is for your security in the event of a slip or there is rock or ice fall. A plastic helmet is more suitable rather than the expanded foam helmets available. Make sure you try it on in a shop with a woolly/fleece hat underneath **PLs note, that it is a recognizable trend that on Elbrus many outfitters feel that it is not necessary to wear one for the majority of the climb. You will see this for yourselves. We will be roped up when traversing the crevasses and in our eyes, this could indicate that there is a risk of a fall. With a fall there is a risk of banging your head, so we have now decided to advocate that you should bring one, and wear it! This advice follows the UK winter condition advice. The international advice is loose if there at all. I would agree it is all a bit a grey area.. but hey why don't we (360) take the lead in being cautious. You only have one head.. (luckily, we have two of pretty much everything else)

Hydration

Water bottles/bladder

3L equivalent – Camelbaks are useful at lower altitudes but have a tendency to freeze up at higher altitudes without insulation tubes, Nalgene bottles are better at altitude. We suggest a combination of a 2L bladder and 1L bottle or 2 x ½L bottles to put in your jacket for summit night

Water purification

Although all water is boiled some prefer to double up and add purification tabs as well.

Toiletries

Wash kit

Keep it simple on the mountain. Essentials are toothbrush, toothpaste and deodorant. Moisturiser is advisable, everything else is a luxury!

Travel towel

Travel towels from the likes of Lifesystems are perfect

Wet wipes

Preferably biodegradable, these are great for washing when modern shower facilities become a thing of the past

Alcohol gel

A must have for good camp hygiene

Insect repellent

For early stages and once back down

Toilet paper

Provided on the mountain but a spare in your daysack may be useful if you need to hide behind a rock between camps

Nappy sacks or dog poo bags

Only needed to bag your toilet paper if you are caught short in between camps and for keeping your rubbish tidy in your tent

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North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

KIT LIST

Medications

Personal first aid kit

The 360 med kits are designed to be used in emergencies and akin to an A&E rather than a pharmacy on Expeditions so please come prepared with useful meds for yourself such as painkillers (Ibuprofen if you can take it and a Paracetamol) plus blister plasters, plasters, antiseptic, rehydration sachets and any muscle rubs you wish to use.

Personal medication

Keep this in your daysack

Miscellaneous

Head torch

We recommend Petzl head torches. Bring spare batteries.

Trekking poles with snow buckets

Trekking poles with snow buckets are recommended

Camera

Bring plenty of spare batteries and memory cards

Penknife (optional)

Sewing kit (optional)

Hand warmers

For summit day

Documentation

Passport

Don't forget this! Your passport should have at least 6 months validity. With your passport expiry date at least six months after the final day of travel.

Copy of passport

Just in case

Visa

This must be arranged beforehand, we will assist with the application process

Dental check up

We recommend you have a dental check-up before your trip. New fillings can be an issue at altitude if there is an air pocket left in the gap

Money

We recommend you take around £300 – £400 in ROUBLES onto the mountain. This will allow for tip money plus any extras such as satellite phone calls and emergency funds. Small denominations are recommended as it may be difficult to obtain change and it will be easier to divide tip money

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North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

KIT LIST

Travel insurance

Copy of own travel insurance details. And relevant contact numbers. We have a partnership with True Traveller and would recommend that you contact them when looking for travel insurance for your trip with 360. However, it is vital that you ensure that the insurance cover they offer is suitable for you, taking your personal circumstances (items to be insured, cancellation cover, medical history) into account. Many other insurance providers are available and we do recommend that you shop around to get the best cover for you on the expedition you are undertaking. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the appropriate insurance for your intended trip. To include medical evacuation and coverage up to the maximum altitude of this trip.

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North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

FAQ'S

Country

What does the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advice on travel to this region

It must be understood that the Foreign Office (FO) advice has for a while been to avoid travel to this region.

For more information please visit the FCO website: <http://www.fco.gov.uk>

Recent reports from trusted friends suggest that the area is heavily militarized. This does NOT mean that it is safe but this strong Russian presence will significantly reduce movements of rebels and therefore they believe the area to be safer. It is important that you understand that we are going against the FCO advice and that this is the opinion of trusted friends and our local portage and logistics company. Additionally, there have been no recent security briefs of untoward activity in this area.

From our local agents and other regional advisers it appears that any risk is between the airport and our hotel, a road journey of about four hours. If you decide to participate in an Elbrus Expedition you must understand you are travelling against FCO advice and accept the risk and any consequence. 360 Expeditions by running this expedition does not overrule FO advice and the in-country advice we receive is current.

360 Expeditions would not be sending out leaders and friends to Elbrus if we felt there was a great risk. This is our choice and that of our guides, we are happy and confident in running Elbrus. You should make up your own mind.

What you have said sounds alarming, is Elbrus safe?

We monitor the situation closely on Elbrus both through FO advice and by information we are able to obtain from others on the ground in that region. By travelling to the Elbrus region you will currently be going against UK FO advice.

Our own risk threshold is that we are happy to go to this region. We are not saying the area is safe. Therefore if you decide to participate in this expedition you will need to accept this risk and any subsequent consequences. Remember that by travelling against Foreign Office advice can possibly bring implications such as lack of travel insurance. If you are unable to get travel insurance you will certainly be able to get medical insurance for the trip which is important. 360 can help provide you with advice on this if required. Remember to disclose your destination to your insurer to ensure continuity of cover. If you are having trouble finding an insurer who will cover you, please call us for assistance.

360 Expeditions has previously successfully run several expeditions to Elbrus with current Foreign Office advice.

Although technically easy, Elbrus is an inherently dangerous mountain in particular when it comes to fierce weather conditions and adverse avalanche conditions. Despite its lower height than Kilimanjaro this mountain needs a different approach and must not be treated lightly. The guides (both 360 and expert Russian guides) accompanying the expedition are very experienced and have the teams' safety as their priority, they will do their utmost to work with the team to deliver a successful, safe and enjoyable expedition.

Elbrus

North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

FAQ'S

Food and Water

What is the food like on the mountain?

All meals on the mountain are of the highest possible standards. In fact considering that our cooks have to produce the best possible meals in a wilderness setting using only basic cooking facilities such as camping stoves, the meals they produce are nothing short of miracle. The meals are fresh, nutritious and varied. We ensure that dietary preferences are met where possible and quality local ingredients are used.

The underlying aim is to provide balanced nutritional meals packed to refuel hungry bodies and to replenish stores for the next day of activity.

It is also recommended for you to bring along daily personal snacks. Fast release high-energy goodies (jelly beans for example) can be useful for long hill days. These types of snacks will be particularly useful on summit day as en-route there may be not be a chance for a long leisurely stop. High energy snacks like these are quick and easy to eat and will give your body a regular energy top up to help you keep going longer. Whatever snacks you plan to take with you make sure they are tasty to you.

Where does the drinking water come from?

For the first day bottled drinking water will be used. While ascending Elbrus from the north you will be in a wilderness setting and so water will be sourced from local streams and purified appropriately. As you go higher and reach the snowline, clean snow can be collected and melted by boiling to create purified water.

How often is fresh water available for replenishing during the day?

Before leaving camp in the morning you will fill your water bottles. You should take iodine or chlorine purification with you so that if you need more water during the day and find a water source you will be able to purify adequately.

Elbrus

North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

FAQ'S

Accommodation

How does tent sharing work? And how big are the tents?

We use a combination of high quality 3 person tents to be shared between 2 people to provide extra space for your comfort and the huts when available. Please note the huts are very basic and, when used, you do sleep like sardines! We generally try to have 3 nights in the huts.

This is a remote route and as mountaineers we need to be self-sufficient with our logistics. Although we use a few porters for this route to aid in carrying group equipment we still need to keep the weight of group equipment such as tents to a minimum.

Another important factor in tent sharing is to develop a buddy-buddy system where every team member can keep an eye on one another during the expedition in case one member develops a problem overnight. Their tent 'buddy' can then help look after them and notify the 360 Leader. This is especially important at altitude. Teamwork is the key to success.

Do we get to stay in the barrels? And what are they?

On our descent we may stay in the botchkys or 'barrels'. They definitely need to be seen to be believed. They are an old converted fuel barrel with bunks, windows, electricity and yes even heating! Compared to a tent, they are quite comfortable and luxurious.

Health and Safety

Am I likely to suffer from altitude sickness on this expedition?

Although our acclimatisation regime ensures that everybody enjoys the best possible chance of getting high on the mountain, altitude related problems can happen. The most common of this is high altitude sickness (AMS – Acute Mountain Sickness).

Symptoms for this can include headaches, nausea and vomiting.

This sounds quite dramatic but generally this is just the process your body naturally goes through to adjust to the higher altitudes and the reduced partial pressure of the atmosphere. For some people the acclimatisation process takes a little longer than others.

For our leaders this is all part and parcel of ascending a mountain as high as Elbrus.

AMS might sound frightening but our guides are fully trained (and highly experienced) in helping relieve your personal symptoms and providing advice on how to best proceed.

Elbrus

North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

FAQ'S

What should I do if I start suffering from AMS?

There are some basic measures you can take to help yourself should you start suffering from AMS. As headache is the most common symptom of AMS try taking a simple painkiller such as paracetamol or ibuprofen to relieve the headache. If the headache disappears all well and good. Please remember to inform your 360 Leader of any altitude symptom you may have and any medication you have taken as a result so they can keep an eye on you and advise accordingly.

Should someone develop severe AMS then the only cure is descent and as safety is our priority you will be taken down appropriately.

AMS might sound frightening but our leaders are fully trained (and experienced) in helping to relieve your personal symptoms and provide advice on how to best proceed.

What can I do to help prevent AMS?

In most cases AMS can be avoided by the following: drink plenty of water, walk slowly, stay warm and eat well – and listen and talk to your guides.

We recommend that you familiarise yourself with the various effects that altitude can cause. During your pre-climb briefing, we will describe altitude sickness to you in detail, and advise you how to cope with it.

The most important thing is not to fear it, but to respect it and to know how to deal with it and more importantly tell your guides how you feel.

FAQ'S

Should I bring Diamox on the expedition with me?

We recommend you come armed with a course of Diamox or other high-altitude drug on this expedition, though we do not recommend that take you these as a prophylactic during the trek or climb. We view Diamox as a treatment drug rather than a preventative medicine. Most adventure medics give similar advice, however we do appreciate this can be confusing, as many GPs (who aren't necessarily mountaineers) do suggest taking it as a prophylactic.

Here at 360 we pride ourselves on designing all our itineraries with acclimatisation front and centre and this expedition has been carefully designed to allow for your body to adjust to the altitude gradually, safely and comfortably. However, if you find that you are still having problems adjusting to the altitude (see our FAQ on Altitude Sickness) then your expedition leader or medic will recommend the correct course of action regarding taking Diamox.

Should I take Diamox?

It is far preferable to take Diamox if and when needed during the course of the expedition. If you are already taking it and then start having altitude related problems you are left with few options but to descend to a more comfortable altitude which sadly often means that the summit is not attainable.

Furthermore, Diamox is a diuretic, meaning you will have to drink a lot of fluid to prevent dehydration. Of course, the upshot of this is you'll have to pee more which means you'll probably be having to get up more in the night and take cover behind rocks during the day. Another quite common side-effect is that it can cause your extremities to "buzz and tingle" including your fingers, toes and lips which can feel quite unsettling. Other side-effects can include dizziness and light headedness with loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Although all these side-effects are manageable when you have symptoms of altitude sickness, we personally believe it is counter-intuitive to take it unless necessary.

Of course, it is totally up to you, this is just our recommendation and we're not doctors. If you do decide to take Diamox on the advice of your doctor then please do let your leader know in situ so they are aware of this. We also suggest you take the drug for a couple of days a few weeks before travelling so you can experience the symptoms before taking them during the trek.

Elbrus

North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

FAQ'S

What happens if there is a problem on the mountain?

Not only are you in the capable hands of our 360 Leader and local guide but a mountain rescue service is also operated on Elbrus that includes helicopter evacuation if necessary.

In addition, the 360 Leader carries a satellite phone in case of emergencies. It's important to confirm that your travel insurance includes medical cover for evacuations.

You advocate taking a small first aid kit, what should it contain?

We advocate a little bit of self-help on the mountain. If for example you have a blister developing during the trek then please stop take of your boot and treat it. If not, then something minor like this will develop into more of a problem when you switch to high altitude boots for the climbing phase of Elbrus.

We would recommend your own first aid kit should contain:

Diamox, or other high-altitude drug, enough for the duration of expedition; a basic blister kit, plasters, antiseptic, sun protection, your own personal medication (your luggage might not get to camp before you and so you may not be able to take your medicine according to the regime you are used to), basic pain relief (paracetamol /aspirin/ibuprofen,) a personal course of antibiotics if prone to illness – two different types are preferable, as back up, anti-diarrhoea tablets if you do have a more sensitive stomach etc. Foot powder in your socks every morning is great for preventing blisters. Generally, the best approach to take when packing your first aid kit is to include such basic medications as if you would on a family or personal holiday.

Having said that, your 360 expedition leader and/or a member of the local crew does carry a very comprehensive first aid kit which contains a wide range of supplies, and they are fully trained to use whatever is needed for any emergency that may arise.

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North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

FAQ'S

Do I need any jabs for Elbrus?

Other than the standard inoculations that should be kept up to date, there are no specifics, but you are always advised to ask your local GP or travel health clinic for the latest recommendations for Russia.

Kit

Is it possible to rent equipment before I go?

It is possible to rent climbing equipment both in the UK and also once you arrive in country. However, we recommend the use of personal equipment whenever possible. This is so you know your equipment as best as possible and we can't guarantee the quality of rented equipment.

Should you wish to rent any equipment in country please inform the 360 office and we will do our best to arrange this for you in advance.

If you decide to hire equipment in the UK, please take a look at www.outdoorhire.co.uk – we do have discount codes for use with Outdoor Hire also. If you wish to buy any of your own kit, we can also provide a 15% discount code for Cotswold Outdoor.

What clothing should I wear on the mountain?

Our Leaders usually start the trekking phase wearing long, lightweight trekking trousers and quick wicking tops. Long trousers are recommended as a deterrent to insects, scratches from plants or bushes and to act as sun protection. Shorts can be worn on the initial few days of the trek if the temperature is warm. Remember to apply sun-protection frequently.

Once above the snowline conditions can change quite dramatically. The prevailing conditions on the mountain will dictate what you will wear: if it is cold when you leave the camp in the morning then wear a fleece. As things warm up take advantage of the zipper system which most trekking clothing has and open and /or close the zips to adjust to your own preferred temperature. If you get too warm simply take a layer off.

Common sense rules and as you will already have some mountain experience prior to Elbrus you should know best of all how your body performs in different climates.

Elbrus

North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

FAQ'S

Do I need waterproofs?

These need to be on hand at all times, especially on the lower parts of the mountain below the snowline. Elbrus is a large mountain and can suffer from some adverse weather patterns. If the weather isn't favorable then conditions lower down the mountain can consist of stormy weather and prolonged heavy rain.

Once above the snowline, although it is unlikely to rain, waterproofs can be very useful in case of heavy snow or could be used as an extra layer against the cold or as a wind buffer against the effects of wind chill. Your 360 Leader will advise if they are not needed for a particular day.

What clothing should I wear on the mountain during Summit day?

Summit day on Elbrus can be brutally cold and temperatures of below minus 30C are not unusual. Every individual can be affected by the cold differently.

An example of those who feel the cold more could be wearing the following on summit night:
Head: Warm hat and underneath a windproof balaclava.

Upper torso: Multiple layers of thermal tops followed by a fleece jacket or soft shell and on top of all this a good quality down jacket.

Hands: Inner lining gloves made from polypropylene/polyester and over these good quality down mittens. Hand warmers can also be very useful.

Lower torso: One or two sets of thermal bottoms or long johns. Over these will be the mountain pants followed by a pair of waterproof bottoms.

Feet: One set of thick mountaineering socks (a thin pair of polypropylene/polyester liner socks can be worn underneath).

Be careful wearing two thick socks as if there is not enough air cushion between your foot and the boot you may find your feet getting colder instead of warmer.

Elbrus

North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

FAQ'S

Are down jackets necessary?

Down jackets are essential for Elbrus.

Lower on the mountain (below the snowline) they most likely won't be needed except perhaps in the evenings. Above the snowline the weather can be warm if the sun is out but if there is bad weather then temperatures can plummet. A good quality down jacket will be one of the most valuable pieces of kit for summit night.

What is the best type of footwear to use?

Because of the huge variety of terrain encountered when ascending this mountain it is very important to wear the right footwear. For the initial part of the mountain (below the snowline) trekking boots are required. Boots should be sturdy, waterproof, insulated against cold temperatures and offer adequate ankle support. In addition it is highly recommended that your boots are well worn in to prevent the formation of blisters.

For the climbing phase, plastic mountaineering boots with high altitude inners or non-plastic boots specifically designed for peaks above 6,000m are required. Please remember that even though Elbrus is below 6,000m it can be bitterly cold and the higher the quality of your boot the less risk there is of frostbite. We don't know what temperatures are going to be like for our summit bid but in the past they have been as low as -30c.

There are various types of double boots but the generic work-horse is something like the La Sportiva Spantik or similar. More information can be found on our kit list and you can take a read of our boot advice here – <https://www.360-expeditions.com/useful-guide-for-boots-and-crampons/>

Please note that B2 boots such as the Scarpa Manta Pro are too lightweight and will not be warm enough for this expedition. Equally, single boots with a permanently attached gaiter like the Scarpa Phantom Tech are also unsuitable.

No matter which double boot you get, you should always wear two pairs of socks in them and still be able to move your toes. Cramped

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FAQ'S

What should I carry inside my rucksack?

As you are doing a special north-south traverse of Elbrus there will be a degree of self-sufficiency even though we use some porters. The porters we use are for group equipment such as tents and cooking equipment so expect to carry your own personal kit such as sleeping bags, sleeping mats, food etc. A large capacity rucksack such as 80 litres is needed. Remember that any extra space in your rucksack will only be filled by air that doesn't weigh much, but if your rucksack is too small then you may find that you will run into problems on the expedition.

How warm does my sleeping bag need to be?

Your sleeping bag should be rated down to minus 10C comfort rating. From the first camp upwards it is not unusual to experience frosty nights and a good night's sleep is important in giving you the best chance to climb this mountain. Ensure you get a sleeping bag that has this temperature rating at the comfort rating rather than at the extreme rating.

Remember that your sleeping bag can be further enhanced by the use of a silk or fleece liner.

Sleeping bags work through the air being warmed up by your own body temperature. Once you have warmed the bag up, the down retains the heat and tries to ensure that you sleep at a temperature as close as possible to your own body temperature. To start with on the mountain it could be best to wear as little as possible when inside your sleeping bag. Our leaders will often only wear a set of thermals. It is important for the bag to trap the heat. If this doesn't work they may add several layers but ensure the sleeping bag around them isn't too tight. If all else fails then it may be necessary to wear your down jacket in addition.

Can I leave items I won't need for the mountain in storage somewhere?

Yes, you can leave clean sets of clothes and whatever belongings won't be needed for the mountain. These are normally left safely in storage at the hotel.

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FAQ'S

Do you have a recommendation on rucksacks?

Our guides prefer to carry one large 70-80 litre bag for the entire expedition. This bag is their day-sack as well as their load carrying sack. We aim to carry only minimal equipment on the summit bid. You'll be wearing most of your stuff but as the day progresses and (hopefully) warms up, you'll begin to take off your down layers and bulky clothing and it's much easier to carry when everything fits easily into a larger bag.

Some climbers prefer to also bring along a smaller day sack, specifically for the summit bid. This is entirely your choice. We leave quite a lot of camping equipment and unnecessary personal stuff at high camp and have porters going up to get this. They bring all of it down and then it makes its way around the mountain to meet us on the other side.

We take a few large duffles up with us to bring down the kit you don't need for the Traverse – essentially a few big bags will come up to High Camp, will be filled with everyone's kit that isn't required for the traverse and which will be brought back by road to your hotel in Terskol, when you've summited.

Most climbers choose to transport their rucksacks within a duffel bag for international travel, which also serves as an extra holdall for leaving any spare kit (e.g. toiletries and spare clothes) at the hotel – for use after summiting.

What crampons do you recommend?

Non technical 12 point crampons, as made by manufacturers like Grivel are ideal. Non-technical means that they are attached to your boot with straps rather than a "clip lever" at the heel and the front points are less aggressive than crampons made specifically for climbing steep terrain like frozen waterfalls. Buy normal mountaineering crampons rather than the much more expensive specialist ice-climbing crampons.

Do we need two slings of 120cm? And why?

Slings are a standard piece of mountaineering kit which have multiple uses. They are mainly used as security on steep ground. Sometimes part of the upper section of the route has a fixed line to protect climbers. You can clip into this line with your sling and a carabiner. Other uses are for your guide to clip into you should you need a confidence rope, or to assist you on steeper sections of the ascent. In the past we have also used slings to make anchors or prussiks to set up for crevasse rescue and to secure a belayer to the mountain. Slings weigh next to nothing and at times are worth their weight in gold.

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North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

FAQ'S

The Climb

What prior experience and skills are required for this climb?

Elbrus is a glacier climb, so it would be good if you came to this trip having worn crampons and used an ice axe before. That said, we do provide beginner classes on both of the above – offered as a refresher course, not as standalone training.

How long is a typical day on the mountain?

Days where we are acclimatising can be between 5-7 hours long. Summit day can be up to 15 hours, with the average summit day being 7-8 hours. The benefit of a long summit day is that we start and finish at the huts, rather than having to camp higher to shorten the summit day.

Why is there a contingency day to climb the mountain?

A contingency day is strategically placed in the itinerary to maximise the chances of success for our groups. This extra day can be used for an extra acclimatisation day if needed by the group or alternatively will be valuable if weather conditions aren't right for the first summit attempt.

Is it possible to hire a porter for some or all of the climb?

Absolutely – do chat to the office team on booking to chat through your requirements.

Porters can be hired on days 4 and 5 of the itinerary to assist with carrying your kit from base camp to high camp, and this is done by weight – the porters charge 350 rubles per kilo (≈£4), up to 20kg for 1 porter, and they can be hired in situ. This usually works out to approx. £60 per day. If you wish to join together with other trekkers to hire one porter for a combined load, this is also possible.

For the climb to Lensz Rocks on our acclimatisation day, it is possible to have a private porter who will be there to assist with carrying your bags. (1,500 rubles per kilo, ≈£15)

On our summit push, it is possible to hire a private guide who will double up as a porter and assist with carrying your bag (approx. £450, up to 14kg), and be with you for the climb. Though this can be arranged in situ, if you do wish for a private guide on summit day, please let the 360 team know beforehand so that we can ensure an additional guide from our amazing team to assist.

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FAQ'S

Can we use the PistenBully on the decent?

Yes you can. We include a ride in the Pistenbully from 4,800m. There might be the option on the day of a pickup higher up at 5,200m if the weather is bad, the group is pushed for time or you're completely knackered but this should not be relied upon. Note that a pick up at 5,200m will cost around £80 per person (based on 6 pax joining and 2015 exchange rates). Make sure you have roubles on you up the mountain in case you want a higher pick up and it's available.

What is the guide climber ratio?

We aim to work with the 1:3 guide to climber ratio.

How does the load carrying work?

Overall we aim for this to be a self-sufficient expedition, in the sense that we carry our own loads to the high camp. Porters are available but the onus is on learning the finer art of load carrying and consequently what gear is absolutely essential and what is not.

In practice we make two trips to the high camp, one as an acclimatisation hike where we return back to base camp and one where we make a one way trip.

All our equipment needed for the summit push will need to be brought up during those two trips.

First rotation: High camp return, which also serves as the acclimatisation walk.

The first carry will be for the stuff you need for the summit push only. This includes harnesses, helmets, ice-axes, crampons and warm clothing (including beanies, gloves, down jacket). It's also possible to carry up your double boots if you'd like to make the next carry in lighter shoes.

This equipment is stored at high camp in a safe place.

Second rotation: one way to High Camp. Remain there until summit push.

The second carry will be for remaining personal kit – including items like sleeping bags, roll mats and trekking clothes.

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FAQ'S

The Weather

How cold can it get?

Be prepared to get cold on Elbrus, especially on summit night. Although we climb Elbrus during the best period of the year, like on any mountain the weather can still be unpredictable. A bad weather system can reduce temperatures to below freezing during the evenings and on summit night temperatures can fall below minus 30°C.

Travel

What if I arrive early or depart late? Is there a single room option on this trip?

Due to the excessive amount of bureaucracy in Russia (and the pedantic nature of their officials) the planning of an expedition is very time consuming as every detail must be confirmed well in advance to meet our obligations with visa and travel documentation.

Changes from the plan can become very expensive and flexibility is not an option like it is in the west. For this reason we request that expedition members ensure their travel arrangements in and out of the country are as close to our itinerary as possible. There is a single room option on this trip for both the hotels in the city as well as the lodge in the valley below the mountain.

When will you let me know my flight times?

360 will send you a flight schedule as soon as we have booked your flights. Final confirmation will be sent to you three weeks before departure.

Insurance

Do I need special travel insurance for the expedition?

You must carry individual travel insurance to take part in the expedition. We cannot take you on the mountain without proof of insurance.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the appropriate insurance for your intended trip. To include medical evacuation and coverage up to the maximum altitude of this trip.

Your insurance details are requested on the booking form, however this can be arranged at a later date. 360 Expeditions will be requesting your insurance details 8 weeks before your departure.

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North-South Traverse | Russia | 5,642m

FAQ'S

Entry into Country

Are there any entry or visa requirements?

Yes, one of the biggest issues with travel in Russia is the visa! Almost all foreign travellers to Russia require a visa.

Once your trip has been paid for, confirmed and we have your flight arrival/ departure details we will provide the invitation letter necessary to procure your visa to visit Russia. We usually like to do this 4 – 6 weeks prior to the trip start date. The visa process takes approximately 2 weeks, although you can opt for a speedier service by paying a higher fee. You have to send your passport in to your nearest Russian embassy along with the necessary paperwork. 360 or a visa processing service should be able to assist you with this process.

Visas can cost anywhere between £90-£180, depending on the speed you require the visa to be processed – and the costs do vary year on year.

Training

How can I best train / prepare for climbing the mountain?

Obviously the best way to train for any expedition is to recreate the conditions of the climb as closely as possible. This can be difficult depending on where you are based geographically and we appreciate people have busy lives with work and family commitments.

Ideally you would have altitude experience from previous climbs and the more experience the better.

Technically, you will need to be able to move competently using crampons on steep snow or ice and be able to perform an ice axe arrest. These skills can easily be gained on a basic winter skills course in Scotland or with us in the Pyrenees.

The main area to focus physically is to build up as much endurance as possible. This can be developed by long hill days with your rucksack on your back carrying your kit. The more miles you clock up in the hills prior to Elbrus, generally the more endurance you'll have that will give you something in reserve when it counts during a long day on the mountain.

FAQ'S

Finance

When is the money due for this expedition?

Generally speaking deposits are due upon booking, particularly if we are handling your flight bookings. The full amount should be paid 4 months prior to departure. However having said this our aim is to get you to the top of this mountain and we understand that personal financial situations can vary.

Please contact our friendly office crew to discuss a suitable payment plan. We have after all been in your shoes and go by the motto of where there's a will there's a way!

What additional spending money will we need?

What you wish to bring in personal spending money is entirely up to you. It is normally better to bring more than you think you need as Russia is quite an expensive place.

Most people get by with around £300 – £400 in currency equivalents. This amount should suffice to tip the local crew and 360 Leader (which is, of course, optional), buy souvenirs and alcoholic drinks after the climb, and to pay for an extra night at the hotel in case of an early summit.

There are a few currencies you can bring: US Dollars, Euros or pounds as these can be changed readily for Russian rubles at Travelex desks.

You will need roughly £80 for the PistenBully, £100 for tips for the Russian team and £40 for the extra hotel night if used. Rubles are best for these costs.

In the Caucasus, there are NO cash machines around and it is very much a cash economy there (electronic payment is rarely an option). There are however plenty in Moscow so if you plan to withdraw cash (rubles) locally, we would recommend you do it in transit.

Where you are situated in the Caucasus you will find a few market stalls that can be useful for buying cheap souvenirs. Otherwise, the local specialty – vodka – is normally quite cheap and prolific in Russia!

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FAQ'S

How much should we tip the staff?

Our local crew work extremely hard to assure that your expedition runs well. Although tipping is not compulsory, once someone sees the hard work the crew provides, tipping will seem the least they can do to say thank you.

As a general rule we suggest around £100 equivalent in rubles per client for the entire local crew to be shared amongst them. A nice gesture would also be to tip the 360 Leader. It is their skill, effort and dedication that can make an expedition a success but that is entirely at your discretion.

What is your cancellation policy? What is your refund policy?

Please read our terms and conditions carefully before you depart for details on this. 360 Expeditions highly recommends trip cancellation insurance for all expeditions as we must adhere to a stringent cancellation policy.

Electronics

Do we need a travel adaptor for the plug sockets in the hotel or are they the same as UK?

The voltage is 220v / 50Hz like the UK. Round two-pin plugs are used.

Is there mobile phone reception on Elbrus?

Assume that there is no mobile phone reception on Elbrus. There may be sporadic mobile phone signals on the descent down the south side but while climbing you should be focusing on the mountain to be aware of any dangers or problems. Besides, it will most likely be too cold to effectively use your phone where there may be a signal.

The 360 Leader will be carrying a satellite phone primarily for emergencies but you may use this at a cost of £3 per minute.

General

Who will I be talking to before departure?

We're all here to answer any questions you may have, but you will mostly likely be talking to Marni about the trek, and Helen about any flight, invoice or financial queries.

If you do have any queries, whether it's about medical concerns, you're unsure about certain things on the kit list, or you want to add a few days onto the expedition at the end to relax a bit, we encourage you to get in touch with us and Marni really loves to talk!

The better informed you are, the more likely you are to take on your expedition with confidence, and thus reach your objective.

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TRAINING PROGRAM

To begin 6 months prior to the expedition where possible.

1. CVS: Cardiovascular exercise which is low impact such as swimming, cycling, cross trainer, rowing.

2. Weekend walk should be done over undulating terrain. Only a light rucksack needs to be carried.

3. For specific exercises it is worth doing static squats and heel raises on a regular basis to improve leg muscles prior to the trip. Static squats are especially useful to help protect the knees. Please remember that it is still important to have a well balanced workout using a variety of muscle groups.

4. It is worth winding down and resting in the week leading up to the trip, doing several light walks to keep things going.

5. When walking going at a pace of a brisk walk with a light sweat and enough to feel breathless is recommended

6. During the program, rather than step up suddenly each month (example, going for 3 one hour walks each week during the weekdays in April to 3 one and half hour walks suddenly in May) it is better to build up gradually each week so there isn't a large transition (example, going for 3 one hour walks during week 1 in April, going for 3 one hour and ten minute walks during week 2 in April, going for 3 one hour and fifteen minute walks during week 3 in April, going for 3 one hour and twenty minute walks during week 4 in April)

6. It is important you seek medical advice prior to starting any training program, especially if you are not used to regular physical exertion

All the best with your training!

MONTH 1

OPT 1

2 x 30 mins weekday walk
1 x 1 hour weekend walk
1 x 10 mins CVS

OPT 2

1 x 30 mins weekday walk
2 x 1 hour weekend walk
1 x 10 mins CVS

MONTH 2

OPT 1

2 x 45 mins weekday walk
1 x 2 hours weekend walk
2 x 10 mins CVS

OPT 2

1 x 45 mins weekday walk
2 x 2 hours weekend walk
2 x 10 mins CVS

MONTH 3

OPT 1

2 x 45 mins weekday walk
1 x 2 hours weekend walk
2 x 10 mins CVS

OPT 2

1 x 45 mins weekday walk
2 x 2 hours weekend walk
2 x 10 mins CVS

MONTH 4

OPT 1

3 x 1 hour weekday walk
1 x 4 hours weekend walk
3 x 15 mins CVS

OPT 2

2 x 1 hour weekday walk
2 x 4 hours weekend walk
3 x 15 mins CVS

MONTH 5

OPT 1

3 x 1.5 hours weekday walk
1 x 5 hours weekend walk
3 x 20 - 25 mins CVS

OPT 2

2 x 1.5 hours weekday walk
2 x 5 hours weekend walk
3 x 20 - 25 mins CVS

MONTH 6

OPT 1

3 x 2 hours weekday walk
1 x 6 hours weekend walk
3 x 30 mins CVS

OPT 2

2 x 3 hours weekday walk
2 x 6 hours weekend walk
3 x 30 mins CVS

360^{EXPEDITIONS}



"Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty & well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out & loudly proclaiming 'Wow! What a Ride!' "

Dream it. Plan it. Live it.