

Kilimanjaro calls

Careful preparation is the answer



Ice-capped, although only 330 kilometres south of the equator, Mount Kilimanjaro presides majestically over the savannah of Tanzania. At 5895 metres above sea level, it is Africa's highest peak, the world's highest free-standing mountain and a magnet for mountaineers and trekkers from across the globe.

When to climb?

It is generally accepted that the best time to climb is during the dry seasons. These fall during January, February and June through to October. Note that January and February are the hottest, May to August the coolest and August through to October are the driest months.

Tropical rain forest to snowfields

A Kilimanjaro climb leads you through five major ecological zones, each approximately a thousand metres apart in altitude. Daytime temperatures can range from 5 °C to 30 °C. At night the mercury drops well below zero at higher altitudes. Even during the driest months, prepare for possible wet days and cold nights, as well as the damp of the rain forest. Select your clothing and equipment with care, as you will have to cope with a variety of conditions.

Stay healthy

Ensure that you are physically fit and consider having a thorough medical examination if you have the slightest doubts. You will be in a malaria area, so use prophylactic medication. Altitude sickness affects nearly everyone to some degree, so memorise its symptoms, don't ignore them and accept experienced advice. Avoid contaminated food or water, but stay well-hydrated. Protect your skin and eyes with great care. UV rays are much stronger because they strike the earth more directly at the equator. It's important to stay dry and warm, as it can be detrimental to your health to get wet in windy, low-temperature conditions. Remember to take out comprehensive travel insurance before departure.

Pack light, go right

A porter will carry your duffel bag with items you do not need during the hiking sessions. Keep in mind that the load of this bag is limited to ± 13 kg, depending on your tour operator. Consider the weight and technical attributes of every item you place in your day pack. Excess weight will slow you down and increase the difficulty of breathing. Ensure that your day pack is correctly balanced to minimize fatigue. Ideally pack items individually in light plastic bags to prevent their getting drenched during rain showers and river crossings. Walking sticks are highly recommended, as they significantly reduce the load on knee joints. Decant your toiletries into smaller travel containers. Choose versatile clothing and make use of layering.

Proper planning, professional help

Although the ascent is not among the world's most difficult, it demands thorough preparation. You will need to arrange your trip through a reputable tour operator in your own country. The tour operator will organise your climbing permit, guides, porters, camping gear, tents, hut bookings and all your meals. Also investigate which route up Kilimanjaro will best suit your abilities. Travel and transport to, as well as inside Tanzania can be booked through your tour operator. Visas are obtained at your point of entry into Tanzania. Certain medical certificates are also needed, of which yellow fever is the most important. Consult a doctor regarding inoculations and necessary prophylactic medication.

See reverse for Kilimanjaro Checklist >>>

Kilimanjaro Checklist

Clothing and accessories

Head and hands

- Beanie (or Peruvian hat)
- Balaclava
- Moisture-wicking bandana or Buff™
- Sun hat (proper all-round shading)
- Fleece scarf (optional)
- Thermal gloves (optional)
- Waterproof gloves (windproof, well-insulated)
- Thermal liner gloves
- Polarised sunglasses
- Goggles or clear glasses (to cut out freezing wind on summit night)

Lower altitude clothing

- T-shirts/short-sleeved shirts (4 moisture-wicking)
- Long-sleeved technical shirts/long-sleeved T-shirts (2 moisture-wicking)
- Technical hiking shorts (moisture-wicking, functional and durable)
- Technical full-length pants (2 - 3 pairs), durable, quick-drying; at least one pair with zip-off lower legs

Sleeping bags and packs

- Sleeping-bag.** Good quality and rated to at least -8 °C. Down filling is preferable.
- Sleeping-bag liner.** Optional for those sensitive to cold, or who have a lower-rated sleeping bag.
- Sleeping mat and pillow.** These offer comfort, ensuring that you are fresh for the next day's exertions.
- Daypack.** Must have padded straps and waist belt for comfort. An airflow harness and easy-access pockets are necessary. Daypack should be approximately 35-40 L in size and able to carry all necessities such as water, rain jacket, snacks and warm clothing.
- Duffel bag or full backpack** (to be carried by a porter). Must be tough, waterproof and large enough (about 80 L) for all gear and clothing.
- Waterproof inner bags** (preferably several smaller ones). Essential to keep items dry during rain or stream crossings.
- Lockable travel bag.** You will need this for leaving extra clothes at your hotel.

Hydration and food

- Water bottles'** capacity must total at least 4 L. A functioning 'body water balance' is one of the keys to a successful climb.
- Water purification** tablets and/or filter.
- Trail snacks** like trail-mix, energy bars, glucose sachets, energy drink powder etc. (Guide companies provide meals, but not snacks.)

Hygiene and first aid

- Water bottles'** capacity must total at least 4 L. A functioning 'body water balance' is one of the keys to a successful climb.
- Water** **Blister kit** **Survival blanket**
- Sun-screen cream and lip protection,** SPF 30+. Note: UV radiation increases as altitude rises.
- Medicines:** personal medication, headache tablets and painkillers, flu/cold medication, anti-nausea tablets, prophylaxis against malaria, anti-diarrhoea medication, muscle strain medication, eye-drops, insect-repellent, medication for acute mountain sickness (check that you are not allergic to sulfa drugs like Diamox, if using Diamox follow doctor's instructions exactly and tell your guide that you are using it).
- Basic first aid kit.** Plasters, bandages, antiseptic cream, sterile gauze, safety pins, CPR breathing barrier etc.

Equipment

- LED headlamp** with spare batteries, as this is preferable to a torch. **Binoculars** (optional)
- Pocket knife or multi-tool.** Do not pack this in your carry-on bag for the plane.
- Digital or film camera,** ASA 100 and 200 film, small portable tripod, video camera, memory cards and spare batteries. Always insert a new camera battery when going into cold areas at high altitude. Keep your memory cards warm, as cold memory cards may malfunction. Keep your camera padded and dry at all times, as moisture will freeze at the summit and could stop the camera from working. Note: keeping a camera inside your jacket can cause condensation to form.

General

- Check with your travel agent** and guide company for details on passports, visas, currency, immunisation requirements and health risks.
- Kilimanjaro guide book**
- Cash** for drinks, gifts and tips for guides and porters.

Footwear & accessories

- Waterproof hiking boots
- Walking or running shoes
- Hiking socks (6 pairs sock liners; 3 pairs thinner, moisture-wicking socks; 3 pairs thicker, warmer socks)
- Gaiters (optional)
- 2 hiking sticks

Higher altitude clothing

BASE

- Thermal underwear tops and bottoms (soft, moisture-wicking, warm, synthetic, not cotton)

MID LAYER

- 1 x 100-weight polar fleece top
- 1 x 200-weight polar fleece top
- 1 x pair insulating pants

OUTER LAYER

- Water- and windproof jacket
- Water- and windproof pants
- Poncho (waterproof, but lightweight)