

Record Breaking Mountains

Our world is phenomenal: a varied landscape full of natural beauty, much of which is still untainted by human development. Decorating this landscape are many mountains – giants majestically elevating above the world below - from which you can stand and look at the land laid out in front of you like a blanket. There are 1,187,049 mountains in the world with no two mountains the same. Which mountain is the tallest? Which is the coldest? The steepest? The deadliest? Here, we explore some record-breaking mountains from around the world.

The coldest mountain on Earth

Brrr! The coldest mountain on Earth is found in North America. Fancy climbing to the top? Its summit is a staggering 6,190 metres above sea level. This mountain, named Denali, stands in Alaska and the upper half of the mountain is permanently covered with snow and glaciers – some of which are 30 miles wide! Extremely cold, temperatures on the mountain have been known to drop to minus 59 degrees Celsius. To put this into perspective, your freezer is set at about -18 degrees Celsius. Denali - previously known as Mount McKinley - is so cold that the wind chill could instantly cause you to freeze; many who try to reach the summit do not succeed.

The steepest mountain in the world

Mount Thor in Canada is the steepest mountain in the world; aptly named after the Norse God of thunder, you have to be a bit of a superhero to want to tackle this mountain! The western face of the mountain boasts the longest vertical drop in the world – 1,250 metres. To put this into perspective, the Statue of Liberty is 182 metres tall while the Eiffel Tower stands at 300 metres tall. Popular with paragliders seeking the ultimate thrill of jumping from the tallest cliff in the world, many have tried-and failed- to scale Mount Thor. The mountain's cliff face was first successfully climbed in 1985 although that took the climbers a month to achieve.

The tallest mountain

Mauna Kea, in Hawaii, does not reach as high as Mount Everest but it is considered to be the tallest mountain in the world. 'How can this be?' I hear you ask! Well, Mauna Kea is an island and, if you measure from the base of the mountain on the floor of the Pacific Ocean to the peak, it is over 10,000 metres tall – taller than Everest. Mauna Kea is actually a dormant volcano which last erupted around 4,600 years ago. It is an easier climb than many other mountains but it is still not without its dangers: the high altitude and lack of oxygen can cause sickness and problems with breathing.



The highest mountain

Mount Everest is indeed the highest mountain in the world, with its peak rising to 8,848 metres high. Located in the Himalayas, the world's highest mountain is visited by about 35,000 tourists every year. Arguably the most famous mountain in the world, climbing Everest is a pursuit that many dream of undertaking. However, with exhibitions up to the summit becoming increasingly popular, the crowds of people queuing to get to the top can cause dangers additional to the threats caused by avalanches and deadly crevices. Known as the 'Death Zone,' the area with an altitude above 8,000 metres has such little oxygen that the body begins to die; climbers' brains and lungs are starved of oxygen. With so many exhibitions attempting to summit the mountain, people are forced to wait in the 'Death zone' for dangerous lengths of time.

The deadliest mountain

Annapurna I, in Nepal, wins the title of the 'deadliest mountain.' Only the most experienced climber would attempt to scale this mountain with around 1 in 3 people losing their life in their efforts to conquer this beast! Frequent avalanches make the climb treacherous with rock, ice and snow falls occurring at any time. In the past, climbers have died from injuries caused by avalanches with some thrown into crevasses, unable to escape. Even if you avoid the avalanches, the weather is completely unpredictable; the extreme cold, heavy snow, high wind and storms present another great threat to even the most experienced climbers. If you do get injured on the climb and are lucky enough not to die immediately, the inaccessibility of the mountain means that your chances of survival are not good: the unstable terrain makes it difficult for a rescue helicopter to land and – even if someone helps you down from the mountain – there is no hospital nearby.

EXPLANATION FOCUS

1. What is the purpose of the author giving you the heights of the Statue of Liberty and the Eiffel Tower?
2. Explain some of the dangers faced by those choosing to scale Mount Everest
3. Why is Annapurna I considered so deadly?
4. How is the tallest mountain different from the highest?
5. Explain what it is like on the Denali mountain

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

Find a synonym for 'astounding.'

I

Why is it suggested that Mount Everest is arguably the most famous mountain?

P

Which of the mountains do you think would be considered the greatest achievement to climb? Why?

R

How many people visit Mt Everest each year?

S

What is the 'Death zone'?