

Climbing Kilimanjaro

Everything you need to know, from preparation, to altitude sickness and a full day to day recount of a climb.

Who can do it!!	Anyone can climb Kilimanjaro. You do not need to be super fit or have a mountaineering background. You do however need to prepare your body for the climb by walking steep hills 3 to 4 weeks before the climb. Do plenty of leg exercises. If you know of a building with lots of stairs, this is the best place to get ready. Kilimanjaro is a regular 30 to 40 degree gradient climb.
How long it takes?	Kilimanjaro has many routes, some very difficult some very short, but the best to take is Machame route which is a 7 day hike and will take you around Kilimanjaro. You will enjoy spectacular views of the mountain and the landscape and will give your body time to acclimatize.
What about equipment?	You need to be WORM. It gets very cold at night and sometimes it is windy. A good Down sleeping bag is a must as well as good inner, middle and outer layer of protective clothing. We supply tents and sleeping bags for those who do not have it.
Best time to do it.	From May to November and from February to March are the best times to do it.
What kind of weather?	The weather is variable. Sometimes it is rainy, sometimes it is sunshine and sometimes it is just cold. But for the adventurer this is not a problem. Remember that although it may be raining in the land below, you will be above the clouds most of the time.
Is it cold?	It is normally ok but it can get very cold: During the climb to base camp you will experience temperatures of 14 degrees during the day up to 22 degrees. But at the top and during the summit attempt, you must expect -10 and sometimes down to -15 degrees.
Food?	We supply all the food needed for your body to cope with the climb. Mainly you will be eating rice, noodles and soups for main meals and some kind of muesli and plenty of fruit. If you have any special requirements we can customize your menu but remember that weight is a limiting factor, so one must be practical about it.
Who carries it all?	Although you can carry your goods yourself, this is definitely not recommended. Your body will be finished by the 5th day and then you need to climb for 7 hrs. to the summit. We use porters to take all the goods and one porter is assigned per person. We set a weight limit per person of 7kg maximum. If you need to take any special equipment we then assign extra porters. Porters are very honest hard working people. They will carry all your load, setup camp, and cook and lift camp every day so that all you have to worry about is the landscape and walking.
Altitude sickness?	Nobody should get sick at 5890 mt. it is a case of listening to your body, taking your tablets, drinking plenty of water and listening to your guide. Most people find the pace of the summit day ridiculously slow, but there is a good reason for this. Your body needs to get used to the altitude slowly. You must also consciously breathe deep in and out and this can

	only be done in a slow mode. Yes some people's body will simply not cope with it, but by the time you get to base camp you will be able to gauge whether you should summit or not. In any case ;getting to base camp is already the most gratifying experience
What to take along?	Cameras , definitely Spare batteries and spools (you need spare ones as they tend to freeze with the cold) 2 pairs of good wool socks a good set of thermal underwear (long sleeves) Head torch and batteries. 3 to 4 changes of underwear 1 long pant (jean) 2 long sleeves vests or t-shirts 1 good jersey pair of thermal gloves Balaclava for your head and face 1 short (for the sunny days) Waterproof and weather-proof jacket (not just a windbreaker) waterproof and weather-proof pants Sleeping bag. Sweets and chocolates. Small flask for the summit. Sun glasses (you do not need snow glasses) Sun cream and lip balm. Altitude tablets. Yourself!!!

Memo of my Kilimanjaro Climb

20 July

I finally left Cape Town on my way to Kilimanjaro, after having a nice half chicken at the airport with the kids and my wife.

Finally I am on my Way!!.

Arriving at Johannesburg, Uncle Jorge was waiting for me. I had a very good laugh when we were driving out of the airport, and we were asked to switch the engine off. This they do to ensure that one has not stolen the car. Yep, this is Jhb all right!!.

21 July

I am at the airport and ready to leave. I booked in very early, so I have no worries. Just had a breakfast and my stomach are doing the butterfly thing, but it will be ok.

I can't believe I am actually and finally doing it!!



Dar Es Salaam

Airplane landed and door opens: whooshhhh!! Heat wave welcome the oven 33Degrees, I almost lost my wi.....!!.

I got to the custom officer who was moving very slowly and after ½ hour I realized that I had left my sleeping bags on the plane (sudden panic). I ran back to the tube that we came in and it was closed already and they were towing the airplane away. In panic I spoke to an officer and explained to him that I had to get the sleeping bags, as it was all I had to go up Kilimanjaro with. The officer said no problem, he opened the door of the extending tube and he started to whistle to the person towing the plane away, screaming in Swahili. The man smiled and started to tow the plane back towards the tube. To my relief, they opened the plane; I ran in and got my bag. This is a land of no problems for anyone and this was the first taste of it I got. Try to do this stunt anywhere else, you would probably have to fill forms for Africa in petitions and pass them through some high-ranking officer for him or her to just say no. Here, it took a whistle, a good laugh and it was done.

Bags recovered, I proceeded to customs. Slow, Slow, Slow, Super slow process. Standing in the queue, let my eyes wonder at the beauty of the women around. Women here are WOW!!!; pitch black, slender and very beautiful.

Once out of the airport I met with a nice guy who was a freelance tour operator (Norman Shayo) who seems very nice and told me he would try to organize me a ride to Serengeti.

He took me to flamingo restaurant at Dar es Salaam airport where I had a nice salad and rested waiting for my connecting flight.

The place is very nice and decent. The owner told me that I could stay as long as I wished. He has Internet facilities at the restaurant, which I tried to use with no luck. Nothing worked!!.

I left for Kilimanjaro airport at 8:00 pm. If you thought the arrival was slow, the departure was even worse. Nobody seems in any kind of a hurry here; everything is slow.

By the way, the owner of the restaurant is also the owner of 3 other shops at the airport. Wherever you go, there he is. He seems to own the airport (I would not be surprised).

Moshi

I arrived at Kilimanjaro Airport and all was fine there. Emmanuel (my guide) was waiting. Very nice guy. He took me to the hotel (mountain inn), which is 45 km from there, in an old battered Suzuki jeep. This gave a very nice raw first impression to my arrival.

At the hotel we had supper at 10:30pm and we talked for a long time. I fell asleep eventually in my room like sleeping beauty, hoping that a princess would wake me up with a kiss (dream on!!).

23 July

Moshi town



Today I woke up late. I had a very small breakfast and took a bus/kombi into Moshi.

What a ride!, 26 people fitted in this bus. A lady had to put half her bum on top of my leg to fit next to me; everyone was hanging onto each other so I did same by getting hold of this big woman's love handles!! She looked at me and smiled. It was a nice ride. The people here are so natural, simple and fun.

In town I met a guy who I became friends with almost instantly (Rosmin). He took me for a walking tour around the place. We went especially to the real places. We went to the market where you can buy just about anything. Spices from and for Africa. Colourful place full of life and beautiful people. Elegant women always working hard at something. I saw many stalls selling mountains of 5 cm long dried fish. This apparently you

cook or steam and eat it with rice. People buy it by the Kilo. The shops and stalls are of beautiful colours and full of life.

The butchery was a shock to my system. It is an open stall with pieces of meat (raw) hanging from dirty walls, no fridge, no salt, just flies. People actually buy cuts of meat. The stench of rawness is quite something but here it is a way of life.

We walked through the back streets of Moshi, and passed Swahili street where houses are made of mud and are about to fall, but people live there.

The spirit of Africa is most present in this area.

All people are some kind of entrepreneurs and I still have to find a house without a stall or a person sitting outside selling something.

Sewing seems to be a big thing here, as every second shop has a peon outside (on the streets) with a sewing machine sewing some colourful garment.

Women wear beautiful African colour clothes complemented with a turban in their heads.

We had a snack at a place where a very nice lady, her two daughters and 2 sons serve very nice Samosas. Very cosy place, where she personally attends you.

One of her boys had an obsession with cleanness, as he kept on wiping the floor during the whole duration of our lunch.

I went to an Internet cafe and what a joke!. Maximum speed of 14400 if you're lucky. It took me 45 minutes to write a 1-page email. Apparently all service providers have only wireless connections to offer, and this makes them very slow and unreliable. Anyway, most people here do not know of any faster browsing so they do not complain.

We then visited the outskirts of town, which is where life really is. Saw no luxuries; plain simple living. People here have a beautiful spirit and I enjoyed this from them.

I took another kombi back to my hotel and now I am resting and eating a tomato, cucumber and carrot salad, which took me quite some time to explain to the chef.

This is a beautiful place, but most important; with beautiful people.

Altitude Sickness

The briefing will contain a detailed section on altitude sickness and other medical issues ...

A general mountain rule is that you should not generally ascend more than 300 meters per day and for each 1000 meters that you do ascend you should take a rest day. The way Kilimanjaro is climbed contravenes both of these rules. This is what makes this mountain difficult and potentially dangerous. It is important that all climbers read and understand the contents of this section.

In climbing terminology, mountain altitudes are divided into three zones ... high, very high and extreme. As you can see below, this climb involves extreme altitudes and is therefore a serious and potentially dangerous undertaking ...

AMS: Acute Mountain Sickness: During the trek it is likely that more than 75% of climbers will experience at least some form of mild altitude sickness. This is caused by the failure of the body to adapt quickly enough to the reduced level of oxygen in the air at an increased altitude. There are many different symptoms but the most common are headaches, light headedness, nausea, loss of appetite, tingling in the extremities (toes, fingers) and a mild swelling of the face, ankles and fingers. These symptoms in a mild form are not serious

and will normally disappear within 48 hours, the result of poor circulation or a small leakages of fluids within the body.

HAPE: High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema: "water in the lungs" : This more serious sickness has very clear symptoms ... breathlessness at rest, very high pulse, crackling sound in the chest leading to coughing of fluid (sputum). This condition is rapidly fatal unless the casualty experiences immediate descent. There are no drugs to cure and no possibility of re-ascent on this trip.

HACE: High Altitude Cerebral Oedema: "swelling in the brain": Again there are clear symptoms ... a COMBINATION of two or more of the following: Very severe headache, severe loss of balance, mental confusion, and repeated nausea. This condition is rapidly fatal unless the casualty experiences immediate descent. There are no drugs to cure and no possibility of re-ascent on this trip.

Climbers should not be scared by all this talk, but it is essential that they understand that if they push on or stay at same altitude with HAPE or HACE they will die. People do. Even serious cases of altitude sickness can only be treated by immediate descent. Our Western leaders and local guides are all experienced in dealing with the problems of altitude. It may be necessary for you to descend to a lower altitude until you recover or even to abandon the climb in the interests of safety. The decision of the Western leader or the Senior guide in such situations will be final.

The following three steps are a guide to achieving acclimatization:

Water: A fluid intake of 4 - 5 litres per day is recommended. Fluid intake improves circulation and most other bodily functions, but does not increase fluid leakage from the body. Thirst should not be an indicator of proper fluid intake; if your urine is clear then you are drinking enough.

Slow Walk: Pace is a critical factor on all routes. Unless there is a very steep uphill section your breathing rate should be the same as if you were walking down the street. If you cannot hold a conversation you are walking too fast. Breathing through the nose for the first 2 days of the climb will limit the pace. Walk "softly" allowing your knees to gently cushion each pace. "Pole pole" < go slowly > is the phrase that will echo around your head as it is repeated to you by the guides.

Walk high sleep low: If you have enough energy and are not feeling the effects of altitude, then you might take an afternoon stroll further up the mountain before descending to sleep. Almost all routes offer an extra day for acclimatization. Taking this day increases your chances of getting to the top by 30% and increases your chances of actually getting some enjoyment out of the experience by much more than that. We do not offer climbs which do not include this extra day.

Prevention of altitude sickness with drugs: Diamox

Diamox is a drug which can be taken to assist the body by improving the efficiency with which oxygen can be absorbed from the thin air. There is no disputing the efficacy of the drug. There is however a big debate as to whether and how Diamox should be used.

There are three ways to use Diamox on the mountain ...

The first way is to use it as a preventive throughout the trip starting from the day before the climb. The conventional argument against doing this is that it conceals the symptoms of body underperformance, thus increasing the chances of a failure if one does occur being catastrophic.

The second way is to "listen to your body" until day 3 (6 day climbs) or day 4 (7 day climbs) and then, if you are not demonstrating any severe symptoms, to take Diamox as directed above to boost your performance at higher camps. The argument against is the same as previous.

The third way is to only use Diamox as a treatment for altitude illness. This is reasonable, but severe symptoms can only be treated by removal from altitude.

We carry enough Diamox in our medical boxes for the second and third options. This should not be taken as an indication of our advocating this course of action. The choice is yours and we suggest that you consult your doctor and do some background reading on the subject if you remain unsure.

We estimate that of American climbers, perhaps as high as 75% take Diamox in some form during the climb. Of non-American climbers this number probably drops to 25% or below.

Here are some notes on the subject of Diamox:

"Diamox 750 mg is the proven medical dosage. That is not to say that a lesser dosage will not work, but that for the manufacturers need this dosage to prove its efficacy 100%. Our practical "recommendation" is 500 mg. It seems to work. More importantly you don't need to pee ALL the time (only most of the time) with this dosage. Quite a lot of clients are still recommended only 125mg or 250mg by their doctors."

"As far as we can see and from what the medical literature says, Diamox does not actually disguise serious symptoms of altitude sickness, as is the conventional counter argument to taking the drug. The consideration of whether or not to take it is more to do with the climber's individual attitude towards taking drugs as preventatives. If you never have been to altitude, then you do not know how your body is going to react. Do you want to take drugs for something that might not even make you sick? This is where the cultural difference comes into play ... Americans are in general more generous in their drug consumption than Europeans, so tend to be more willing to take Diamox just to be sure."

"We do not use Diamox as treatment if the climber is going to descend, but we may recommend it to climbers who are still going up. If our guides suggest that you take Diamox, then you may well wish to take them up on it."

"Last more general comment. Doctors back home might have very little idea about Diamox, therefore the advice that climbers gets varies enormously. If you really want to get the full information, then ask your doctor to refer you to a specialist."

Other health issues and notes

Aspirin and Paracetamol are highly recommended for headaches because they also thin the blood, so improving circulation & oxygen delivery to the body.

Strong painkillers are not recommended as they can suppress respiration.

One high altitude problem which is not altitude illness is Cheynes Stokes Breathing, which involves waking up in night gasping for breath. Climbers should not panic about this, it is simply because slow breathing at rest is not able to pull in enough oxygen from the thin air. A period of panting should restore the climber to normality.

Another issue is frostbite. The summit ascent is the only real time that climbers may be at risk from the effects of severe cold. If you have two good pairs of gloves and a couple of chemical hand warmers, then you should have no problem. It is essential however that you make your guides aware of particularly cold hands and feet. We have had only one serious occurrence of frostbite, which occurred when the climber in question told his climbing colleagues that he had cold hands, but did not tell to the guides. As a result he lost three nails and parts of two fingers, all of which should have grown back. This serves as a sanguine reminder of how you should communicate and rely upon your guides.

Ladies please note that altitude may affect the menstrual cycle, so bring appropriate materials.

Contact lenses must be removed at night to allow eyes to absorb oxygen from the atmosphere. The rarefied conditions of altitude reduce oxygen levels and in extreme cases a Corneal Oedema can develop.

Day by day memories of my Kilimanjaro climb.

First Day at Kilimanjaro

We drove to Kilimanjaro national park in a kombi through rough terrain. I did not realize that the vehicle took us already to an altitude of 1800 mt above sea level.

The park warden did not want to believe that I was going to do the climb without porters. No one climbs without porters.

Getting ready to start walking!



The climb on the first day was tough and long. 5hrs through rain forest. Magnificent green that hurts your eyes. But it was very steep walking in some places. My pack was too heavy (+- 18 kg) so I am going to leave some stuff tomorrow.



While walking through the forest I saw a variety of delicate beautiful flowers. Deep red with yellow against a curtain of green leaves. Some pink and white with shiny glossy hairs that covered the whole stem. The flora is amazing and one is overwhelmed by the lavishness of the green landscape.



My guide Emanuel and his idea of a portable Small Gas stove!!!

We arrived at first camp (Machame) and prepared masala tea. Then I cooked noodles with sardines and had some coffee at the end of the day.



Second Day at Kilimanjaro

We got up at 7:30 am and were very cold. I made scrambled eggs with tomato, bread and had porridge afterwards. As we were in no hurry we took it easy and were the last ones to leave the camp. By now it was obvious that we would be sharing the climb with at least 40 or 50 other people.

The climb to Shira camp was very steep the whole day. We walked at a gradient of 45 to 50 degrees the entire day. The sun shone its warmth on us while we walked. The climbing was slow and very trying. The views fantastic and the vegetation are amazing. The hills were covered by beautiful evergreen flowers and beautiful lobelia stumps stared at us as we passed, greeting us.



Lava rocks



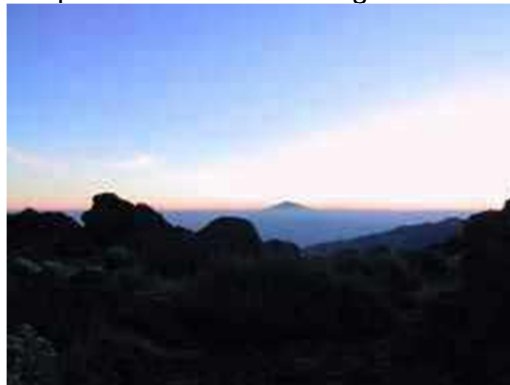
My guide seems to be struggling with his bag, so he walks unbalanced all the time.

Anyway, we got to Shira camp, which sits on a lava flow bed and has an amazing view of Kilimanjaro summit and Mount Meru in the far horizon.

My head is hurting a bit but not too much. I started taking the altitude tablets. I feel ok otherwise.



Second camp has the most amazing view of the Summit!



I prepared a tomato and cucumber salad for lunch (which was a real treat). I made rice and pesto sauce and a soup for dinner.

We have had ½ moon at night and the summit looks awesome at night. We can also see millions of stars tinkling in the sky, and to our luck we saw a beautiful shooting star today. We *walked for 5hrs.*



A bird that everyone calls Tennis balls! comes to visit every night.

As it gets colder they puff up and end up looking exactly like their name suggests.



Kilimanjaro's shadow on Mount Meru.

Making love to each other every night!!



Third Day at Kilimanjaro

What a day!! Very trying and very intensive. We got up early and left camp for Lava Tower which sits half way to today's destination. It is a long, long gentle uphill but the altitude started to take a toll. We walked slowly at a pace of 1 step a second. One cannot go any faster. We arrived at lava tower for lunch. Most of the landscape was a mixture of dust and low vegetation with massive black boulders that looked as if someone had just dropped them there in the middle of nowhere.



Shira Plateau



There was fantastic view of Kilimanjaro and we are so close to it that one can almost touch the glaciers.



We climbed the lava tower and the view from its top is WOW!!!!!! With Kilimanjaro in the one side and the plains of Tanzania in the opposite, with mount meru protruding from these flat plains.



We left after lunch and walked to barranco camp. We went from 4600 mt down to 3800 mt. through very rough terrain, passing a forest of magnificent Cenicio trees. These trees are very eerie as they look like overgrown aloes that are about to topple over. We arrived exhausted with a headache and hungry. We made soup, which helped us to recover. It got cold very quickly (-2degrees). I cooked rice with a tomato and cucumber salad. We had some coffee and went straight to bed. Watching the top of Kilimanjaro change colours with the sunset was amazing.



Cenisio tree!!



One of the wonders of Kilimanjaro



The road today was hard, dusty and long. We walked from 8:30 am to 16:45. What a day!. To top it all There was a couple of French guys camping next to us, one of which developed altitude sickness breathing problems and their guide did not know what to do with him. I helped them by showing them some exercises to get some extra oxygen into their lungs and told them that they must get down the next day. I am Zat!! So I am going to sleep, Good night.....



Sunset behind Kilimanjaro!

4th Day at Kilimanjaro

We got up early and decided to try to get to barafu camp today (this is the last camp before the summit). The start of the walk was what they call "the breakfast climb". What a climb!! You climb a hill at 70 to 80 degrees gradient through rocky terrain for the first 1 ½ hour. It was cold and exhausting.



We then carried on for another 3hrs until we reached the second last camp (we were supposed to camp here for the night). We had lunch here and wet our feet in freezing cold water. The walk to this point was long and tiring. We decided to carry on to barafu camp instead of staying here as I felt strong and the weather looked good.



Leaving 3rd camp

Icicle greeting us to the top!

We had to carry all the water we will need for the next 2 days from this point. So a 5-lt drum plus 2 times 2 litres bottles, and 2 one-litre bottles, this makes extra 10 kg all of a sudden. WOW!! My back.



Lava Rocky Landscape



We decided not to stay at this camp and carry on to base camp



We started climbing slowly at a pace of 1 step per second, and it was up and up and up. It took us another 3 ½ hours. My guide got sick and luckily a porter passed by and we paid him 5000 tsh to carry his bag to barafu.



Final Road to Barafu. My guide in trouble (white spot)

I went slowly ahead and when I got there, it was cold and very crowded. (5:30 Pm). We prepared a noodle masamorra and ate it without complaining. Too tired, too hungry and with a headache. Went to rest at 8:00 Pm. It was so cold that we had to cook inside the tent. I was not sure that this was a wise decision to get to this camp so soon.

Barafu Camp, We're ready for the climb!



The Final climb

It was 11:30 pm on the night of the 4th day. We decided to start getting ready for the climb. We made porridge, coffee, packed the bags and the tent (you don't normally do this if you come with porters) and we left it all with the guards.>

Head torch on, dressed almost like an astronaut we started the ascent.

My guide and I walked very nice together as we both can keep a slow but constant pace for long periods.

The climb was steep, slow and painful.

The first ½ hour your heart is pounding at light speed rate and you feel short of breath.

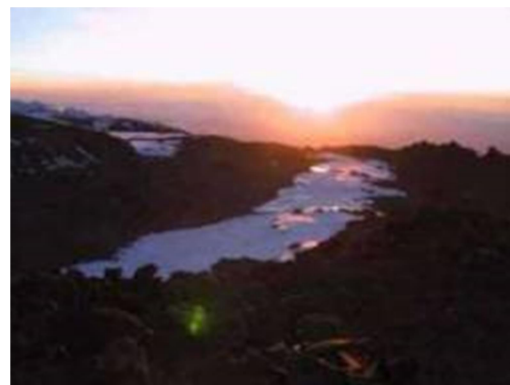
It got cold, very cold. The air that you breathe in is so cold that it hurts the lungs and dries your throat. I had to put my balaclava over my mouth and make a pouch in front of it so that my breath out would warm my breath in. The cold comes from the sides and from your back.

2 hrs. into slow painful climbing, now adjusted to the harsh conditions, it got even colder and heavier. We were now climbing at a pace of 1 step every 2 seconds (short steps). This was faster than most people that we passed along the climb.

Everyone is panting, ladies complaining of the cold and tiredness, someone in the back shouted a big fu.....! in frustration.

We slowly carried on and painfully on. You don't care if anyone is in trouble, as you are focused solely on the climb.

My right buttock developed a needle pain and I got worried as it started to travel down my leg. It was the cold.



Kilimanjaro's shadow falling over Mount Meru

I told my guide please no more overtaking, because I spent 5 times the energy of a normal step in a longer step needed to overtake, and it took me about 20 mins to recover.

3 hrs. climbing and my body feel sore all over. I started to stop every 10 steps for 5 seconds to get my breath back. The ground is now loose gravel at a 65-degree gradient and every step that you take, you slide ½ back. It is cold cold cold.

I decided to take a photo of the light of Moshi town, which could be seen from this point, and my hand almost froze when I touched the metal of the camera. I took a nice shot, but also took another hour before I could feel my fingers again.

At 4 hrs. and something, we reached the rim of the crater (Stella point). The last 20 mins before this point was a sadistic one-step at a time against your body's will. Now climbing at one step per 3 seconds and this step being ½ foot long, plus your breath is long and painful. Your heart is pumping like a drum set. The cold that touches your face is numbing. It is now getting light and we are now able to see further than 3 mt without our torches.

We rested at a rock outcrop. You feel finished but guess what!, it's not over. We still have another 1 ½ hr. to the summit, and this is the worst news anyone can give you now (my guide was in serious trouble of being dismantled right there).

When you sit on any rock, you feel the cold traveling from your bum up, so you do not sit for longer than 2 mins.

After a lot of convincing to my body to carry on, we got going again.

It is now more or less level walking but it makes NO DIFFERENCE!, you are finished and exhausted and every step you take is a conscious effort still at a pace of 1 step every 2 to 3 seconds. People's faces look terrible, and you hope that yours does not look also like you are about to die.

We carried on slowly, wind from the inside of the crater; you can see UHURU peak in the distance and it looks far. You also see the flashes of the cameras of people that have already made it.

The sun started to show beautiful colours on the clouds and it is an incredible spectacle of nature; but you are so, so tired that one cannot appreciate it fully. You are focused on the peak ahead.



The breathing is by choice a long inhaling and a long exhaling and you try to keep it to 3 steps in 3 steps out. The Summit on the 5th day

The sun is almost out of the clouds, 6:45 am and we are 5 mt from the summit. You see people hugging each other; everyone is in tears men, women, old and young.

As I took my final steps to the summit marker, a wave of emotions came to me: My mom, my family, my wife, my children, my girlfriends, my pets, my childhood, my school and friends; my entire life passed through my soul in less than 10 seconds. The feeling is indescribable.

All the pain, exhaustion, the aches are all present, you are still freezing cold, cramps all over and yet; you don't mind. It was worth it just for this moment. Even for my guide who completed his 35th climb, I saw him sitting down and crying a bit. It is a very emotional moment and you can definitely feel the human spirit around you. Somehow we all become family as we all shared the same pain and the same feelings to get to this incredible spot. You look around you and you see people expressing themselves completely openly, everyone shares the tears you feel like letting out. Your body suddenly feels like jelly and your legs are shaking horribly but it is now due to the emotions more than to the exercise.



Can you see me standing next to the glacier??

After the initial moments, you now start taking notice of your surrounds and also start taking photos. You wait for your turn to stand at the summit marker. Everyone wants this. Some people bring out banners, others some token; like a man that took out 5 teddy bears out of his bag and placed them next to him. A couple decided to give each other a scrumptious kiss while the photo is being taken.



Inside the crater



The glaciers are an incredible sight of nature!!

I, just went for the photo, simple and straight, but I know what it means to me.

The sun is now starting to come out of the clouds and it is awesome!. The shadow of Kilimanjaro starts to extend over Tanzania and over Mount Meru, which is 50km away in the distance. This is quite a spectacle. People all around you are very emotional and the landscape is absolutely incredible. You look in any direction and you see space, plains of land covered by grass and some tiny trees. Some of it covered with low clouds, some of it open. Clouds burn like fire with the sun and the sky is deep blue.

Now I have to say that up to this moment everything looked a bit fuzzy every now and then, and I thought it must be the effect of altitude, but when I wiped my face after sneezing, I discovered that my eyelashes were frozen with icicles and this was what was making things look fuzzy. I had a good laugh when I discovered this and I also discovered that my whole face was covered by a thin layer of ice. My eyebrows were completely frozen too, and looking at other people, they too were covered by ice all over their face.

By the way, it is now freezing, freezing cold. The sun 1/2 out of the clouds made no difference at all. Wind blowing at about 15km /hr. from inside the crater.

After all the photos and the moment of glory (which lasts altogether no more than 10 mins) we decided to start down. It is too cold for sightseeing.

Now walking became a pleasure, going down no more painful steps. You feel like in the clouds (and you indeed are). We stopped to look at the inside of the crater. It is enormous. You look into an ice-covered valley about 3 km across. On the other side of this op, you see a large hill covered by ice, and this is the actual crater where the fumarole is located, but it is far away. A steep way down first and then a flat walk for about 1.5 km and then another climb to the top of the other side. This looks far and uninviting. The sun shines on the glacier bed making an enormous orange mirror of it. On our way back to Stella point, we stopped at various points to look at the incredible glaciers. They are massive. If you stand next to the glacier walls, you reach about 1/10th of its height. I decided to go down to one of them for a photo (about 20 mt down from the path), took the photo and to my surprise, every step trying to get back up was an incredible effort, as if someone had put a ton of lead on my feet and legs. It took me 9 mins to climb the 20 mt back to the path and I was exhausted. I decided then, no more close ups!

I enjoyed the wonderful views that Kilimanjaro was giving me, the beauty and power of it, the majesty and grandeur of it. I thanked Kilimanjaro for letting me reach its top, and for allowing me to share its splendour. One starts to see what you have really accomplished on your way down n back to Stella point (which is still the rim of the crater 5700 mt). You see people still coming up at an incredibly slow pace (you did the same just now). One man could hardly walk, was wrapped in an emergency blanket and was being aided by his guide. He looked ready to die but kept going. A Japanese lady was going around in circles and the guide had to turn her body in the direction of the summit so that she could unconsciously carry on towards it. We also saw an old lady that looked real sick being held by the arms by her guide and assistant. She could hardly breathe but kept going. One man would give 3 steps, and stop panting for about a minute before another set of steps. Everyone feels the pain of getting to the top; Young, old, fit and non-fit. It does not matter. It is hard and testing of your innermost strength to get there. Kilimanjaro is a mountain you have to respect and not to take for granted.

On our way up, we saw a number of people young and old turning back, some of them as early as the first 200 mt after the start of the climb. As you see them pass you get worried whether you will make it or not. Climbing Kilimanjaro makes all equal: Men, women, young and old. There is no distinction. Everyone is fighting their own battle against their will.

At the Summit; UHURU Peak, We Made It!!



Arrival at Stella Point (6hrs climbing)

Going down, The 5th Day

After reaching Stella point, I said good-bye to Kilimanjaro. We decided we cannot stay any longer; too cold, too exhausted.



We started the descent and it was much easier and much more fun. You go down a route 50 m to the left of the ascending one. 80% of it is loose gravel, so you grab speed and each step becomes a 1 to 2-m descent because the ground slides under your feet. You must just keep your balance and watch out for large stones.

We kept going like this for almost 2hrs until we reached hard ground. We were by now so tired that many times we stopped to rest and almost fell asleep on the spot.



2 ½ hours later we were back at Barafu camp



Your body so tired that there are no words to describe it.

We collected our bags, found a spot, took our sleeping mats out and just lied down to try and sleep. We were very hungry but all we could muster in the form of food was to open a tin of peaches and cream and gulped it down in seconds. We fell asleep for about 1 hour but I was too tired to carry on sleeping.



Back at barafu camp, feeling absolutely exhausted.



The bad news was that we could not stay at this camp, as there is no water. So after resting for about 3 hrs, we forced ourselves to leave for millennium camp, which is 1 ½ hour away of steep downhill all the way to it.

We reached the camp at about 1:30 pm. We made a good meal, prepared coffee and got into our sleeping bags to rest. I cannot describe with words how absolutely finished I felt. We had been awake since the beginning of the 4th day, so it is for 30 hrs. that we have not slept, plus a little climb in between. This was not just us, but for every one that attempts the summit in a 6 day hike. Everyone you see at this camp is finished, exhausted and just wants to rest. We fell asleep almost instantly.



6th Day at Kilimanjaro



Signing off at Millennium Camp

We woke up at 8 am, rested, sore but with a nice sense of achievement. As I got out of the tent, Kilimanjaro greeted me with the sun on its side; asking me “how do you feel”. I subconsciously replied: “like a new person, thanks my friend”. We readied ourselves for the last walk to mweka gate. This is a 4 ½ hour walk going down, down, down. Initially through low bushes which 45 minutes later are replaced by a splendorous rain forest. Beauty all around. Green so strong that looks like someone had dropped a bucket of green paint all over.

I enjoyed taking photos of small ferns lit by faint sunrays that made it through the canopy of the forest.



Walking out via rain Forest!!



Beautiful and delicate red flowers (impatiences) and 10 mt tall tree ferns. Wherever you look it is filled with wonders of nature. We even saw a few black loeries as we walked along.

After walking 4 hrs. we reached the gate. There they give you your certificate (if you made it to the top) and you can buy cool drinks and t-shirts that say, "I just made it" (I of course got me one) for US15. I bargained the price of one down to US10.

I felt sad to leave such incredible place, but at the same time happy that I will have a bit of a rest.

I stank from head to toe so did my guide. But this is the case with everyone arriving at this point. There are no big rivers to wash up in Kilimanjaro. Just little streams that you have to sit patiently for it to fill your bottles to drink from.

People that do the climb with porters have it a bit easier as they do not carry their weight. But they still have to walk it all. Porters spend hours collecting water for the people. They are strong and incredibly fast. Some of them carrying up to 25 kg all the way to Barafu camp. They get paid almost nothing by their companies (+- US10 a day if they are lucky). 90% of them are not geared by their companies, so they walk in talkies and tracksuits. Talking to some of them I found that some companies provide them with food only every second day; something which I found disgusting. Companies charge an average of US1500 per person for a climb. They pay the guides US50 per day and US 10 per day to their porters who do ALL the work. They get up at first light, prepare breakfast for the clients, pack and leave the camp after the clients. They ALWAYS overtake the clients and get to the next camp long before them. When the clients get to the camps, everything is ready for them; tents, food etc. They are hardworking people and I really feel that government should step in to stop the companies that are abusing them.

In any case, this was a sad note to y climb, but one, which I feel, must be expressed.



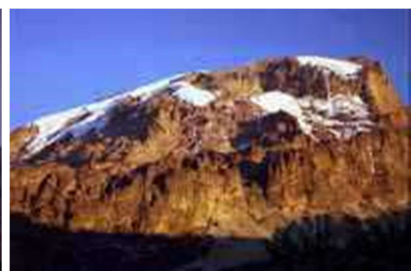
Something I forgot to mention on my Climb day was that I had planned to phone my wife from top of Kilimanjaro as there is cell reception up there. My guide took his cell especially for this purpose. We loaded it with US 10 of prepaid voucher. When we got to the top and took the phone out (which was wrapped in a thick sock), we found that it was frozen solid. My guide was carrying it in his pocket and because he kept his hand in it too, the sweat from his hand was collected by the sock and froze instantly. We could not get it defrosted up there, as the temperature was +- -15 degrees. The water that we took for drinking in bottles was also frozen solid, even the one carried by him on his pocket close to his body (is it cold enough for you?). We had to shake the bottles and break the ice inside to try to drink a few sips.



All in all, the experience was one, which I shan't forget. I will certainly be back, but this first climb I wanted it to be my way. I carried my rough sack and food supplies for 7 days together with my guide (who had never done it like this before), as I wanted to feel Kilimanjaro. I wanted to remember every step, all the pain and every wonder. I wanted to be able to say with conviction "I HAVE CLIMBED KILIMANJARO" with its full meaning.

I am apparently one of 3 that have done it so. The rest all do it using the porter system, which basically takes the weight off your shoulders while you walk, but everyone goes through the "CLIMB DAY", perhaps a bit more rested than us carrying our own goods for 4 to 5 days. But the pain is the same, the achievement is the same, the wonder of Kilimanjaro is the same to all of us who have visited it.

Kilimanjaro is a wonder that teases people into attempting the summit, and I think that nature has placed it there with a purpose.





Kilimanjaro is a call that if you take it, it will fill your life with something indescribable, it will leave you wondering how ridiculously small we are in not acknowledging that we have only this earth to leave on, and that by spoiling it and not caring for it, will one day end all its wonder (like Kilimanjaro) and with it US!!!