

# REACHING NEW HEIGHTS



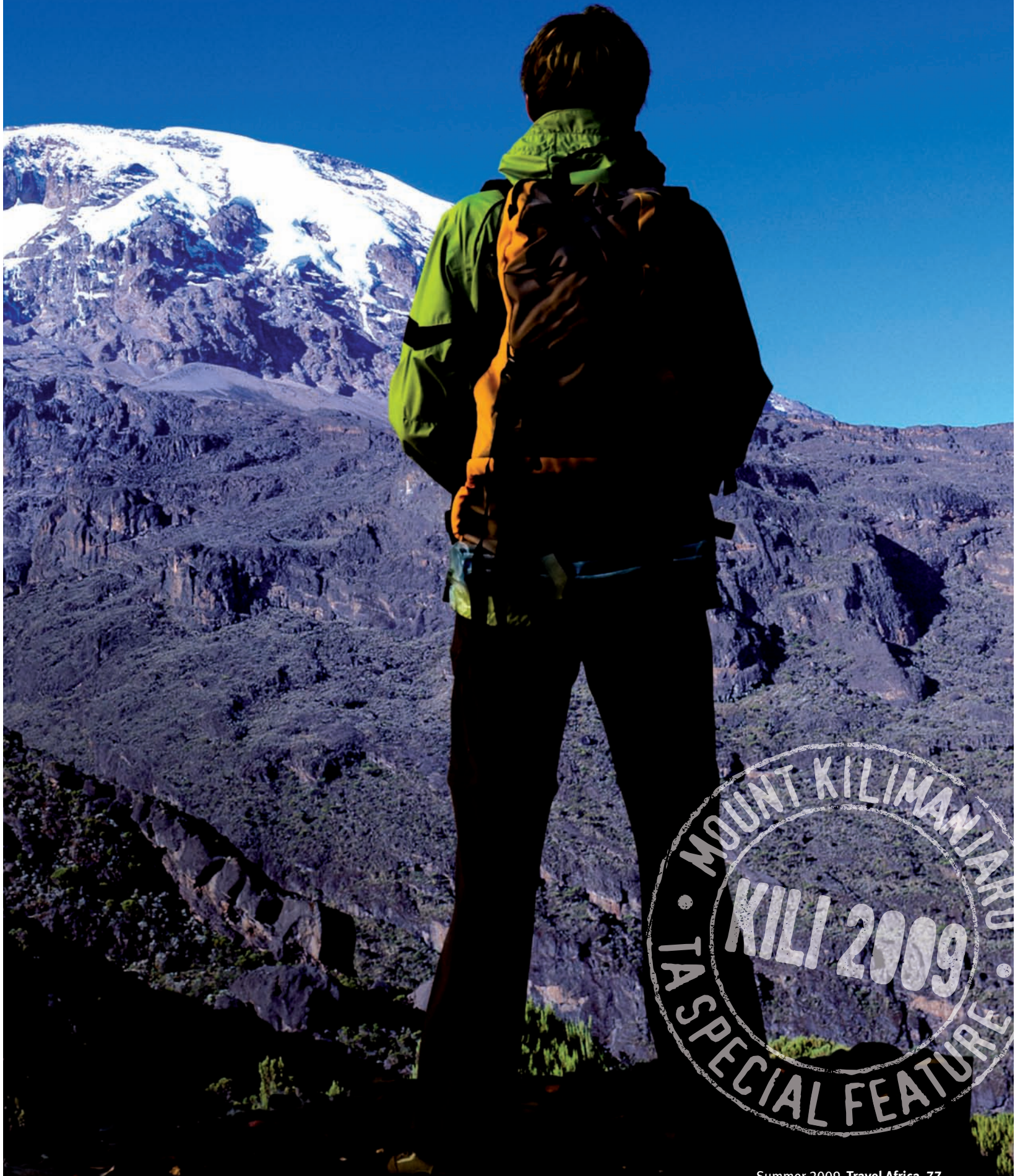
When word of a snow-capped mountain on East Africa's equatorial plains reached Europe in the mid-19th century, the public, and London's Royal Geographic Society, scoffed at such an unbelievable notion. Although Kilimanjaro is now one of Africa's greatest icons, it must be said that the idea of it is no less astounding. Incredibly, the sense of disbelief in people typically reaches its zenith when they first set eyes on the mighty mountain. Whether catching a glimpse of it on a clear day from Nairobi, some 200km away, or witnessing its glaciated summit suddenly materialise on a bed of clouds, appearing to hover almost five kilometres above a golden savannah peppered with elephants, Kilimanjaro seems more fit for a dream than any reality. Fitting then, that Africa's tallest mountain plays a part in so many people's dreams.

Each year, thousands of visitors attempt to fulfil their lofty ambitions by climbing Kilimanjaro, Africa's tallest mountain and one of the planet's coveted Seven Summits. Although there is much working in their favour – a mild climate, easily accessible slopes, an abundance of porters and guides, and no need for technical climbing abilities – many don't make it to the top. **Jeremy Gane**, the man responsible for recently getting all 34 of the Comic Relief team to the summit, and someone with more than twenty Kili climbs to his name, is here to help you stand on the top of Africa. ❖❖



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KILIMANJARO



• MOUNT KILIMANJARO •  
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## THE GOAL

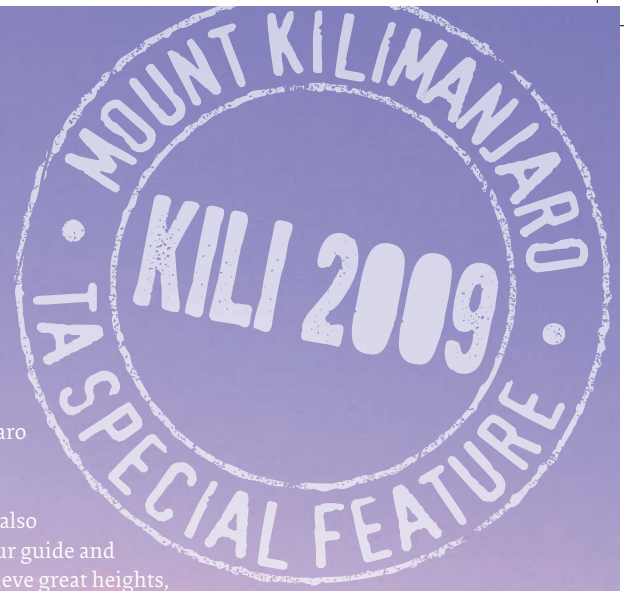
Looming large over the East African savannah, and providing what is arguably the most spectacular sunrise venue in Africa, is the majestic summit of Kilimanjaro. Set at the uppermost reach of the Kobo crater rim, Uhuru Peak is not just the top of the mountain – it is the top of the entire continent.

However, Kilimanjaro has much much more to offer you than just the ability to bag Africa's highest summit. In a matter of days you'll climb from the Equator to what feels like the Arctic, moving through grasslands, tropical rainforest, alpine meadows, moorland and desert uplands to snow and ice. Along the way you can trace the grand process of evolution in reverse: from the animals of the

forest to the first stirrings of bacterial life on the summit.

And while climbing Kilimanjaro will inspire you to greater levels of physical and mental strength, your efforts on the mountain can also benefit Tanzanians. Much like your guide and enthusiastic porters help you achieve great heights, your tourist dollars help hundreds, both directly and indirectly, in the Tanzanian tourist industry.

For those of you wishing to reach Uhuru Peak for a charity of your choice, the rewards of your efforts are compounded even more.



## PRE-TRIP PREPARATIONS

### Body and mind

Preparation is critical to improving the chance of success on the mountain. The fact that 17 per cent of physically fit climbers fall victim to Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS), compared to 44 per cent of those who are not in good shape, only underlines the importance of creating or maintaining a good level of fitness before your first step on Kilimanjaro.

Physical fitness and readiness for the trek can be best achieved by working on the muscles that you will use on your climb. While legs are the obvious targets, your abdominal core is also key to avoiding back problems. As aerobic fitness will help you cope with the thin air, cardiovascular workouts are also wise. If you go to a gym, ask one of the trainers to put

together a suitable programme for you; it should include simple core fitness routines, the step machine and the treadmill with increasing inclines. Outside the gym, the best training for hill trekking is – wait for it – hill trekking, so get out and try walking for increasing lengths of time with a daypack weighing up to 8kg. Don't forget to spend time walking down hills as well.

The preparation is not just physical though, as the difficult conditions on the trip will also test you mentally. If you're already over the hurdle of accepting a life of tents, long-drop toilets, lukewarm water for washing, and extreme conditions, which can range from baking hot to wet and freezing cold, you are on your way.







## Finding the perfect operator

With a seemingly endless array of tour operators offering Kilimanjaro experiences, there are some important questions you need to ask to ensure that your climb is as safe and enjoyable as possible.

### Qualifications and experience

Ask about the qualifications, training and experience of their staff. Tanzanian Kilimanjaro guides must have Kilimanjaro National Park (KINAPA) qualifications. First aid qualifications are also important. Additional training in local flora and fauna, and in foreign languages is also a good indicator of quality service.



Choose local guides whenever possible. Tanzanian guides with good operators not only have far more experience on Kilimanjaro than those from overseas, but they are also a key part of the local economy, spreading their income around the greater community.

### Dealing with an emergency

Ask the tour operator how they handle an emergency. They should have solid answers that deal with all aspects of a potential situation: evacuation from the mountain, communication facilities, which hospitals are used etc. Reassure yourself that you will be rescued safely and your family informed if you are injured or taken ill.

### Transport

Can transfers be organised safely and efficiently from your point of arrival in Tanzania/Kenya to the pre-climb hotel, and then on to Kili the next day? What vehicles do they use? Are they insured for tour operation?

### Acclimatisation

Ask the tour operator how their itinerary will help you acclimatise to altitude.

### Staff welfare

Does the company have a policy for staff welfare, payment and tipping? Are they a member or partner of an ethical tourism association such as the International Mountain Explorers Connection (IMEC)? Are they taking part in the IMEC's Partnership for Responsible Travel and/or the Porter Assistance Project? Are clothes, food and tents provided for staff on Kilimanjaro? A well looked-after crew will look after you well.

### Environment

How does the climb company protect the environment? Ask about removal of rubbish, latrines, etc.



### Cost

There are plenty of cheap options for climbing Kilimanjaro, but they are not necessarily safe or successful, and the local staff may be poorly treated. Prices should include: transfers to and from the mountain, all park and rescue fees, full board on the climb, a a of at least three support staff to each climber, and quality camping equipment.



## What to pack

Most operators provide items such as tents and cooking equipment, so you'll most likely be required to only bring personal items. As conditions are so varied, pack for all weathers. Several operators also provide items such as sleeping bags, sleeping mats, down jackets and rain gear, so double check with them before your departure.

Among the essentials, you will need:

- Large waterproof kitbag or rucksack (60-90litres)
- Waterproof daypack (30-40litres)
- Four-season sleeping bag with at least a -10 degrees Celsius rating (A fleece liner is a great idea)
- Quality sleeping mat such as a Therm-a-Rest® (both for comfort and ground insulation)
- Sturdy hiking boots with ankle support (wear these in before your trip)
- Waterproof windbreaker and trousers
- Down jacket or insulated ski jacket (essential for summit night)
- Thermal underwear
- Balaclava or insulated hat
- Insulated gloves/mittens & thermal inner gloves
- Sunhat, sun lotion and sunglasses
- Insect repellent and malaria prophylactic
- Water purification filter or tablets
- Basic first aid kit (plasters, antiseptic, support bandages, aspirin, Imodium, lip balm etc)
- Telescopic walking poles with rubber tips



## The tallest free-standing mountain in the world?

Although many consider Kilimanjaro the tallest free-standing mountain on the planet – heck, there's a sign stating as much on the summit itself – the volcano's claim to the title is not clear-cut. Kili's grip on the moniker depends on a very subjective definition of one word. The word? 'Near'.

To determine the largest free-standing mountain, geographers measure the free-standing rise of the summit over the lowest closed contour line that encircles, and stays near, the summit. If a 50km radius is considered 'near', Kilimanjaro retains the title as the lowest contour that makes the grade is 1395m, giving Kili a free-standing rise of 4500m. However, if 75km is used, Columbia's Pico Cristóbal Colón takes the prize with a free-standing rise of 5000m. If the radius is expanded to 120km then Hawaii's Mauna Kea volcano is top dog – it rises over 10,203m from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean.





## ON THE MOUNTAIN



### Taking care of yourself

The majority of individuals who set off to tackle Kilimanjaro complete their trip without any undue mishap. However, the mountain should not be taken lightly as there are very real dangers lurking. Besides the usual traveller's complaints, like sunburn, stomach upsets and blisters, the main problem on Kilimanjaro is the potential for Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). This is a very serious condition, which can affect anyone. Most individuals have the ability to adapt to altitude, if they expose themselves to it sufficiently slowly. However acclimatisation takes different lengths of time for each individual. While physical fitness reduces the chances of being affected by AMS, it doesn't guarantee that you won't be affected by it. It's often the case that fit people climb too quickly for their own good, and rush into AMS. Also take note that the younger you are, the more susceptible you are to getting AMS.

As you gain altitude the air gets thinner, the pressure drops and there is less oxygen available in the atmosphere. Consequently your lungs and heart have to work harder to oxygenate your body. As the amount of oxygen in the lungs decreases, the blood becomes less efficient at acquiring and transporting oxygen. Early signs that you are suffering from AMS include headache, disturbed sleep, loss of appetite, nausea, dizziness and lassitude and vomiting. If any of these

symptoms become apparent, you should pause until they have passed. Be careful as AMS can affect your ability to make sound decisions. As long as the symptoms remain mild you can continue to ascend slowly. If they persist, consider descending to a lower elevation at once. If the symptoms worsen, you run the risk of developing High Altitude Cerebral Oedema or High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema, both severe, potentially fatal versions of AMS. The treatment for these conditions is to descend immediately to a lower altitude. As you lose height, the symptoms should abate, then disappear.

The golden rules for avoiding AMS are as follows. Don't try to make an ascent within 24 hours of flying. Ascend slowly. If you start to feel the onset of AMS symptoms, go no higher. If the symptoms persist, descend at once.

A drug called Diamox can be useful in the prevention of AMS. Studies show that low doses (250mg per day) of it reduce the incidence of AMS – this is a result that I have also noted on successive Kili climbs. Unlike dexamethasone, this drug does not mask the symptoms but actually treats the problem. However, if symptoms persist, descend immediately. Discuss taking Diamox with your doctor before departure.

Other things you can do to stay safe and healthy are to remain hydrated, maintain a good standard of personal hygiene and always stick to approved paths.







### Climbing for charity

As Kilimanjaro represents such an obvious challenge, it is no surprise that so many people attempt to conquer it for a worthy cause. My company, Charity Challenge, which is the UK's leading adventure travel company specialising exclusively in international fundraising expeditions, has seen Kilimanjaro treks sitting in our top three ranked itineraries for the past ten years. Participants can cover the full cost of the challenge, which means every penny they raise benefits the charity. Alternatively, they can pay a deposit and commit to raising a minimum in sponsorship (typically around £3750). Approximately 45 per cent will go towards covering their costs and all remaining monies are retained by the charity. Trekkers can support any UK or Irish-registered charity and Charity Challenge does everything possible to support them. Climbing Kili for charity makes reaching the summit all the more rewarding. For more information, visit [www.charitychallenge.com](http://www.charitychallenge.com)

### The Comic Relief climb

Gary Barlow first approached us at Charity Challenge about staging the BT Red Nose Climb last summer. By December we were working almost seven days a week on planning and preparation for the event. We weren't the only ones working though, as all those making the trip invested in raising their fitness levels, some of whom had a mountain to climb in this respect before leaving the country.

The tough conditions and extreme weather faced by these high-profile clients were the same as any other group would experience. There was lots of camaraderie and the celebrities often laughed and joked about the enormous change to their lifestyles on Kilimanjaro.

However, what made the expedition such a mammoth project was not the celebrities, but the challenge of transmitting the event to numerous media outlets each day. This required a team of 25 people from the media, Comic Relief and Charity Challenge, as well as a 140-strong Tanzanian support team. Around 800kg of media equipment was flown out to Africa and there were two editing suites set up at the base of the mountain. All the media and climbing gear were transported safely up and down the mountain and each media team (six in all) had their own dedicated porters and guides.

The Tanzanian support team, led by the imposing chief guide Emanuel, were completely unfazed by their high-profile clients, due in part to their lack of celebrity knowledge. The team managed the logistics amazingly well, ensuring the camp was in place each evening and, most importantly, enabling everybody to summit.

Comic Relief set a goal of providing an anti-malaria net to every child under five in Tanzania, and the climb went a long way towards achieving that as it raised a very impressive £3.36 million.



CHRIS JACKSON / COMIC RELIEF / GETTY IMAGES

## Taking care of Kilimanjaro

With tens of thousands of people on Kilimanjaro's slopes each year, environmental degradation of this UNESCO World Heritage Site is a real possibility. To ensure the health of mountain, KINAPA has set guidelines on environmental protection that should be respected. Following these rules will help to minimise your impact.

- Remove all litter, even if this means picking up rubbish left by other trekkers
- Smokers should collect matches and cigarette butts and dispose of them correctly (butts are a fire hazard, take years to decompose and can harm wildlife)
- Don't pollute water resources
- Gas canisters are to be used for cooking (no camp fires allowed for any reason)
- Stay on the trail (going off the beaten track damages sensitive soil and vegetation)
- Don't pick up or disturb any of the flora or fauna found on the mountain



### Birth of a giant

Molten lava, taking advantage of a fracture splaying off the Great Rift Valley, burst through the earth's weakened surface around three-quarters of a million years ago, pushing up part of the continent's crust in the process. The Shira volcano, the oldest in the Kilimanjaro Massif, was born. After successive eruptions adding to the volcano's height, it collapsed, forming a massive caldera almost half a million years ago.

However it wasn't long before more eruptions occurred, building the mountain back up again. These new volcanic deposits formed the second of Kilimanjaro's three volcanoes, Mawenzi, the remnants of which are still visible today. Then, 50,000 years or so later, immense volcanic activity occurred just west of Mawenzi, creating Kibo, Kili's youngest volcano. Further eruptions, caused by continued pressure beneath the crust, greatly added to the massif's size. One such event led to lava spilling out of Kibo's crater and down into the Shira caldera, as well as around the base of Mawenzi, forming the so-called 'Saddle' seen on the mountain today. Since then, less violent activity has led to the formation of a chain of parasitic craters running across the mountain. One of them, known as the Reusch Crater, sits within the Kibo summit itself. It was formed a little over 200 years ago, marking the most recent volcanic activity of note.

While Shira and Mawenzi are classified as extinct volcanoes, the smell of sulphur emanating from the Reusch Crater will be enough to convince you that dormant Kibo hasn't had its last day in the sun.



## TAKING IT TO THE TOP: THE ROUTES

Kilimanjaro offers a rewarding range of ways to the summit, which vary in degrees of difficulty, scenic beauty and trekker traffic, so if you are considering taking up the challenge, carefully select the one that best suits you.

### 1 MARANGU

Marangu is the original trekking route on Kilimanjaro and it passes through very beautiful landscapes, including the awe-inspiring 'Saddle' between the peaks of Kibo and Mawenzi. The lower section starts in agricultural areas, before moving through a cloud forest dotted with wild orchids. After you've passed around the base of the Maundi Crater, you'll enter the moorland area, from where you'll make a steep ascent through the barrenness. A rocky trail will lead you to the Hans Meyer Cave, and eventually to Gillman's Point. From there, it is a slog up through the snow to the summit.

Marangu is by far the busiest way up Kilimanjaro. It's popular for two main reasons: it's one of the easiest ways up the mountain, and it's typically the cheapest option. The latter factor is often the case because some operators foolishly undercut others by offering shorter, five-day climbs. Even the six-day ascent can be risky in regard to acclimatisation, and therefore the large numbers attempting to do Marangu in a day less have led to the summit success rate on this route being around 40 per cent.

It is the only route that offers sleeping huts with beds and mattresses, though they hardly qualify as luxurious accommodation – the large number of climbers also means there is often insufficient room available. The crowded nature of this route is its worst attribute. Thanks to the camps selling soft drinks, mineral water and beer, the Marangu has been dubbed the 'Coca Cola route'.

Although some routes allow you the option of descending down a different path, giving you a wider view of Kilimanjaro's incredible landscapes, this is not the case with Marangu – if you climb it, you must come down it.



**Above:** Some of the routes up Kilimanjaro take you through rich rainforests carpeted with moss and other vegetation

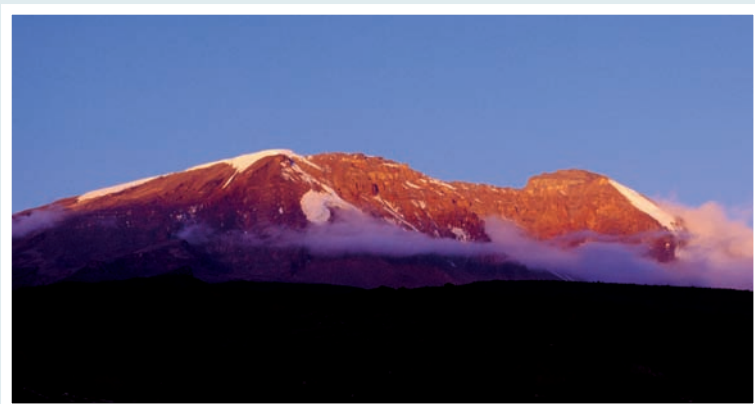
**Below:** Kili from the Shira plateau

### 2 SHIRA

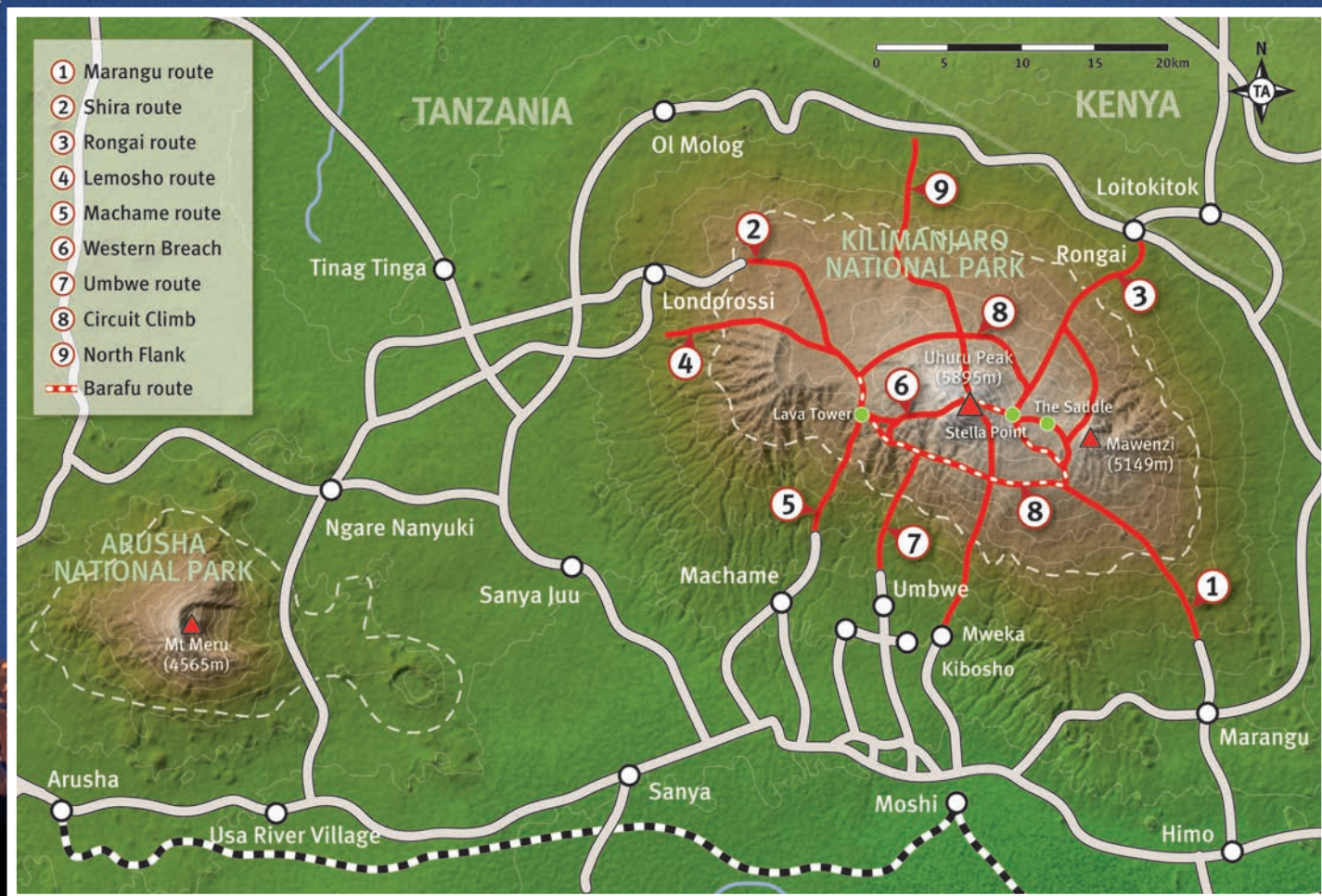
Starting on the west of the Kilimanjaro massif, Shira runs roughly parallel to the Lemosho route. Widely considered to be among the most scenic routes up Kilimanjaro, it also provides plenty of wildlife viewing opportunities. It must be said that the first two days of rainforest on the Lemosho route are infinitely preferable to Shira, which commences on a 4WD track through tree plantations and heath.

The advantage of the Shira route is that it is possible to include a visit to the north flank of Kilimanjaro within an eight-day programme. A standard climb straight up Shira without this excursion is usually done in seven days. This is possible as Shira starts at a higher elevation, using a vehicle to bypass much of the lowland rainforest that the Lemosho route embraces. This does mean that you'll have less time to acclimatise, which may lead to problems with AMS. However, if you are in excellent physical shape, you'll have an extremely good chance of reaching Kilimanjaro's Uhuru Peak on this route.

It's mandatory for those climbing up Lemosho to descend via the Mweka route on Kili's southern flank.







### 3 RONGAI

Starting just south of the Kenyan border, this rewarding route is once again a possibility for climbers – it was almost completely unused for many years due to the area being considered too sensitive. Many experienced guides consider this ascent route to be both easier and more beautiful than the main Marangu trail.

Beginning in attractive farmland and progressing into delightful forest, which offers you the possibility of wildlife viewing, Rongai passes through several different climatic zones, adding considerable interest to the trek.

The standard itinerary is six days, but an additional day can easily be added to ensure maximum acclimatisation and to give you more opportunities to view the magnificent scenery. The extra day can be used to enjoy a detour to the beautiful Mawenzi Tarn (one of my favourite places on Kilimanjaro) via a little-used trail through moorland. The final ascent uses the same section of trail as the Marangu route. As with all the routes, you will be rewarded with a stunning sunrise over the glaciers and ice cliffs of the summit and across the East African plains.

This route retains a sense of unspoilt wilderness, and offers a different perspective on Kilimanjaro by approaching it from the north. It's also usually a drier option than the southern alternatives. Rongai is for ascents only, so you will usually descend via Marangu.

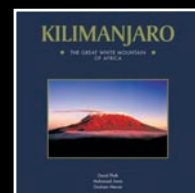
All park fees and arrangements must be made at the Marangu gate before starting at the Rongai trailhead.

In a matter of days you'll climb from the Equator to what feels like the Arctic, moving through grasslands, tropical rainforest, alpine meadows, moorland and desert uplands to snow and ice



#### A dedication

David Pluth graciously allowed us to use vivid images from his book *Kilimanjaro – The Great White Mountain of Africa* for this feature. We were saddened by his recent death and dedicate this edition of *Travel Africa* to him







**Above:** The Machame route provides some stunning vistas of Kilimanjaro's upper slopes

**Right:** Starting in the lush forests of the southwest, Machame is now the most popular of the wilderness routes

**Below:** Climbing the Western Breach



#### 4 LEMOSHO

The Lemosho route approaches Kilimanjaro through forest and moorland from the west, eventually crossing the caldera of Shira Plateau as it heads to the visually dramatic southern flank. This option takes you under the southern ice fields of Kibo, before spilling you out onto the Barafu route, on which you'll make your final ascent to the summit.

Barafu itself is not a complete route from base to summit, but rather a section of higher trail that connects the south circuit with Stella Point and Uhuru Peak. It is shared by several main routes: Lemosho, Shira, Machame and Umbwe.

Lemosho is a relatively little-used and unspoilt approach route, and the rainforest is particularly beautiful on this part of the mountain. When I first climbed Lemosho there was only one other company sending climbers along it. Now there are several, but it still remains a great wilderness experience, especially on the first three days of the climb.

Time spent walking across the wilderness of the Shira Plateau gives you a good chance to get used to the altitude before tackling the busy Barafu route to the summit. It's not unusual to observe animals like elephants and buffalo in the forest around the Lemosho glades.

Itineraries on this route are longer, ranging from seven to nine days, which obviously makes them more expensive. With nine days on Lemosho, a diversion to the wild, forbidding and rarely-visited northern flank that overlooks Kenya may be taken – this itinerary is possibly the best for giving you a great overview of Kilimanjaro, as well as providing you with the maximum chance of reaching the summit.

As is the case if you climb the Shira route, you must descend the Mweka route on Kilimanjaro's southern flank. This is also the case if you climb up via the Machame route. Although this means you don't finish where you started, you do see more of the mountain and its unique environment.

#### 5 MACHAME

The Machame route approaches Kilimanjaro through forest and moorland from the southwest, and eventually passes through volcanic desert. It joins the Shira route before traversing beneath the southern ice fields of Kibo, and leads you to the Barafu Ridge camp, from where you'll trek to the summit along the Barafu route.

Considering Machame passes through diverse vegetation and offers wide-eyed views, it's no wonder that over 30 per cent of all climbers now use it – it is now the most popular of the wilderness routes. With tough trail through the rain and long, steep days of walking, Machame is physically more challenging than Marangu. There are also no huts – only tented accommodation is allowed. The trek on summit night tends to be about an hour shorter than if you came via Marangu as you reach the rim nearer to Uhuru Peak.

As is the case if you climb the Lemosho or Shira routes, you must descend the Mweka route.

#### 6 WESTERN BREACH

The Western Breach is an alternative trail to the summit in place of the Barafu route, and you can use it if you wish to get into the crater. I've had some wonderful climbs up it and really enjoyed cutting through the breach onto the floor of the crater itself.

However the recent warming of the climate has led to an increased danger of rockfall due to the melting of the adjacent Arrow Glacier. KINAPA closed the route after a tragedy in 2006 in which some porters and tourists were killed. It has since been reopened, though the route is open only to climbers with technical experience and who are being led by a qualified technical guide. The group must obtain special permits and carry ropes, ice axes and wear safety helmets.







**Above:** A view of Kili from Mount Meru. Climbing Meru is recommended before attempting the challenging Umbwe route

**Right, top:** The Umbwe route starts in the lower forests and offers a direct two-day approach to Barranco Camp

**Right, bottom:** Tented up in the Summit Crater Camp



## 7 UMBWE

Considered one of the toughest trekking routes, Umbwe offers you a direct two-day approach to Barranco Camp at 3940m from the south. This is clearly a dangerous elevation gain over the first two days, so I would recommend climbing Mount Meru before taking on Umbwe – this is an attractive combination climb for those of you with more time. Due to its difficulty, there are obviously fewer people on it than most other routes. From Barranco Camp you'll head up to Barafu Ridge, before ascending to the summit up the Barafu Route.

Descriptions of the Umbwe climb in some guidebooks seem to be written up by authors who have not actually climbed the route. In truth, underfoot on Umbwe it is relatively easy as long as the trekker is prepared to do some scrambling on the second day during the approach to Barranco. There are obviously fewer people on this route, and if you attempt to do it on its own – without acclimatising on Meru or elsewhere – you are less likely to summit.

## 8 CIRCUIT CLIMB

The Circuit Climb is the most wonderful way to see the entire Kilimanjaro massif, but it requires ten days and nine nights on the mountain. The route follows the circuit trail that goes right around the mountain at a relatively high altitude, typically between 3000 and 4000m. This simple trail is used by the national park administration for accessing the entire massif, and also as a training route for Kilimanjaro guides. As you get onto the remote north flank, there is always an element of excitement and risk present – rescue from the north takes longer and is more difficult.

It is so remote here that eland – possessing long coats especially to deal with the cold Kilimanjaro nights – are often seen. We have also encountered the occasional buffalo that has come to lick minerals from the natural caves high on the slopes of Kilimanjaro. And, kid you not, we have even seen lion pug marks high on the remote slopes here! However, there is one thing that you are unlikely to see up here – another climbing group.

## 9 NORTH FLANK

This unique ascent was first climbed in June 1999 by Julius Minga, a Tanzanian climber, and me. The route (also known as Mountain Madness) offers the toughest trekking programme on Kilimanjaro, and includes a chance to cross Kibo's crater from north to south – it is a route climbed by no other company. Trekking round to the north side of Kilimanjaro is really a step into the unknown. If you can cope with the thought that you are further from rescue – in the event of accident or illness – than on other routes, it is an experience to be recommended.

### All in the name?

Uhuru Peak (5895m), which is the mountain's official apex, received its name in 1961, the year of its nation's independence from the United Kingdom. Appropriately, uhuru translates as 'freedom' in Swahili. The former name – Kaiser-Wilhelm-Spitze – was given to the peak in 1889 by Hans Meyer, the first European to reach the summit, in honour of the then recently deceased Prussian leader, Wilhelm I (1797-1888). While the summit, the highest point on the entire African continent, remains the ultimate goal for most.





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## ➤ The Summit

Almost everyone who's reached Uhuru Peak remembers the Kilimanjaro summit bid as a milestone in his or her life. My very first summit, in the monsoon of April 1991, was noted as follows: "Still following in our guide's footsteps through the knee-deep snow, we reached the crater rim gasping for air. Suddenly, as we approached Uhuru Peak, the snowfall ceased and the whole of Africa, or so it seemed, was suddenly opened up to us. Looking down from the Arctic-esque summit to the acacia dotted savannah five kilometres below was pure magic."

I tried to avoid the monsoon and snow seasons on successive climbs, yet without exception, each summit night was tough and felt never ending. But dawn at Stella Point, and the walk to Uhuru Peak always brings a feeling of elation. The Comic Relief group consisted of nine celebrities and a vast crew of media and support personnel. The artists split into three groups on summit night as 130km per hour winds assaulted them through the long dark night. The entire team reached the summit, though the first group arrived four hours before the last. Alesha Dixon was the last celebrity up, and I shall always remember the powerful phalanx of Tanzanian guides helping her drive forward up the last ramp of scree to the summit. They climbed alongside her throughout the preceding six hours, alternately singing strong rhythmic songs and offering words of encouragement, while the ferocious winds chilled everyone to the core. Without their incredible resilience, hard work and good-humoured assistance, Alesha could not have made it.

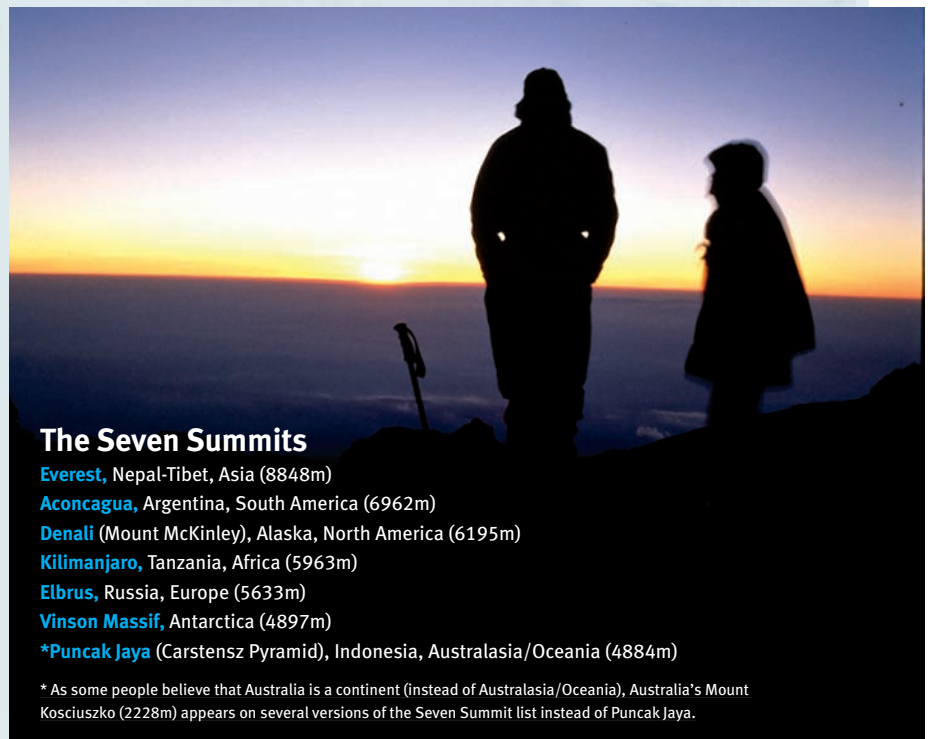
The descent is always characterised by elation, exhaustion and irritation (base camp always seems out of reach). Most trekkers take around six hours to reach camp, so their climb and descent will have lasted over twelve hours. It's a lot to ask of the human body and soul, making it a day one never forgets!

The mountain has a captivating aura of its own and those who tread its mighty slopes, whether they reach the summit or not, will leave with feelings of respect and wonder – not to mention memories for a lifetime. 🙏

■ *Jeremy Gane is director of Charity Challenge ([www.charitychallenge.com](http://www.charitychallenge.com)) and has more than twenty Kilimanjaro climbs to his credit.*



"Still following in our guide's footsteps through the knee-deep snow, we reached the crater rim gasping for air. Suddenly the snowfall ceased and the whole of Africa, or so it seemed, was suddenly opened up to us"



### The Seven Summits

- Everest**, Nepal-Tibet, Asia (8848m)
- Aconcagua**, Argentina, South America (6962m)
- Denali** (Mount McKinley), Alaska, North America (6195m)
- Kilimanjaro**, Tanzania, Africa (5963m)
- Elbrus**, Russia, Europe (5633m)
- Vinson Massif**, Antarctica (4897m)
- \*Puncak Jaya** (Carstensz Pyramid), Indonesia, Australasia/Oceania (4884m)

\* As some people believe that Australia is a continent (instead of Australasia/Oceania), Australia's Mount Kosciuszko (2228m) appears on several versions of the Seven Summit list instead of Puncak Jaya.