

Mountaineering training in the Indian Himalayas

By

the Off: about best Himalayan adventures (TO ABHA)

Published: March 2013

© TO ABHA

Website: [the Off: about best Himalayan adventures \(TO ABHA\)](#)

Blog: [the Off: tour. travel. write.](#)

Twitter: [@theOffABHA](#)

Email Subscription: [theOff](#)

RSS feeds: [theOff.info](#)

Email: contactus@theoff.info

Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Mountaineering Institutes**
 1. Jawhar Institute of Mountaineering & Winter Sports (JIM & WS)
 2. Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports, (ABVIMAS)
 3. Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (NIM)
 4. Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (H.M.I.)
 5. Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute (S.G.M.I.)
- **Upcoming institutes**
- **Types of mountaineering courses**
- **A comparison of five institutes**
 1. Courses offered
 2. A comparison of course duration and fee
 3. Age limit
 4. Training season
 5. Batch size
 6. Physical fitness standards
 7. Institutes at a glance: a comparison of facilities
 8. Fee structure
- **27 Frequently asked questions (FAQs)**
 1. Is joining a mountaineering course necessary to become a mountaineer?
 2. Shall I complete both basic and advance mountaineering courses?
 3. What is the difference between BMC and AMC?
 4. Can I join advance mountaineering course directly?
 5. Why shall I train in India?
 6. Where can I train to be a mountaineer in the Indian Himalayas?

- 7. Which is the best institute?**
- 8. Where are courses conducted?**
- 9. What are eligibility criteria?**
- 10. What is the required fitness level?**
- 11. When is the last date to submit the application?**
- 12. Can I apply online?**
- 13. How is selection made?**
- 14. Check List for Indians**
- 15. Check List for non-Indian participants**
- 16. What is the course fee?**
- 17. Do I pay the full fee in advance?**
- 18. What is the cancellation and refund policy?**
- 19. Do institutes offer scholarships?**
- 20. What is the course schedule?**
- 21. Shall I bring my own equipment?**
- 22. Which kind of food is served?**
- 23. Can I bath at the base camp and beyond?**
- 24. Is the discipline during the courses tough?**
- 25. What should I avoid?**
- 26. When does training start?**
- 27. Does institute conduct medical check up again on joining the course?**

Introduction

An active holiday involving an extreme adventure requires activity-specific knowledge and experience. For instance, if you want to climb peaks in the Himalayas, you should seriously think about enrolling for a mountaineering course to acquire the skills. Enrolling for the course offered by the Himalaya-based institute has twofold advantage: The course fee is relatively less. The courses are conducted in the Himalayan territory, giving you the first hand experience of the terrain and weather. This free travel guide would help you in training to be a mountaineer in the Indian Himalayas.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Mountaineering Institutes

The Indian Himalaya has five mountaineering institutes conducting different types of mountain adventure courses regularly. The institutes are located in the five Himalayan States: Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), Himachal Pradesh (H.P.), Uttarakhand (UK), West Bengal and Sikkim.

Representatives of central and state government including the Ministry of Defense manage all the five institutes. The staff is sourced from the Indian defense forces and local community. Each institute has a comprehensive set of training facilities and highly qualified staff. The medium of instruction is English and / or Hindi.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Jawhar Institute of Mountaineering & Winter Sports (JIM & WS)

The youngest government mountaineering institute in India was set up at Aru in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in 1983. JIM organized the first basic mountaineering course (BMC) two years later. The institute was relocated in 90s to Batote and then again shifted to Pahalgam in early 2000. The institute also offers rescue services in case of accidents and emergencies. For instance, JIM was involved in major rescue operations in the state during 2010-12.

The institute with headquarter in Pahalgam comprises of four sub-centers at Nalthi (Bhaderwah), Sanasar (Kud), Shey (Leh) and Gulmarg. JIM was honored with the Indira Priyadarshini Vriksh Mitra Award by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt. of India in 2002 for hosting environment awareness programs. The institute is governed by the Executive Council consisting of representatives from state and central government, including the Ministry of Defense.

Contact information

C/O JIM & WS, Nunwan, Pahalgam

District: Anantnag

Jammu and Kashmir

Pincode: 192126

E-mail: principal@jawaharinstitutepahalgam.com

Website: <http://www.jawaharinstitutepahalgam.com/>

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports, (ABVIMAS)

The institute, located on the bank of the Beas River, imparts training in mountaineering, aero sports, water sports and skiing. ABVIMAS offers adventure courses across the state through various sub-centers, including Regional Mountaineering Center (McLeodganj, Kangra), Regional Water Sports Center (Pong Dam, Kangra), High Altitude Trekking & Skiing Center (Narkanda, Shimla), Adventure Sports Center (Hotkoti, Shimla), Mountaineering Center (Bharmaur, Chamba), Skiing Center (Solang, Kullu) and Water Sports Center (Luhnu, Bilaspur). The mountaineering training area comprises charming Solang Nala, Bakar Thach, Patalsu Peak and Beas glacier.

More than 50 years old institute has trained over 40,000 adventure seekers and helped in promoting adventure tourism in Himachal Pradesh and India. The institute, set up in 1961, also offers corporate adventure training programs.

Contact information

Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports,

Manali

Himachal Pradesh

Pincode: 175131

Email: whmi_manali@yahoo.com

Website: <http://www.adventurehimalaya.org/index.asp>

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (NIM)

A prestigious address in the Asian mountaineering landscape, NIM instills sense of adventure and respect for the environment through different courses. The institute, founded in 1965, is located amid the Ladari Reserve Forest. The institutional real estate includes NIM Beach in Rishikesh and Tekla Rocks (Uttarakashi), about 3.5 hectares of boulders and rocks for rock climbing training. Ice and snow craft are taught in Gangotri Glacier area.

NIM comprises of the Himalayan Museum Kailas, Gyan Hall, Green House, Pine Bowl, a library, cafeteria, souvenir shop and outdoor artificial climbing wall. Pine Bowl features 15.5 meters tall Himalayan International Artificial Climbing Wall.

NIM has trained many famous Indian mountaineers, including Suman Kutiyal, Savita Martolia and Sarla Negi. The institute hosted 1st Uttarakhand Cup, 13th National Cup and 1st Asia Cup for artificial wall climbing. The institute has led several successful expeditions to virgin and non-virgin peaks including Draupadi Ka Danda, Dudhana, Swaragrohini I and Chaukhamba II.

Contact information

Nehru Institute of Mountaineering
Uttarkashi
Uttarakhand
India
Pin code: 249193
Email: nimutk2004@gmail.com
Website: <http://www.nimindia.net>

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (H.M.I.)

H.M.I., set up in Sister Nivedita's House (Roy Villa) in 1954, was shifted to the current location, Brich Hill's Western Spur, in 1958. The institute lends itself to the views of Kanchanjunga (8,589 meters). H.M.I. has trained over 24,000 students including many foreign nationals.

Rock climbing training is imparted at Gombu and Tenzing Rocks, located near the institute. Ice and snow craft is taught at Chowrikhang (about 4,380 meters) and Rathong Glacier area in West Sikkim.

The institute features a library, restaurant, cyber café, tea parlor, research wing, mountaineering museum, ice cream parlor, public communication office (PCO), Jayal Auditorium, international sports climbing wall (50*20 feet) and Chima Wall – an indoor training wall.

Contact information

Himalayan Mountaineering Institute
Darjeeling
West Bengal
India
Pin code: 734101
Email: hmi_darj@rediffmail.com
Website: <http://www.himalayamountaineeringinstitute.com>

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute (S.G.M.I.)

S.G.M.I., headquartered in Baluwakhani, Gangtok, Sikkim, was set up in 1963. The mountaineering courses are a combination of theory and hands-on experience. The participants learn to crawl on rocks at SGMI Rocks. The new complex was inaugurated in December 2009.

The institute, named after Sonam Gyatso, a famous mountaineer from Sikkim, also imparts mountaineering training to Sikkim tour operators and NSS volunteers. A number of preeminent mountaineers like Yangdi Sherpa, Phul Maya Tamang, Nima Wangchuk Sherpa, Phu Dorjee and Sonam Wangyal learned the ropes of mountaineering at the institute. The teams from institute have successfully climbed Everest and Pandim.

Contact information

Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute
Baluwakhani
Gangtok
Sikkim

Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Sonam-Gyatso-Mountaineering-Institute/383581428352547>

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Upcoming institute

In 2012, the government planned to set up another adventure institute, National Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports (NIMAS) Dirang, Arunachal Pradesh.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Types of mountaineering courses

The institutes organize the following mountaineering courses:

1. Basic mountaineering course (BMC)
2. Advance mountaineering course (AMC)
3. Method of instruction (MOI) for future mountaineering instructors
4. Search and rescue course (SAR)

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

A comparison of institutes

Courses offered

Mountaineering Institutes	Mountaineering courses			
	BMC	AMC	MOI	SAR
JIM & WS	√	√	√	√
ABVIMAS	√	√	√	√
NIM	√	√	√	√
H.M.I.	√	√	√	
S.G.M.I.	√	√		

Table 1: Mountaineering courses offered by five institutes

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

A comparison of course duration and fee

Mountaineering Institute	Mountaineering course duration in days and fee for Indians and SAARC nationals in Indian Rupee (INR) and other foreigners in US\$							
	BMC		AMC		MOI		SAR	
	Days	Fee	Days	Fee	Days	Fee	Days	Fee
JIM & WS	26	INR 4,100 \$ 1,450	26	INR 4,100 \$ 1,450	15	INR 2,100 \$ 900		
ABVIMAS	26	INR 9,750 \$ 365	28	INR 10,500 \$ 430	28	INR 10,500 \$ 430	14	INR 11,200
NIM	28	INR 5,000 \$ 650	28	INR 5,000 \$ 650	21	INR 5,000 \$ 650	21	INR 5,000 \$ 650
H.M.I.	28	INR 4,000 INR 8,000* \$ 650	28	INR 4,000 INR 8,000* \$ 650	28	INR 4,000 INR 8,000* \$ 650		

***: Fee for participants from South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) region**

Table 2: A comparison of duration and fee of mountaineering courses offered by four institutes

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Age limit

Mountaineering Institute	Age limit in years for mountaineering courses			
	BMC		AMC	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
JIM & WS	18	40	18	40
ABVIMAS	16	45	16	45
NIM	17	35	18	40
H.M.I.	17	40	17	40

Table 3: Minimum and maximum age to join BMC and AMC

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Training season

Mountaineering Institutes	Mountaineering training season	
	BMC	AMC
JIM & WS	April to September	September
ABVIMAS	May to July	May to July
	September to October	August to September
NIM	Mid March to Mid June	Mid April to Mid June
	Mid September to Mid November	Mid September to Mid October
H.M.I.	March to June (1 st week)	April to May
	Mid-September to Mid-December	Mid September to Mid November

Table 4: Annual schedule for BMC and AMC

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Batch size

Mountaineering Institutes	Batch Size: number of trainees per batch	
	BMC	AMC
JIM & WS	50	50
ABVIMAS	75	30
NIM	50-70	25
H.M.I.	60	40

Table 5: Number of students per BMC and AMC batch / course

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Physical fitness standards

Mountaineering Institutes	Recommended physical fitness level			
	Ability to walk (kilometers)	Height gain (meters) during the walk	Weight (kilograms) to be carried during the walk	Standard time (hours) for completing the walk
JIM & WS	3	300	10	1
NIM	10-15	Uneven terrain	12-15	3-4
H.M.I.	25	Hilly area	15	

Table 6: The institute specific physical fitness standards

Fitness is an ongoing process. Start preparing at least 3-4 months in advance keeping the above standards in mind. Work out regularly.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Institutes at a glance: a comparison of facilities

Mountaineering Institutes	Facilities								
	ACW	A/H	C/I/R	H	L	M	MR	S	O
ABVIMAS		√		√	√	√			
NIM	2	√	C	√	√	√	√	√	
H.M.I.	2	√	I & R	√	√	√			RW

A/H: Auditorium and halls

ACW: Artificial climbing wall

C/I/R: Cafeteria, ice cream parlor, restaurant

H: Hostel

L: Library

M: Museum

MR: Medical room

RW: Research Wing

O: Others

S: Shop

Table 7: A comparison of facilities available at ABVIMAS, H.M.I. and NIM

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Fee structure

Mountaineering Institutes	Fee components							
	Fa	F	Acco	Equip	Trans	Med	Inst	O
JIM & WS	X	√	√	√		√		
ABVIMAS	X	√	√	√		√	√	Porters
NIM	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	
H.M.I.	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

Fa: Return fare from home to institute

F: Food

Acco: Accommodation

Equip: Equipment

Trans: A part of local transportation during the course

Med: Medicine

Inst: Instructions

O: Other training expenses (excluding personal expenses) during the course

Table 8: A comparison of various components of the course fee

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

27 Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

Q1. Is joining a mountaineering course necessary to become a mountaineer?

Yes. Mountaineering requires special techniques and equipment. Correct use of equipment enhances chances of success of the expedition. The courses introduce you to the techniques and give an opportunity to practice under the guidance of professional mountaineers so that you can learn safely.

Q2. Shall I complete both basic and advance mountaineering courses?

If you want to climb regularly and gain altitude successively in the Himalayas, complete all three courses BMC, AMC and SAR.

Q3. What is the difference between BMC and AMC?

As implied by the name, BMC covers the basics of mountaineering. However, AMC builds on the basic skills acquired in BMC and embraces the following specialized aspects:

1. AMC is more technical in nature.
2. More emphasis is laid on overall fitness.
3. You may learn basics of global positioning system (GPS).
4. First aid and search and rescue techniques are also taught.
5. In the last week of AMC, you will plan a real expedition like a professional. The plan will be appraised and awarded score will be added to your total score.
6. You may have to appear for a written test to get the certificate.

Q4. Can I join advance mountaineering course directly?

No, you need “A” grade in BMC to join AMC. Make a sincere effort during BMC if you want to learn more about mountaineering.

Q5. Why shall I train in India?

You should train in India for two reasons:

1. To gain practical experience of climbing in the Himalayas and
2. To learn about local culture and country norms.

Q6. Where can I train to be a mountaineer in the Indian Himalayas?

You can train at any of the five mountaineering institutes located in the Himalayan states: JIM & WS (Jammu and Kashmir), ABVIMAS (Himachal Pradesh), NIM (Uttarakhand), H.M.I. (West Bengal) and S.G.M.I (Sikkim).

Q7. Which is the best institute?

There is no benchmark index available. However, some trainees rate HMI and NIM higher than other three institutes based on their experiences.

Q8. Where are courses conducted?

The training is imparted in three different locations: within the campus, in nearby rock climbing area and at high altitude base camp. For instance, JIM & WS takes the participants to Bhaderwah, Pahalgam, Sonamarg or Leh in J&K. The base camp of ABVIMAS lies in

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Solang Nala, H.P. and that of NIM in Gangotri area, Uttarakhand. H.M.I. organizes ice and snow craft training at Chowrikhang and the Rathong Glacier, Sikkim. The institutes may change their base camps occasionally considering environment protection issues.

Q9. What are eligibility criteria?

- The applicants must be able to read and write Hindi and / or English.
- Minimum educational qualification is secondary school education.
- The participants should have reasonably good physical fitness ([Table 6](#)).
- Age limit varies from 16 to 45 years depending on the institute you choose ([Table 3](#)).

Q10. What is the required fitness level?

You should be able to trek uphill at least 10 km with 15 kg load in 3 hours.

Q11. What is the last date to submit the application?

Last date is not defined. However, apply well in advance to get a guaranteed seat. For instance, NIM suggests that a candidate shall apply twelve months in advance to secure a confirmed seat for BMC. ABVIMAS recommends submission of duly filled application 45 days ahead of the course date. All institutes offer admission on first come, first served basis.

Q12. Can I apply online?

No. You can download application forms from the websites and send enquiry emails. But, you have to send demand draft and a duly filled in application through the regular post. However, some institutes give you an option of provisional admission via email. For example, HMI allows the candidate to email scanned copies of the duly-filled in application, medical form and fee bank draft for provisional admission. However, the hard copies of all three documents should be submitted at the earliest and in no case later than the date prescribed by the institute in the provisional admission document for confirmation of the seat.

Q13. How is selection made?

Trainees are selected on first come, first served basis provided they meet all other criteria, such as age limit, medical level, fitness level and educational qualification.

Q14. Check List for Indian participants

1. Medical certificate
2. Demand draft of fee, including application form fee
3. Proof of date of birth

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

4. 2 passport size photographs
5. Carry personal items mentioned in the prospectus, as personal items are not provided by the institutes.

Q15. Check List for non-Indian participants

1. Medical certificate
2. Demand draft of fee, including application form fee
3. Proof of date of birth
4. 2 passport size photographs
5. Visa
6. Passport
7. Carry personal items mentioned in the prospectus, as personal items are not provided by the institutes.

Q16. What is the course fee?

The course fee depends on three things:

1. Course opted
2. Institute selected
3. Nationality of the participant

For example, fee for basic mountaineering course varies from INR 4,000 to 9,750 per person for Indian participants. Refer to tables [2](#) and [8](#) for fee details.

Q17. Do I pay the full fee in advance?

NIM, H.M.I., ABVIMAS and JIM &WS charge full course fee in advance through a bank demand draft. H.M.I. also accepts the fee via direct bank transfer. NIM, H.M.I. and JIM & WS also levy an application form fee of INR 100. However, JIM allows large groups and / or institutes to book seats by paying just 50% of the fee. NIM may provide Indian railway concession form for the journey between home town and Rishikesh.

Q18. What is the cancellation and refund policy?

There is no refund for application form fee (INR 100). The other cancellation and refund policies vary from institute to institute. For example,

ABVIMAS does not refund the fee after commencement of the course. If the institute cancels the course, you get full refund. If you request to cancel the admission prior to commencement of the course, you are entitled to 50% refund.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

If you cancel the NIM course seat two months in advance, you get 75% refund.

H.M.I. refund ranges from 95% (2 months in advance) to 25% (upto commencement of the course). There is no refund after commencement of the course.

Q19. Do institutes offer scholarships?

Indian Mountaineering Federation (IMF) offers scholarship to the Indian trainees whose income or whose parents' income is less than INR 5,000 per month. Only 10% of BMC and AMC students are eligible for the scholarship. Submit application 3 months in advance with income certificate attested by a Gazetted Officer.

Q20. What is the course schedule of BMC and AMC?

First week

- Morning exercise is organized daily.
- Theory sessions focus on tent pitching, rucksack packing, knots used for rock climbing and mountaineering and other related topics.
- Theory classes generally take place after lunch.
- Mountaineering equipment is issued.
- Medical check-up
- Practical training takes place at the campus and nearby rock climbing area for acclimatization and assessing general fitness level of the participants.
- The participants would be divided into small ropes and leaders would be selected for each rope. Friends and participants from the same city / town/ state would not be allowed to join the same rope.
- You will get some free time to go to nearby market before leaving for the base camp.

Second and third week

- Trainees trek to the base camp at the snow line, where they would stay for about 15-20 days.
- They will get hands-on experience of ice and snow craft.
- High altitude hikes
- Depending on ability of the group, the trainees would go for a height gain trek or attempt a small peak in the vicinity of the base camp at the end of the training.

- [Back to the Table of Contents](#)

- Camp fires wherever possible are organized.

Last week

- Return to the campus.
- Clean the equipment and return it.
- Attend graduation ceremony and collect certificates.

In general, the institutes follow the above approach. However, there may be some changes in the schedules of different institutes.

Q21. Shall I bring my own equipment?

Do not bring your own equipment. All institutes offer good quality equipment during the course free-of-cost. However, if you already have special clothing for high altitude, bring it.

Q22. Which kind of food is served?

Both vegetarian and non vegetarian food is served during the courses. The menu is mainly Indian, but the style of cooking and taste of the food may have regional flavor depending on the institute you choose. The breakfast menu generally includes jam, eggs, bread, butter, *parantha* (Indian fried stuffed bread) and / or porridge. Eggs and meat are replaced with cheese and / or mushroom for vegetarians. All three meals, evening tea and snacks are served during the course. At the base camp, you will get soup also. Enough food is served to satiate the hunger pangs.

Q23. Can I bath at the base camp and beyond?

At the base camp, you rarely get a chance to bath. Sponge yourself daily if you like. You will get limited hot water to brush the teeth and wash the face. However, you would not feel like washing your face at the base camp because the water is too cold to use. And, you have to fetch it for yourself. Carry toilet paper to answer the nature's call.

Q24. Is the discipline during the courses tough?

Discipline is quite tough as army is involved in the training. For example, the trainees, especially female trainees, cannot spend time in male instructors' tents. Follow the time table given to you otherwise be ready for suitable punishment. Never be late for the theory classes, field sessions and meals for your own benefit.

Q25. Are there any special precautions to be taken?

Take care of your belongings, valuables and equipment issued to you. Do not wear expensive jewelry during the course. Deposit the valuables (money and jewelry) with the institute

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

before leaving for the base camp, as you will not need them and there is nothing to spend money on at the base camp and beyond. A small amount of money would be sufficient to meet expenses while traveling by bus from the institute to the base camp and the return journey. Return the equipment to the institute before departing. If you do not return the equipment, you may have to pay for it. We have experienced that students who damage or lose their equipment steal others equipment to escape monetary penalty at the end of the course.

Q26. When does training start?

Mountaineering courses generally start in April every year. The courses continue until beginning of July. Then again, courses commence from August and last till November. However, the course dates may change with weather.

Q27. Does institute conduct medical check up again on joining the course?

All institutes conduct medical check-up of all participants at the time of reporting. This check-up is in addition to the medical certificate duly signed by a qualified MBBS doctor, submitted during application stage. Please note that participants found unfit during medical check-up at the institute would not be allowed to attend the course.

If you have further queries, write to us at contactus@theoff.info. We would try to answer the questions at the earliest.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

++++