

David Lim

The Everest veteran, adventurer and motivation coach on life's lessons.

How did you get started in adventure travelling?

I began, like many young people, backpacking across a number of countries in the mid-80s, but this had nothing to do with mountaineering, which got me hooked quite a few years later. I started rock-and-ice-climbing in 1990.

Name a few of the places you have "triumphed" in these 30 years?

Two climbs which I take as great personal triumphs was my comeback climb on Aconcagua, the highest peak (6,962m) in North and South America, where Wilfred Tok and I made the first all-Singapore ascent of this tough peak. The other would be my 2005 solo expedition to Ojos del Salado, where I pulled off the third solo climb of the world's biggest volcano.

Speaking of your comeback climb – you're referring to when you emerged partially disabled in both legs after you were struck with the rare nerve disorder Guillain-Barre Syndrome?

Does the permanent damage to your right leg make it more difficult to travel?

It is a pain when I fly – the metal and plastic brace keeps setting off the metal detectors!

Yes, I think my biggest triumph was coming back from total paralysis and disability. It's easy to be brave when you have full control over everything, but when you are racked up in a hospital, as I was from the nerve disorder – it was the most challenging time of my life.

Which was the most difficult expedition?

I think the hardest expedition was my 2002 Ascent 8000 trip where I had planned to ascent two of the world's highest peaks, back-to-back in a 70-day trip, without the use of bottled oxygen. I had just one climbing partner and my disabled leg, it was very, very tough. You learn some real lessons – like where your true limits lie. I think many people have yet to find this out for themselves, and I encourage them to give such things a go!

And the most beautiful?

There are so many! But one of the most mind-blowing experiences was rounding into a large block of ice on Everest's north ridge in 2001 to see the entire 3,000-metre north face of Everest sweeping in one massive, unbroken face of rock and ice, all the way to the top, and feeling incredibly dwarfed by its presence...

You led the first Singapore Everest Expedition in 1998. Is climbing Everest all it's cracked up to be?

It's still a great personal achievement, but it's no longer a great climbing feat, and it attracts too many of the wrong kind of people. Quite a few people go there largely for their own selfish ambitions, and lack the sense of community, camaraderie, and common-sense that comes with years of apprenticeship in this sport. They go just for the trophy-hunting aspect of it – that attitude stinks.

Your latest expedition was the crossing of the Salar de Uyuni. How was it like spending five days crossing the world's largest salt desert, unsupported?

Surreal in many ways! The horizon is white from edge to edge, and apart from some rocky islands that emerge from the salt pan, everything else feels like another planet. Pulling the 70 to 80-kilo rickshaws that carried all our gear was also an interesting exercise in balancing a large cart while moving forward.

We saw pictures of your water-carrying, rickshaw-like contraption. Who came up with that and did it work well?

We had a beautifully-designed pair of carts made by Hospimek here, based on similar carts used on previous desert crossings, but the courier failed to deliver them on time. As a result, we had to make do with locally made heavy steel carts that we bought off a market stall, and then found a welder to make some modifications – all in a space of 36 hours! They had slightly-misaligned wheels, and an imprecise fit, but we had no choice.

You're also a corporate motivator – what is that?

I help organisations create a compelling working environment that helps their people deliver their best. The big problem here is that many organisations don't know what they need, and if they do, they prefer a band-aid, superficial solution.

Is that linked to your personal experience, surpassing all these challenging journeys?

It is indeed. However, more important is delivering a solution to people that they can readily embrace and get excited about using right away.

How do you motivate people?

What I have been extracting the key lessons from my own leadership and resilience

experiences and finding some scientific explanation for the outcomes. It's the best way to transfer my learning to others. [But] just talking about your climbing experiences won't be able to help most people – they need to understand that the underlying personal skills of succeeding on the mountains and in life are nearly universal.

Have you ever wanted to quit halfway through an expedition?

Absolutely. At times, the weather sucks, the living is rough, your butt is freezing and you are working 12-hour days with a big pack on your back! Mountaineering is like hitting your head against a brick wall – it's great when you stop. That being said, the vision and dream of the mountain climb is the glue that keeps people and minds together to the end.

What other injuries have you sustained on your trips?

In addition to some minor, permanent nerve damage from Guillain-Barre Syndrome in 1998, my right leg no longer works below the knee. But it's amazing how your body can adapt and compensate.

If you have the power to change one thing about how people travel now, what would you do?

Travel to learn about the world, rather than just going from one photo-opportunity to the next. That attitude alone will change your travel and spending patterns.

Do you have a dream expedition?

I don't really have a dream expedition, just a dream expedition experience – involving good friends or trusted partners; beautiful, if scary mountain weather; an interesting climbing route; challenges along the way – these all make for a great trip. I think I'm going back to the mountains in 2008.


Apart from your expeditions, what other ambitious goals have you got?

My present ambitious goal is to create more sustainability in my business, Everest Motivation Team – so that we can truly transfer the wisdom from the mountains to others.

So, who are your heroes?

One of my real-time heroes is quadruple amputee Jamie Andrew, with whom I climbed in Africa a few years ago. Just looking at how he manages to take care of himself without hands or feet is truly amazing. My business heroes include kick-ass entrepreneurial types like Richard Branson. **FHM**

David Lim is the author of *Mountain to Climb* and *Against Giants*. His expedition stories are online at www.everest.org.sg



The conductor
won't tolerate the
lousy violinists.

**"Mountaineering
is like hitting your
head against a
brick wall."**