

From breaking barriers
to joining world's
8,000-meter club

Dreams know no boundaries: Female Iranian mountaineer



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INTERVIEW

Afsaneh Hesamifard, an Iranian mountaineer, made headlines last month when she scaled Mount Cho Oyu — one of the world's tallest peaks located in the Himalayas on the border between Nepal and Tibet (Xizang Autonomous Region of China) — becoming the first

Iranian woman ever to join the elite 8,000-meter club.

Cho Oyu marked the final stop in her project to take on all 14 of the world's mountains above 8,000 meters. Standing atop her 14th summit, she said she felt on top of the world, describing it as an extraordinary moment, "as if I had finally reached a place of stillness and complete success."

Defying family pressures, social barriers, and judgmental attitudes, Hesamifard has broken through the limiting perceptions of Iranian women and reached the height of her abilities and dreams. She emphasizes: "For women in Iran, especially those stepping into adventurous and high-risk sports, there have always been particular obstacles. But I tried never to let these limitations get in the way of my dreams."

Over the course of three and a half years, she took on dangerous summits such as Nanga Parbat, Kangchenjunga, and Annapurna, kicking off her 8,000-meter quest and finally completing it on October 14, 2025. According to her, this achievement does not mark the end of her mountaineering career. She now sees it as her mission to pass on her valuable experience to younger generations, believing that no wall is higher than human will and that even from within the storm, one can still catch sight of the sun.

When Iran Daily asked Afsaneh about the very moment she topped out on her final 8,000-meter peak, her eyes lit up. "Every step on the frozen slopes of Cho Oyu reminded me of the years I spent nurturing the dream of climbing to the world's highest points," she says. "I dedicate this climb to all the women of my country — so they know there are no borders to what they can achieve." Today, Afsaneh has not only etched her name in mountaineering history but also paved the way for courage, hope, and pride among Iranian women.



Afsaneh Hesamifard poses for a photo at the summit of Cho Oyu with a mountaineering outfit painted in the colors of the Iranian flag.

● SOCIAL MEDIA



Record-setting mountaineer Afsaneh Hesamifard (c) is welcomed by friends, family, fans, and officials after returning home from scaling Mount Cho Oyu and becoming the first Iranian woman ever to join the elite 8,000-meter club.

● KIAN NADERI/IRAN'S MOUNTAINEERING FEDERATION

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I am proud to be the first Iranian woman to have completed the challenge of climbing all 14 of the 8,000-meter summits. Many of these peaks — such as K2, Annapurna, and Kangchenjunga — were firsts for Iranian women. So far, very few women worldwide have made it into the 8,000-meter club, and I'm proud to have put Iran's flag on the map. In doing so, I believe I have pushed back the mental boundaries around Iranian women's potential and set the bar higher for what they can achieve.

IRAN DAILY: Please introduce yourself briefly, and tell us what led you from studying medicine to mountaineering.

HESAMIFARD: I am Dr. Afsaneh Hesamifard, a Himalayan mountaineer who has pursued both medicine and climbing in earnest. I began my medical studies at Mashhad University of Medical Sciences in 1996 and graduated in 2004. Since then, I've been practicing medicine.

I started mountaineering during my early university years, at first purely for leisure. Like many who head out to the mountains on weekends for a change of pace, I took it lightly at first. But over time, mountaineering became more serious for me. Initially, it was a way to get away from daily pressures and blow off steam, but I soon realized the mountains were my sanctuary — a refuge where I could connect with the vast power of nature and find peace of mind.

I can now say I've been pursuing mountaineering seriously for nearly 10 years. I am both a climbing instructor and lecturer on mountain medicine and cold-related injuries at Iran's Mountaineering and Sport Climbing Federation. I started my 8,000-meter project around three and a half years ago and completed it on October 14, 2025, when I bagged my final summit.

How do you manage practicing medicine while mountaineering at such a serious level?

Balancing the two has not been easy,

but it has had its upsides. At times during expeditions, emergencies have cropped up requiring medical intervention. In those moments, when professional care was out of reach, my medical training came in handy, allowing me to treat myself and my teammates. It has given me a great feeling. Medicine and mountaineering go hand in hand for me — one looks after the body, the other nourishes the soul.

How does it feel to be the first Iranian woman to have climbed the world's highest peaks?

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You must have faced serious challenges along the way.

Absolutely. For women in Iran, especially those stepping into adventurous and high-risk sports, there have always been particular obstacles. Early on, my family's resistance was the main challenge. Social constraints, along with judgmental views about a woman's capacity, also stood in my



Afsaneh Hesamifard, M.D., uses her medical training to treat a fellow mountaineer.

● AFSANEH HESAMIFARD/IRAN DAILY