

NATIONAL

## Assistance company supporting 2018 spring climbing season in Nepal

- ANIL GIRI, Kathmandu



On the 65th anniversary of the very first known ascent of Everest, Traveller Assist is supporting the 2018 climbing season from its regional operations centre in Kathmandu.

"We learned a lot from the 2017 high-season [Oct-Nov]. It was the busiest year on record since the 2015 Nepal earthquake. This gave us the opportunity to try-and-test different methods to facilitate, and improve rescue and evacuation missions." said Forest Williams, Operations Manager at Traveller Assist.

Altitude sickness, dehydration and frostbite continue to be the primary call for medical assistance among climbers in Nepal, but due to the terrain and weather patterns, there is an increased risk of falls causing multiple traumas. In addition, seismic activity in the region can cause avalanches, and earthquakes.

"This season, our assistance team are taking a three-pronged-approach to medical rescue in Nepal. Our Operations Manager and Case Manager are based in Kathmandu, where they will coordinate assistance from our Regional Operations Centre. In addition, we have a highly-trained team of former British Army Gurkhas who are based in Lukla, and a second team who are at basecamp." said Jonathan Bancroft, Managing Director of Traveller Assist.

When a traveller is sick or injured in Nepal, Traveller Assist coordinates medical evacuations via ground and air, and assists travel insurers in obtaining medical reports and medical expenses. Services also include, cost-containment through a trusted provider network, and medical repatriation to a preferred hospital anywhere in the world.

Forest Williams added, "Travel insurance companies are often not aware that one of their travellers require medical assistance until they receive a call from a hospital in Kathmandu, often with a bill for \$10,000+ for a helicopter. From our assessment of last seasons helicopter 'rescues,' approx. 30% were unnecessary. We are currently working on several strategies to avoid this expense for insured and uninsured travellers, through better communication, and alternative methods."

This season is expected to be particularly busy, in part because Nepal's Department of Tourism will continue to honour the climbing permits from the 2014 and 2015 aborted climbing seasons. While Everest is popular, climbers also target other mountains in the Himalayas, including: Mera, Makalu, Nuptse, Lhotse and Dhaulagiri.