

# World's Tallest Mountain



You've probably heard of adventurers skiing down the highest mountain in the world. But did you know that elite cyclists can actually ride up it in a day's time? Then race down at 80 miles per hour?

You probably guessed that I'm not talking about Everest. It's still the tallest when measuring purely by height above sea level, or altitude, at just over 29,000 ft.

But by other metrics, there are other contenders.

If you measure from the center of the Earth, the highest mountain is near the equator, where the Earth is 21 km wider than at the poles. By this measure, the tallest is the volcano of Chimborazo, in Ecuador.

But, if you're starting at the base of the mountain and measuring to the top, the tallest—by a wide margin—is another volcano: Mauna Kea on the big island of Hawaii.

Its summit is just shy of 14,000 ft above sea level, the ocean around Mauna Kea is almost 20,000 ft deep, and the base of the volcano is on the seafloor. This makes Mauna Kea nearly 34,000 ft from tip to toe, a full mile taller than Everest.

Its low humidity and long distance from civilization make Mauna Kea an excellent astronomical observatory, with 13 international telescopes at its summit.

There are roads leading up to them, so if you're looking for an 8-hr-straight-up bike climb followed by a blistering white-knuckle descent, Mauna Kea may be your kind of mountain.

Mauna Kea is Earth's tallest mountain, with 60% of its height underwater—nearly a mile taller than Mt. Everest.

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# Background: World's Tallest Mountain

**Synopsis:** If you are looking for the highest mountain to climb, you first have to think about where and how you measure it.

- It depends on *where* you measure it.
  - If you were in Australia, you would find the highest mountain in the Snowy Range of New South Wales. Mount Kosciuszko's summit is 7,310 ft (2,228 m) above sea level.
  - If you visit Antarctica, the highest mountain is in the Sentinel Range of the Ellsworth Mountains in western Antarctica. The summit of the Vinson Massif is 16,066 ft (4,897 m) above sea level.
  - In Europe, the highest peak is in the Caucasus range of southern Russia. Mount Elbrus summits at 18,510 ft (5,642 m) above sea level.
  - Mount Kilimanjaro, in Tanzania, is the highest mountain on the African continent, with a summit of 19,340 ft (5,895 m) above sea level.
  - In North America, Denali (also known as Mount McKinley) of the Alaska Range has a summit of 20,237 ft (6,168 m) above sea level.
  - In South America, Aconcagua in the Andes of Argentina is the tallest peak, with a summit of 22,834 ft (6,960 m) above sea level.
  - But to find the mountain peak that soars above all others, you would need to go to the Himalayan range of Asia. The summit of Mount Everest straddles the border of Nepal and China and has the highest altitude in the world at 29,035 ft (8,850 m) above sea level.
- And it depends on *how* you measure it.
  - If you are focused on highest elevation above sea level, or altitude, the answer is still Asia's highest peak, Mount Everest, at 29,035 ft (8,850 m).
  - If you think about distance from the center of Earth, the answer would be Ecuador's Chimborazo, with a summit altitude of 6,310 m (20,703 ft).
    - Since Earth is an oblate spheroid, it is more than 21 km wider at the equator than at its poles.
    - Since Chimborazo is just 1 degree south of the equator, it is the highest point above the center of Earth.
  - If you prefer to measure the distance from the base of the mountain to its top, the tallest mountain is not on a continent but rather in an ocean basin: Hawaii's Mauna Kea.
    - Above sea level, Mauna Kea only has an altitude of 13,796 ft (4,205 m)—cold enough to need a parka to brave the occasional snowstorm!
    - Its base below sea level, however, is about 19,685 ft (6,000 m), making it, overall, more than 33,480 ft tall (an incredible 10,205 m)!
    - The weight of the Hawaiian Islands actually depresses the Pacific Ocean floor in the region into a "Hawaiian Moat" that is nearly 20,000 ft deep.
    - If you removed the water from the Pacific, Mauna Kea would be nearly a mile taller than Mount Everest!

## References: World's Tallest Mountain

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