



Atte on Cerro Aconcagua's summit

PINNACLES OF PASSION

Calling him a daredevil in the disguise of a Finnish telecoms executive would be like calling the Burj Khalifa a tall building. Meet Atte Miettinen: a Dubai resident on a quest to climb the Seven Summits, the highest mountains on each of the seven continents. After conquering Mount Kilimanjaro, Elbrus, Mount Kosciuszko, Vinson Massif and Cerro Aconcagua, he's set his sights on climbing Mount Everest and Denali in the months ahead.

What do you like best about living in Dubai?

It's a very cosmopolitan atmosphere. I've always enjoyed learning new things, meeting new people... I'm very curious by nature. Dubai is a great place because every day, you meet people from all over the world. It's also very central; I enjoy travelling a great deal and it's easy to get to many places.

How do you explore a new city?

I come from a country where you only use cars when you need them, so I like to visit places where I can walk around... you see and hear a lot more this way. I find it nice to walk around the heart of a city, where you get a different pulse. Sometimes I just sit in a café and look at people, try to listen to their stories to get a good feeling about what's happening.

You've travelled to roughly 90 countries across all seven continents. What's your favourite travel destination?

I loved Antarctica; I've been there both as a tourist and a mountain climber. It was so, so unique and untouched. I get a huge kick

out of being able to go to places that have not been exposed to mass tourism.

What have your expeditions taught you?

That you have the capacity for a lot more than you expect. Challenges feel huge at first, but then you realise, each is manageable if you tackle it one step at a time. I've also learnt a lot about teamwork; on the mountains, you have to succeed as a group and help each other. I also appreciate the little things more – when you're at high altitudes with a headache, it's wet and cold, you're sleeping on a rock... you think back to your warm bed in Dubai. I now value experiences more than material things.

How would you compare being physically vs. mentally ready for a climb?

The physical side is easier, because it's just plain training. Mental preparation is more difficult because you're not really sure what you're preparing for. Before I leave for a climb, I'm constantly running scenarios – like what I would do if a storm blows away my tent – in my head to prepare myself.

You're heading to Mount Everest this month. What do you think will be your biggest challenge?

The Body Disposal Form that each climber has to submit keeps occupying my mind; it dictates what is to be done with your body if you die during the climb. Above 8,000 metres, the body gradually starts dying so if someone collapses above this altitude, you have to leave them behind. The logic is there's very little oxygen and if you start helping someone alone, it's probably going to be two victims rather than one. As a husband and the oldest of three children, I have a huge issue with leaving someone behind. I'm not convinced I'll be able to walk away.

What goes through your mind upon reaching a summit?

It's a difficult thing to explain... you just have to climb a mountain yourself to experience it! [laughs] I need a psychologist to explain this – I've seen many people almost collapse when they summit because something in their bodies tells them, "you can relax now"... when actually, they're only halfway done. It's a weird mixture of exhaustion and happiness. You look around and the clouds are below you; it's a magical kind of feeling. It's also a little disorienting because it reminds me of being in an airplane... I feel the urge to order a coke before remembering I'm on a mountain!

During a climb, how do you spend the extensive downtime while your body acclimates?

We rest a lot because the entire process really takes a toll on one's body. We do lots of gear preparation, training for different situations and planning for the climb. Sometimes we read, play cards and listen to our iPods.

Can you share one of your memorable moments?

Many are from the Indonesia trip. We flew into a village in the middle of a jungle that was discovered only 60 years ago. Villagers here walk around naked with bows and arrows, and eat spiders. We spent a night there and their idea of decoration was wooden branches with stuffed birds without heads... it felt like a real "we're pretty far from Dubai" moment! I spoke to one of the village elders, who looked about 70 or so, and asked his age through an interpreter. He replied "maybe 18" because he had no concept of time!

We're optimistic that you'll summit the next two... so what's next?

Right now, I'm focused on the task at hand. Every rational cell in my brain is saying "get this out of your system and get a real job"... while another part goes "well, it would be nice to ski to the South Pole". Let's see... time will tell! **dv**